



Homelessness Strategy

Richmond upon Thames

2012 - 2016



- 1.1 This strategy sets out the Council's proposals in preventing homelessness and addressing the needs of homeless households in Richmond upon Thames. It builds on the findings from the Homelessness Review (2011) outlining the Council's policy approach to homelessness issues in the borough.
- 1.2 Whilst the Homelessness Strategy will be for the period 2012 – 2016, national policy and welfare changes may require summary updates to the strategy document over the lifetime of the document, allowing the Borough to take a flexible approach to change.
- 1.3 The Council is committed to ensuring that the more vulnerable people of Richmond upon Thames are protected. Tackling homelessness and overcrowding and supporting vulnerable people to live independently are important priorities of the current administration, as is improving access to affordable housing, including home ownership opportunities for low income working families.
- 1.4 Alongside these policy objectives is a broader policy of ensuring that the Council and its partners listen to the views of local people and that these inform the development of local plans, such as has been demonstrated through the 'All in One' consultation.
- 1.5 This new approach to community planning will be developed against a backdrop of public sector financial constraints. This means that we will be scrutinising spending and resource allocation more than ever. The borough is committed to maximising savings and is currently delivering an ambitious transformation and efficiency programme. In November 2011 the Cabinet agreed a new strategic direction setting out its ambition to become a commissioning Council.
- 1.6 The Council has demonstrated its commitment to Registered Providers' tenants and leaseholders in the borough by creating a Tenants' Champion. This Councillor role takes an overview of tenant concerns, promoting consistently high levels of management, especially in complaints resolution and aims to share examples of best practice across the borough.
- 1.7 The Council is currently making changes to the way it allocates social housing and welcomes the Government's greater flexibility provided to it in the allocation of social housing. The Council agrees that the way to gain a housing association tenancy should be through the Housing Register and that work and community contribution should be rewarded by additional priority on the Register.
- 1.8 A Housing Scrutiny Task Group that ran from November 2010 to November 2011 recently published its Final Report, examining evidence on homelessness from the Homelessness Review alongside expert opinion from organisations including a range of Registered Providers (RPs) operating both locally and nationally and central government, including the Department of Work and Pensions. Potential approaches to address the issues outlined from the Review were discussed and many of the final report recommendations will be incorporated into the Homelessness Strategy Action Plan.
- 1.9 The Council is committed to complying with its equality duties under the Equalities Act 2010.

- 2.1** In 2011, the Coalition Government has embarked on a number of radical national reforms to both social housing and welfare policy, also producing its first national Housing Strategy. There is also a new funding model based on charging up to 80% market rents to deliver affordable housing and the Localism Act contains a number of important reforms with regard to homelessness and the allocation of housing association property. This chapter outlines the key issues it is important to contextualise within Richmond upon Thames' Homelessness Strategy.
- 2.2** Tackling homelessness is a key priority outlined in the Government's Housing Strategy, 'Laying the Foundations, A Housing Strategy for England' (2011), and the Coalition's aims to protect the most vulnerable and promote social justice. The national strategy outlines the Government's commitment to homelessness prevention, meeting the needs of the vulnerable, managing the consequences of those made homeless and addressing rough sleeping.
- 2.3** The Government has set up a Ministerial Working Group made up of 8 Government departments to address the complex and inter-related issues contributing to homelessness. The Group published their 'Vision to end Rough Sleeping: No Second Night Out nationwide' (2011) detailing their plans to address rough sleeping. This builds on the London 'No Second Night Out' pilot.
- 2.4** The Government will be publishing a Homelessness Strategy in the spring of 2012 aimed at tackling the causes of homelessness, preventing homelessness at an early stage and delivering services that support individual recovery.
- 2.5** The Greater London Authority (GLA) Housing Strategy (2010) outlines a number of targets with regard to homelessness. These include eliminating rough sleeping by the end of 2012 and providing a rapid response to rough sleepers entering the streets, ensuring that people in temporary accommodation have full access to education and health services and, for those that require it, social services. The London Housing Strategy also has an objective that good quality housing advice including housing options should be available to all Londoners who require it.
- 2.6** The GLA implemented, as a pilot, the 'No Second Night Out' initiative in Greater London which aims to prevent rough sleepers from sleeping out for more than one night and reconnects rough sleepers to services in their home area.
- 2.7** The GLA in August 2011 published 'A Revised London Housing Strategy – Initial Proposals' which is currently out to consultation with the GLA group. It highlights a number of new additional targets around rough sleeping including
- No one arriving on the streets of London sleeps out for a second night
 - Ensure those who have exited rough sleeping do not return to the street
 - Support rough sleepers to reconnect to services in their home area
 - Provide a good supply and range of move on accommodation
 - Meeting the physical and mental health needs of rough sleepers.

- 2.8** Councils receive a Homelessness Grant from central Government to address homelessness in their area, this has been confirmed until March 2013. Funding confirmation for future years is unclear. The Government has also announced a £20 million homelessness transition fund to address rough sleeping and to prevent single homelessness. The Council has supported a bid from SPEAR (a local housing charity that addresses rough sleeping and single homelessness) to access the Transitions fund.
- 2.9** The Localism Act due to be implemented in Spring 2012 will give local authorities the freedom to discharge homelessness duties into the private rented sector, meaning households accepted as homeless would gain a private rented tenancy rather than housing association property. Prior to the Localism Act accepted homeless households received priority to social housing whether or not it was the best solution to their housing problem. Government thinking is to offer local authorities greater flexibility and allow more sensible decision making.
- 2.10** The Localism Act builds on previous policy providing greater flexibility to local authorities in the allocation of social housing. This gives local authorities greater freedoms such as operating closed waiting lists (excluding applicants from outside the borough, with some exceptions). The Government's Housing Strategy also welcomes local authorities giving extra priority to working households, those making a community contribution and housing for ex service personnel.
- 2.11** National Government policy is also focused on the efficient and best use of the social housing sector. Housing Benefit reform will mean social housing tenants only receive payment for the number of bedrooms they require. This will encourage under occupiers in the housing association sector to move to smaller properties, freeing up properties to help address overcrowding.
- 2.12** The Localism Act will give greater flexibility to Registered Providers such as regarding the duration of a tenancy for new tenants: five year tenancies may become the norm (although it is expected the majority will still be renewed). The Localism Act will also require that Councils develop a Strategic Tenancy Policy by November 2013. This sets out the Council's priorities which Registered Providers must have 'due regard to' in relation to setting their policies on the type of tenancies, duration and the conditions when tenancies will be renewed.
- 2.13** The impact of national changes to the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) (where it is anticipated the level at which benefit claimants can access private rented properties will fall from 5 in 10 properties to 3 in 10) may be one of the key homelessness issues affecting the borough during 2012. Other changes include the Under 35's rule whereby those under 35² will be eligible for benefit to cover a room in shared accommodation rather than eligible for benefit to cover a self-contained one bedroom flat. Government thinking behind this rule is to ensure parity with the average age when people buy a property, highlighting that households not reliant on benefits often share properties up to this age. It is also accepted that household formation need not necessarily occur in the location where a person is born.

- 2.14** The Welfare Reform Bill, expected to receive Royal Assent in 2012 introduces the Universal Credit in 2013 and will bring together a household's benefits into one payment. The Government's aims are to address the rapidly increasing costs of housing benefit, demonstrate fairness, reduce the complexity of the system and ensure that work pays. From April 2013, the Government will introduce size criteria for social housing tenants with under-occupiers' benefit being reduced by a nationally set percentage dependent on the number of rooms the household is considered not to require.
- 2.15** The Government has also introduced The Work Programme where public, private and voluntary sector organisations have been contracted to provide intensive personally tailored services to get the long term unemployed back into work. For anyone unemployed for more than 1 year the scheme will be mandatory.
- 2.16** Nationally, there has been an increase in homelessness, with a 17% increase in statutory homelessness in the second quarter of 2011 compared to the same period in 2010. Locally there has been an annual increase of 16% from 138 accepted households in 2009-10 to 160 in 2010-11. Homelessness acceptances from the private rented sector have also increased by 14% during the same period. In the corresponding period the proportion of homeless acceptances from the private rented sector has increased to 21% being 34 households. This is a ten percentage point increase on the previous year.
- 2.17** National research³ has shown that individuals who are homeless have poorer health and poor health and wellbeing can also exacerbate homelessness. As an example, becoming homeless and accommodated in temporary accommodation can exacerbate anxiety and depression.
- 2.18** The impact on health is at its most extreme for rough sleepers. National research carried out by Crisis⁴ highlights that whilst there have been improvements in the health of the general population over the last fifteen years the average age of death for single homeless people⁵ is extremely low, at 47. For women rough sleepers it is even lower at 43. This compares to 77 for the general population.

² There will be exceptions to this such as for the severely disabled and for those who have resided in a homeless hostel accommodation for at least three months.

³ Crisis, 2011

⁴ "Homelessness: A Silent Killer" (December 2011, Crisis).

⁵ Includes those sleeping rough, in hostels and in other hidden homeless situations

Chapter 3 - Key Overall Trends in Homelessness

- 3.1** Homelessness acceptances have declined in Richmond upon Thames from 316 in 2003/04 to 130 in 2008/09. This follows national and regional trends. Subsequently there has been an increase in homeless acceptances to 160 in 2010/11.
- 3.2** A review of our statistical returns regarding statutory homelessness for 2010/11 highlights that the most common reasons for homelessness in Richmond upon Thames in 2010/11 are:
- Parents no longer willing to accommodate – 33.75%
 - Termination of Assured Shorthold Tenancy (AST) – 21.25%
 - Other relative or friend no longer willing to accommodate – 11.25%
 - Violent breakdown of relationship involving partner – 7.5%

The Borough has higher levels of homelessness resulting from parental eviction and 'end of assured shorthold tenancy' compared to both the sub-regional ⁶ and the Greater London average.

- 3.3** The majority of accepted homeless households in Richmond upon Thames are:

	Number	%
Households with dependent children	68	43%
16/17 year olds	39	24%
Households with a mental illness or disability	24	15%
Households containing a pregnant woman	14	9%

Although the actual numbers are quite low, the Borough has a higher proportion of its total acceptances from those aged 16/17 than the sub-regional average (24% compared to 5%). Richmond also has a higher percentage of acceptances from people experiencing mental ill health than the sub-regional average (15% compared to 8%). This may be because preventative activity such as the rent deposit scheme may not be suitable for these groups.

- 3.4** The Borough also has a significantly higher percentage of acceptances from both 16/17 year olds (24% compared to 4%) and those with a mental health issue (15% compared to 9%) compared to the Greater London average. The Council will look into the reasons behind a higher percentage of acceptances from 16/17 year olds compared to both sub-regional and Greater London averages. This will take the form of working with the Targeted Youth Support Team to look at the reasons for homeless acceptances from 16/17 year olds, for example whether homelessness is arising from overcrowding, tenure issues or school. This will enable us to develop appropriate preventative services.

⁶ There are five sub-regions in Greater London which were developed by the Homes and Communities Agency as part of investment decisions. Richmond upon Thames is part of the South West London Housing Partnership, a sub-region comprised of Richmond, Kingston, Wandsworth, Lambeth, Croydon, Merton and Sutton.

- 3.5** Research carried out by the Council on ethnicity and housing/homelessness found that ethnic minority groups are over-represented on the Housing Register which may reflect greater levels of housing need. There is also under-representation of certain ethnic groups (White British, White Irish, White Other, Mixed Race Asian and Chinese) which may reflect better socio-economic outcomes for these groups.
- 3.6** Homelessness applications from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) groups are at nearly two and a half times the proportion of BME groups in the resident population. The incidence of homelessness amongst those from a Black ethnic origin is also high; six times the rate expected from the proportion of the resident population. It should be noted that overall numbers from these ethnic groups are still low: during 2010/11 there were 16 acceptances from Black households and 15 acceptances from Asian households. More information on ethnicity and homelessness is available [here](#).
- 3.7** Overall for 2010/11 a total of 20% of statutory acceptances came from households with a disability (32 acceptances, 24 with a mental health issue and 8 with a physical disability). Many rough sleepers and single homeless people also experience higher levels of ill health including mental ill health, physical ill health and drug and alcohol misuse issues.
- 3.8** National research on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual (LGB) youth homelessness highlights that gay and bisexual youth are over-represented amongst homeless young people and may be more at risk of becoming homeless. There is a need for equalities monitoring around LGB homelessness to better understand if there are local issues.
- 3.9** Women are more likely to be over-represented in statutory homeless households compared to men. This may be because they are more likely to be the principal carer of children or be pregnant and in priority need.
- 3.10** Homeless Link found that in 2009/10 only 11% of rough sleepers were women. Locally between November 2010 and November 2011 seven out of seventy one people the SPEAR outreach service contacted were women, reflecting the national average. National research has also found that rough sleeper services may not always be appropriate for women. Locally the refurbishment of the hostel in 2010 created increased capacity for women and increased provision for supporting women rough sleepers with complex needs.
- 3.11** Consultation as part of the Review process found a number of consistent messages from both statutory and voluntary sector organisations. This included the need for more affordable housing, the need for more hostel provision for the single homeless, move-on supported accommodation for those with mental health issues, affordability concerns and access to the private rented sector and concern over the impact of Local Housing Allowance changes on homelessness. For ex offenders the need for increased housing options, such as a rent deposit scheme, was also raised.

Chapter 4 - The Borough's Approach - Homelessness prevention & advising on the range of housing opportunities

- 4.1 Like the majority of local authorities, Richmond Council is committed to a Housing Options approach that aims to assist clients to secure their existing accommodation or to examine the range of possible routes to securing a new private rented tenancy. Homelessness prevention is used where appropriate in parallel with the legal responsibilities under Part VII of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended).
- 4.2 The Council and voluntary sector partners such as Richmond Citizens Advice Bureau (RCAB) and SPEAR offer a range of housing and homelessness advice services. These are detailed in the Homelessness Review. An example of preventative work would be signposting households to apply for Discretionary Housing Payments where they are affected by Local Housing Allowance (LHA) changes.

Case Study – Work of the Housing Advice Service in unlawful evictions

Housing Advice carry out work to prevent unlawful evictions, working to reinstate tenants into their property as well as advising landlords on the Protection from Eviction Act 1977. In 2010 Mr X was unlawfully evicted from his property. Despite efforts from Housing Advice the tenant was refused access to his property. Housing Advice supported Mr X in taking action and the court ordered the landlord to pay £32,000.00 in compensation as well as costs to him. With this money Mr X was then able to find alternative accommodation.

- 4.3 The Housing Options approach for homeless households includes:
- The rent deposit scheme – offering mobility and access to the private rented sector
 - Shared ownership opportunities where relevant
 - Supported housing opportunities for vulnerable households
 - Sheltered housing for older households
 - Bed and Breakfast / Temporary Accommodation for those households where homelessness cannot be prevented.
 - Housing options approach may also include the Sanctuary scheme for women suffering domestic violence and victims of hate crime (where appropriate and recommended by professionals).

Case Study – Supporting independent living

Malcolm* is a young man with a learning disability and sensory impairment who had been placed in a registered residential service in Surrey for over 10 years after finishing at a specialist residential school. Malcolm had tried to leave the home on a number of occasions when he was unhappy with what was expected of him there. He clearly wanted to make his own choices and was eventually moved back to the borough to live with his elderly family carers on a temporary basis.

Now Malcolm has his own studio flat near to friends and with his own tenancy and front door key, which he has never had before. He is being supported to make choices about how he spends his time, has an ever growing circle of friends with similar interests and is now looking for a job.

*not his real name

- 4.4 The resettlement team provides support to 16/17 year olds, teenage parents, adult clients with mental health support needs, disabled households and the elderly to maintain their tenancies. Work by SPEAR and Registered Providers also helps tenants to maintain their accommodation.

Key Objectives -

Homelessness prevention & advising on the range of housing opportunities

- Ensure good quality housing advice services are available in Richmond upon Thames.
- Prevent homelessness and provide additional opportunities through a housing options approach.
- Support for households who are homeless, including tenancy sustainment and support.
- Promoting financial inclusion, i.e. better access to financial services such basic bank accounts, credit facilities (loans) at reasonable rates and work/volunteering opportunities, especially in the social housing sector.
- Promote partnership working to make best use of resources and share best practice.

- 4.5 Supporting People funding, administered by the Council, funds a number of supported housing schemes and floating support services that maintain tenancies and support vulnerable groups including rough sleepers, those suffering domestic abuse, ex-offenders, young people and clients with mental health issues. Services delivered to those groups may help maintain tenancies e.g. by developing living skills for young people.
- 4.6 Partnership working is vital to the delivery of the Homelessness Strategy including prevention, the provision of services and delivery of Homelessness Strategy recommendations. The Council works closely with partner organisations including SPEAR and Registered Providers to address homelessness. The Homelessness Forum, with its range of voluntary and community groups, continues to provide a useful means for sharing information and best practice.
- 4.7 In terms of the partnership working with health services it is crucial that health, social care, housing and support services (universal and specialist) are integrated to meet homeless people's individual needs. Services should be delivered in a holistic manner to stop the cycle of homelessness and reduce the significant health inequality faced by homeless households.

5.1 The Private Rented Sector

The borough has a large private rented sector in some of the most expensive parts of the borough including Twickenham Riverside, Richmond, Kew and Barnes. There is a 'high end' corporate lets market in Richmond and a large market for young professionals. Also some of the more affordable areas of the borough to rent in have the lowest proportion of households in the private rented sector. Low income households renting privately therefore face challenges in sourcing accommodation with some agencies/landlords not accepting households reliant on welfare benefits.

5.2 National changes to the Local Housing Allowance are likely to have an impact on homelessness in Richmond upon Thames. Research suggests that some 177 households will be affected by reduced levels of Local Housing Allowance between January and March 2012. 107 of these households will face a shortfall of more than £20 per week and 81 households have children. In 2012 the main pressure on statutory homeless services is likely to be from homeless families with children.

5.3 The Council has employed two caseworkers to work directly with households affected by LHA changes during 2012. They will carry out preventative bespoke casework providing housing options which may include helping tenants negotiate lower rents with landlords, assisting with moves to cheaper areas, advising on Discretionary Housing Payments, sheltered housing options and the Rent Deposit Scheme.

5.4 The number of homeless households accepted as homeless from the private rented sector as a result of their tenancy ending has increased between 2009/10 and 2010/11 and this trend is likely to increase during 2012.

5.5 The Council, in conjunction with voluntary sector partners, will continue to provide advice to private tenants to prevent homelessness. The Council will also assist households who have to leave their property to move into another private rented property via the rent deposit scheme.

5.6 Due to high rents in the borough it is unlikely that other London Boroughs will place large numbers of households into temporary accommodation or via rent deposit schemes into the borough. There will still however be a need for the Council to monitor placements made under the Pan-London Agreement on Inter-Borough Accommodation Placements to ensure that movement due to LHA changes does not adversely affect clients' wellbeing or Richmond upon Thames.

5.7 The Owner Occupied Sector

Owner occupiers comprise the largest tenure group in Richmond upon Thames and homelessness from this sector is low. In 2010, the borough had the lowest number of mortgage possession actions leading to orders made of any Outer London borough, with 85 orders made. The number of people accepted as homeless who have been made homeless due to mortgage arrears is extremely low: no-one in 2010/11 and one case in 2009/10.

- 5.8** For older and disabled people house conditions and space within a property can be factors in maintaining independence within the home. They may require adaptations or downstairs bathrooms. The Council will continue to provide Disabled Facility Grants (DFGs) and handyperson services for older and disabled residents.
- 5.9** The national Mortgage Rescue scheme proves challenging to apply in Richmond upon Thames due to the high property values in the area and the price caps on the scheme. The Council will look to raise this issue with the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) to see if there is any flexibility to reflect local house prices.

Key Objectives -

Homelessness and the Housing Market

- Providing an appropriate preventative approach to minimise homelessness from the private rented sector.
- Prevent homelessness increasing from the owner occupied sector.
- Work in partnership with Registered Providers to prevent homelessness including reducing rent arrears and addressing anti social behaviour.

Homelessness and the Housing Association Sector

- 5.10** Amongst the four largest Registered Providers in the borough (who own just under 90% of housing association stock in the borough) there were approximately 22 evictions during 2010/11. Homelessness due to rent arrears and antisocial behaviour is therefore relatively low.
- 5.11** The Council supports the preventative work of Registered Providers in addressing rent arrears and tackling anti social behaviour that has been outlined in the Homelessness Review (2011).
- 5.12** In partnership with Registered Providers the Council has supported the expansion of Thamesbank Credit Union into Richmond upon Thames. The Credit Union provides access to affordable loans, offers savings schemes to its members and actively works to promote its schemes to housing association tenants.
- 5.13** As part of developing our Strategic Tenancy Policy during 2012 the Council will ensure that issues around affordability for low income working households and households reliant on welfare benefits are taken into consideration, ensuring the most vulnerable can still access affordable housing.
- 5.14** Overcrowding can cause family pressures and overcrowding may be one factor driving homelessness (with parental eviction being the largest cross tenure reason for homelessness in Richmond upon Thames). The Council has worked with Registered Providers to tackle overcrowding, such as via home visits and funding extensions and conversions.
- 5.15** The Council will continue to work with Registered Providers to promote sponsored moves, freeing up larger properties for overcrowded housing association tenants.

Young People

- 6.1** Whilst homelessness decreased between 2003/04 and 2008/09, the number of homeless 16/17 year olds has remained fairly constant (around 40 per year), so the percentage that 16/17 year olds make up of total homeless acceptances has increased. In 2003/04 16/17 year olds made up 40 out of 316 acceptances whilst in 2010/11 they comprised 39 out of 160 acceptances. This may be because prevention activity such as the Rent Deposit Scheme is more appropriate for families with children than young people. The Council will investigate further the reasons for this including comparisons with other London boroughs.
- 6.2** Research carried out for the Review reviewing 33 case files during August 2011 found that the key reason for homelessness for 16/17 year olds was being excluded by a parent or family member although nearly a third (11) faced unacceptable conditions such as violence, abuse or abandonment. A quarter of applicants (8) had prior experience of homelessness (such as a family experience) and 60% (20) previously lived in Housing Association property. 79% (26) of cases were known to statutory services such as the Adolescent Mental Health Team, Targeted Youth Support Service or Youth Offending Team (YOT).
- 6.3** The Targeted Youth Support Team in Children's Services work jointly with the Housing Options Team to prevent youth homelessness including mediation work. Mediation is an important preventative tool in tackling homelessness amongst young people and we will regularly review its effectiveness.
- 6.4** The Council recognises the ongoing importance of Children's services, Housing and Education services working together in terms of prevention, assessment and resource planning.
- 6.5** The Council will work with schools and colleges in the borough to understand how raising the school leaving age in 2013 will affect young people experiencing homelessness and allow colleges and schools to respond to potential changes.
- 6.6** We will also put a greater focus on working with young people's services (in particular, the Targeted Youth Support Service, Youth Offending Team and young people's mental health services) upstream of application to help better target homelessness prevention.
- 6.7** The Review highlighted the need to expand the monitoring of homeless acceptances from 16/17 year olds, looking at issues such as overcrowding, tenure, school attendance and results of mediation to better inform and develop preventative services.
- 6.8** The Council will look at the potential for working with Registered Providers to address youth homelessness from their sector via tenant profiling and casework, addressing the links with overcrowding and looking to develop innovative solutions.
- 6.9** We will review the provision of young people's supported housing in conjunction with Registered Providers. We will consider, subject to sufficient resources, the development of emergency short term supported accommodation.

People experiencing mental health issues

- 6.10** Those with a mental health issue may be at greater risk of homelessness as they may be unable to cope with or to maintain a tenancy. Fluctuating conditions may create changes in behaviour and mood and there may be a lack of structure to support them. Drug and alcohol misuse may also create further issues. External factors such as the behaviour of others may also affect those with mental health problems, potentially triggering illness.
- 6.11** Consultation with mental health practitioners from the Review highlighted a need for more move-on supported accommodation for those in residential placements. The Council, working with Registered Provider partners, are looking into developing 2 four bedroom units to address this need.
- 6.12** There has been an increase in the number of people requiring residential care or supported accommodation during 2010/11. Whilst the majority of people have been accommodated within existing services this has prevented some planned moves from residential care into supported living accommodation. This could potentially limit the joint funding of new mental health and homelessness initiatives.
- 6.13** Practitioners felt that the rent deposit scheme currently did not work for many of those with mental health issues due to problems with them being interviewed by estate agents and their ability to find a private rented property.
- 6.14** The Council will review options for Rent Deposit Officers to work more intensively with clients with a mental health condition, including offering greater support to them when they meet estate agents. We are also working to increase provision of move-on supported accommodation.

Other Vulnerable Groups

Armed Forces

- 6.10** The Council is committed to address the needs of ex-armed forces personnel who are vulnerable due to disability and who have been discharged and have a local connection with the borough. Our new allocations policy will include a quota for ex-service personnel to access housing association rented homes.

Domestic Abuse

- 6.16** Violent relationship breakdown involving a partner is the fourth highest reason for homelessness acceptances in Richmond with 7% of acceptances during 2010/11 being for this reason. The Council provides a Sanctuary scheme (when advised by professionals that this is appropriate) and we work with Refuge providing women's refuges in the borough

Ex-Offenders

- 6.17 Ex-offenders are more at risk of homelessness with research by Homeless Link highlighting that 30% of people leaving prison will have nowhere to go, upon release. There are also clear links between the provision of stable accommodation and reducing re-offending.
- 6.18 Locally, Stonham is the provider of supported housing for ex-offenders and receives a Housing Register quota of 3 nominations per year.
- 6.19 Consultation with probation officers highlighted concern over the lack of hostel accommodation, the need for a rent deposit scheme for ex-offenders to access and concern that lack of housing was a factor in those on probation breaching their orders.
- 6.20 Probation officers also felt increased dialogue with Registered Providers over the suitability of particular nominations into a Housing Association property would aid understanding and the reasons for refusal could be examined. Closer partnership working may reassure Registered Providers over risk management plans.

People with Learning Disabilities & Older People

- 6.21 The rates of homelessness acceptance amongst people using learning disability services and older people are very low. The Council will continue to provide appropriate support and services to ensure this continues

Key Objectives - Homelessness and Vulnerable Groups

- Reduce the number of young people becoming homeless.
- Provide appropriate accommodation for homeless households with mental health issues.
- Support more housing options for ex offenders including youth offenders
- Supporting vulnerable people when they become homeless
- Addressing the needs of vulnerable ex-service personnel

Homeless households with physical disabilities

- 6.22** Although 24 of the 32 statutorily accepted homeless households accepted and in priority need due to disability were due to mental health issues ⁷ a further 8 were accepted due to physical disability. Older people may also have higher levels of physical disability. Physical ill health is especially an issue for rough sleepers and this issue is discussed in Chapter 7.
- 6.23** The Council's housing options approach means that in some cases households which include a disabled member or an older person household already have a housing register application. By reviewing their points it has been possible for some to be made an offer of social housing rather than have to make a homeless application and be found temporary accommodation.
- 6.24** The new freedom to discharge homelessness duty into the private rented sector may not be appropriate for those with a disability, such as those requiring wheelchair accessible or supported housing. The Council position with regard to discharging duty into the private rented sector out of borough will generally exclude those with a disability or those with children with a significant medical condition, both subject to independent medical advisor opinion ⁸.
- 6.25** The Council will develop a Policy Statement on Physical and Sensory Disabilities during 2012/13 which will address both homelessness and housing issues affecting these client groups.

Equalities Issues and Vulnerable Groups

- 6.26** The Council will continue to monitor (by protected characteristics) the equalities impact of changes in the sector that may affect vulnerable groups. More detail is available at 8.11.

⁷ P1E Return 2010/11

⁸ The Council will judge every case on its merits, further details are provided in Chapter 8.



Affordable housing development in Richmond Borough

Chapter 7 - Preventing rough sleeping & addressing the needs of rough sleepers

- 7.1 Rough Sleepers are defined by CLG as 'people sleeping, about to bed down (sitting on/in or standing next to their bedding) or actually bedded down in the open air (such as on the streets, in tents, doorways, parks, bus shelters or encampments). People in buildings or other places not designed for habitation (such as barns, sheds, cars, derelict boats, stations or "bashes")'.
- 7.2 The Council funds and works in partnership with SPEAR, which is a local housing charity providing a comprehensive range of services for rough sleepers and single homeless people in the Borough. They manage a fourteen bedroom hostel including a four bedroom unit for homeless clients with complex needs, provide an outreach service for rough sleepers and provide advice to single homeless households.
- 7.3 Day services provide a key means to engage with rough sleepers and the Vineyard Community Centre will be re-opening in March 2012 providing a valuable drop in service. It provides support for rough sleepers and the single homeless and services include a befriending service, meals, showers, laundry and clothing to users of the centre. SPEAR will also operate a morning drop in service.
- 7.4 The Street Homelessness Count carried out in November 2011 found 8 rough sleepers in Richmond upon Thames. SPEAR estimate that over a period of a year they work with an average of 60 rough sleepers⁹. SPEAR and the Council supported 15 rough sleepers into emergency housing provision due to extreme cold weather over the winter of 2011/12. SPEAR's rough sleeper outreach team as at February 2012 have an active caseload of 30 to 35 verified rough sleepers at any time.
- 7.5 The Borough will work with SPEAR and other partners to prevent rough sleeping and target resources at rough sleepers with complex needs.
- 7.6 The Council supports the principles behind 'No Second Night Out' including ending rough sleeping, ensuring new rough sleepers do not continue rough sleeping and tackling entrenched rough sleepers.
- 7.7 Some elements of the 'No Second Night Out' pilot are less relevant to Richmond upon Thames as the pilot focused on Inner London boroughs with more transient rough sleeper populations. Evidence does not suggest that people migrate from central London to sleep rough in the borough. Where appropriate the Council will implement the reconnections protocol element, ensuring rough sleepers whose primary residence is outside the borough are accommodated by their borough of origin.

⁹ Average taken over the last four years

Case Study – partnership work in addressing rough sleeping

In late December 2011, SPEAR began to work with a man in his 70's who had been living rent free in a friend's house for over 20 years. When his friend passed away, he began to rough sleep on Richmond Green. Due to significant memory problems he was difficult to engage with at first, but with the encouragement of another ex-rough sleeper he eventually agreed to meet with SPEAR. Their rough sleeper outreach team then worked in partnership with the Council's Housing Options Team to secure identification for him; to apply for Pension Credit (he had never received any pension previously); and then support him to move into emergency Bed and Breakfast accommodation, funded by the Council. SPEAR then supported him to engage with a GP and Adult Social Care and helped him return to his accommodation on several occasions (because he forgot he had somewhere to live). SPEAR worked with him to submit a Housing Register application and quickly secured an offer of sheltered accommodation from Richmond Council. His new tenancy started in late February 2012 and SPEAR are continuing to support him to establish his new home and hand over his ongoing care and support to the sheltered scheme manager

- 7.8 Lack of hostel accommodation for the single homeless and rough sleepers was raised as a key issue during consultation on the Homelessness Review by a number of statutory and voluntary sector agencies. To address this we will maintain current hostel accommodation. Whilst recognising that SPEAR have a robust understanding of rough sleeping in the borough the Council and SPEAR will investigate detailed patterns of rough sleeping to ensure we have a comprehensive picture of the issue in Richmond upon Thames. The Council and partners will investigate better ways of sourcing housing options for rough sleepers and review innovative ways of increasing throughput at the existing hostel. This will, however, need to be considered in light of current budget constraints.

Key Objectives -

Preventing rough sleeping & addressing the needs of rough sleepers

- Providing advice and support to prevent homelessness for single people.
- Preventing vulnerable households becoming rough sleepers.
- Maintaining appropriate accommodation for rough sleepers.
- Addressing rough sleepers with complex need.

- 7.9 The Homelessness Review highlighted the increase in numbers of rough sleepers with complex needs (such as mental ill health, drug and alcohol misuse issues and who were ex-offenders). The borough has worked with SPEAR to develop a four bedroom assessment unit at the hostel to serve rough sleepers with complex needs. Going forward the Council and partners will need to consider the best means of addressing complex needs and consider if more second stage accommodation is required to prevent 'silting up' of hostel accommodation.

- 7.10** Taking into consideration the recommendations outlined in 'Homelessness: A Silent Killer' (2011) public health partners and the Council will work towards:
- Ensuring the restructure of the NHS considers/prioritises the needs of homeless people
 - Reviewing needs to inform strategic commissioning decisions, to determine whether there is a need to reform health service delivery for homeless people
 - Work towards ensuring health provision meets the needs of the homeless and is integrated and holistic.
- 7.11** The "London Pathway: Healthcare for homeless people" is a regional model of integrated healthcare for single homeless people and rough sleepers. It puts the patient at the centre of their own care pathway and works to transform health outcomes for one of the most vulnerable and deprived groups in our society. Richmond's approach will endeavor to align with this regional template for both the commissioning and provision of healthcare for homeless people in London.
- 7.12** Consultation raised concerns over the impact of the Local Housing Allowance changes and the introduction of the under 35's Housing Benefit rule on the single homeless and the potential this will have to increase rough sleeping. The Council will work with partners to prevent rough sleeping and to ensure single homeless households can access the Rent Deposit scheme.



Affordable housing development in Richmond Borough

Chapter 8 - **Providing appropriate accommodation for homeless households**

Temporary Accommodation

- 8.1** Councils are required to secure emergency temporary accommodation for certain homeless households while their cases are being assessed as well as for accepted homeless households. This may be in the form of Bed and Breakfast accommodation or hostel accommodation. Accepted homeless households may also be provided with short term leased properties (STLs).
- 8.2** With a rise in homelessness and homeless acceptances the numbers of people in bed and breakfast and temporary accommodation have increased during the second half of 2010. Numbers of households in temporary accommodation rose between 2009 and 2010 from 192 to 223 households. Latest data shows an increase in the use of bed and breakfast over the last quarter with 62 placements in June 2011 rising to 70 in September 2011
- 8.3** Likely increases in homelessness from the Local Housing Allowance changes may well put further pressure on the demand for bed and breakfast and temporary accommodation. It will be important for the Council to take appropriate action to monitor and address any increase in costs due to increased provision of temporary accommodation.
- 8.4** The Council will continue to ensure good quality temporary accommodation is provided to those households towards whom it has a duty. We will investigate working sub-regionally to ensure the Council gets value for money in the procurement of temporary accommodation.

Private Rented Accommodation

- 8.5** The Rent Deposit Scheme (RDS) forms part of Richmond Council's housing options approach, and is intended to assist people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless to find housing in the private rented sector. It guarantees the deposit required and can advance the first months' rent. The scheme is intended to provide accommodation to people who may be in priority need and have not become homeless intentionally. Currently the RDS primarily supports families into the private rented sector. The Council will expand the RDS to help single homeless households as well as families to gain better access to the private rented sector.
- 8.6** Given that Richmond upon Thames has the second smallest social housing sector in Greater London in which to meet housing need ¹⁰ and in 2010/11 there were only 330 re-lets available to the Council, private rented accommodation is important.
- 8.7** The Localism Act (2011) gives Local Authorities the freedom to discharge homelessness duties into the private rented sector, meaning accepted homeless households would gain a private rented tenancy rather than a Housing Association property. The Council welcomes this flexibility to provide appropriate accommodation for homeless households.

¹⁰ GLA 2009 excluding City of London

- 8.8** Where a homelessness duty is discharged into the private rented sector the Council will ensure that the offer provided is reasonable and will work with households to provide a package of services / benefits is available.
- 8.9** Private rented properties may not be suitable for all homeless applicants. The Council will assess the needs of homeless households on a case by case basis. Although each case will be assessed on its merits certain groups may generally be excluded from discharge into the private rented sector. These may include
- Elderly (people over retirement age)
 - Disabled people
 - Those vulnerable persons who require local supported housing, or who have a medical condition and in the view of the independent medical advisor, this condition requires them to live locally.
 - Ex-service personnel
 - People in work where the offer would make it impractical for them to keep their job.
 - Those families where children are due to sit GCSE's within 24 months.
 - Those families with children with statements of special educational needs who are assessed as particularly vulnerable by children's services through the Special Education Needs Panel.
 - Those families with children with a serious medical problem where in the view of the independent medical advisor the upheaval might risk it worsening.
- 8.10** National changes to the Local Housing Allowance will make finding private rented properties that are affordable to those reliant on welfare benefits more difficult. Many other London boroughs also face this difficulty. Where possible private rented accommodation will be sourced within borough but where it is not affordable the borough will look to affordable private rented accommodation outside the borough.
- 8.11** The Council will monitor by protected characteristics a number of workstreams including outcomes of LHA casework assistance, discharge of homelessness duties into the private rented sector and who accesses Registered Provider property. This will ensure that the Council understands at a local level any equalities issues created by changes in the sector.
- 8.12** The Council is committed to safeguarding vulnerable households and will use the NOTIFY system ¹¹ when placing households into other boroughs. The Council will be mindful of any safeguarding issues during any upturn in homelessness during 2012 due to LHA changes.
- 8.13** Following national reform of social housing allocations the Council will also be making a number of changes to the way social housing is allocated on the Housing Register including prioritising working households or those making a community contribution and prioritising those with a local connection to the borough (with some exceptions).

¹¹ A web based information system to improve homeless households access to services.

Affordable Housing

- 8.14** The Council is committed to meeting the housing needs of the most vulnerable. Affordable housing (social rented homes, affordable rent homes or shared home ownership) is one means to meeting this need. Supported housing plays a key role in maintaining independence for those who need it, preventing homelessness and giving vulnerable households the life skills necessary to live independently.
- 8.15** A number of Registered Providers ¹² who actively develop in the borough have signed agreements with the Homes and Communities Agency for Affordable Rent programmes. The Council supports the Affordable Rent programme as a means of increasing the supply of affordable housing but is aware of a number of challenges in applying the model at a local level, notably affordability in Richmond upon Thames for both low income working families and households reliant on welfare benefits. The Borough has outlined its position prior to the development of our Strategic Tenancy Policy in our Interim Policy on Affordable Rent.
- 8.16** The Council will work with our Registered Provider partners to deliver affordable homes ensuring schemes meet the priorities outlined in the Borough Investment Plan. The majority of need is for family sized accommodation at target rents. The Council will use its own resources to assist in the delivery of affordable homes, where viable helping to set Affordable Rents at below 80% of market rents and ensuring affordability for low income working households.
- 8.17** With limited land supply in the borough we must also find innovative solutions to increasing the supply of affordable homes. This will include the mapping of Registered Provider land and making best use of existing assets, such as extensions/conversions and continuing to support our voluntary sponsored moves scheme which supports under-occupiers in housing association property to move to smaller properties.

Key Objectives -

Providing appropriate accommodation for homeless households

- Ensuring appropriate temporary accommodation
- Providing suitable private rented accommodation to homeless households Continue to deliver affordable homes that meet the needs of the most vulnerable
- Ensuring the efficient use of supported housing

- 8.18** We will also encourage the delivery of supported housing schemes that meet the borough's needs. As part of this we will review opportunities to remodel schemes where appropriate or work to increase 'move-on' accommodation to prevent schemes 'silting up'.

¹² Registered Providers are another name for housing associations registered with the Homes and Communities Agency.

- 9.1** The table below gives a summary of resources available to the borough in order to prevent homelessness and address the needs of homeless households in the borough in line with the council's homelessness strategy.
- 9.2** Over the period of this Homelessness Strategy, the Council will continue to invest in services for the most vulnerable. Whilst the Council's budget has not yet been finalised for 2012/13, the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy will include some additional resources for homelessness services during the period of this strategy.
- 9.3** The Council receives an annual Homelessness Grant from Central Government to assist in implementing the Borough's Homelessness Strategy and addressing homelessness issues. There has yet to be confirmation of the level of Homelessness Grant beyond 2012/13. The Council has received an allocation of £700,000 in 2011/12 and 2012/13.
- 9.4** The borough also benefits from part of sub-regional funding including the £500,000 sub-regional homelessness prevention projects fund.
- 9.5** SPEAR in October 2011 bid for funding from the Homelessness Transition Fund, a £20 million pound fund to address the 'No Second Night Out' agenda.

Description	Budget 2011/2 £000
Short Term Lets*	2,131
Bed and Breakfast***	920
Hostels*	453
Rough Sleepers**	233
Rent Deposit Scheme**	226
Temporary Accommodation Team	274
Total Homelessness Budget	4,237
Supporting People	2,848
TOTAL EXPENDITURE	7,085

* Expenditure is covered by client housing benefit contributions

** Expenditure is covered by Homelessness Grant

*** Expenditure is covered by client housing benefit contributions and homelessness grant

New Homes Bonus Grant

- 9.6** The Council will receive New Homes Bonus Grant funding of £1.117m in 2012/13. This non-ring-fenced grant will match fund the additional council tax raised for new homes, empty properties brought back into use and an additional amount for affordable homes built for a period of six years. In the Medium Term Financial Strategy it is assumed that this grant will be applied to supporting homelessness costs and the cost of supporting affordable housing in the Borough.

Supporting People Funding

- 9.7** Supporting People funding provides housing related support with the aim of allowing individuals to live independently in their accommodation. Support can be long term or short term and can be via supported accommodation or through floating support, where support is provided wherever an individual resides. The Supporting People budget part funds many services that address or prevent homelessness or sustain tenancies. The Supporting People budget for 2011/12 is £2,847,600.
- 9.8** From 2011/12, funding for Supporting People services is now included within the Council's main Formula Grant from Central Government and is therefore subject to reductions applied to this overall grant as part of the Local Government Finance Settlement. The 2012/13 Formula Grant has been reduced by 5.2% compared to 2011/12.
- 9.9** National and local benchmarking reveals that the vast majority of Local Authorities are involved in seeking significant efficiencies as part of a re-procurement approach. The majority of London Authorities have identified targets of upwards of 15% savings over the next four years. It is expected that Richmond's proposed approach to procurement will deliver overall efficiency savings equivalent to approximately 14% (£400,000) of the Supporting People budget over two years.
- 9.10** The Council will use Homelessness Grant and Supporting People funding to prevent homelessness and support homeless households.

Temporary Accommodation Budget

- 9.11** The total current gross budget 2011/12 for temporary accommodation is £4,237,100. The budget includes £200,000 funded by supplementary homelessness grant contribution carried forward from 2010/11. This budget covers expenditure on Short Term Leased properties, Bed & Breakfast accommodation (B&B), hostels, rough sleepers, Rent Deposit Scheme (RDS) and the temporary accommodation team.
- 9.12** The budget above provides provision for the following:
- i) 151 Short Term Leased properties
 - ii) 45 Bed & breakfast units.
 - iii) 3 Hostels with total capacity of 53 clients

9.13 As at 30th November 2011 there are 256 occupied units in temporary accommodation. The hostels are at maximum capacity and B&B is currently housing 28 family units over the budget figure of 45. There are currently 130 occupied Short Term Leases.

9.14 A portion of the homelessness grant is used for some of the activities above.

Affordable Housing

9.15 Funding for affordable housing can be bid for from the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA). During 2008-11 Registered Providers working in Richmond and supported by the Council received in excess of £20m to meet local housing need.

9.16 Following a bidding round for funding from the 2011-15 Affordable Homes Programme, all of our key development partners have received an allocation of funding for the HCA North West London sub-region. Richmond sits within this sub-region and partners will be able to use their resources to support schemes within the borough.

9.17 The Council will work with Registered Providers to enable affordable housing development and support bids for HCA grant. We will also work to map Registered Provider land in the borough so that if possible economies of scale for sites can be best utilised.

9.18 The Council's Housing Capital Programme (HCP) will be used to support affordable housing that meet local priority needs such as family homes for rent and homes for vulnerable residents. Funding is subject to availability and Cabinet approval. On sites where funding could be required, early discussions with the Council's Housing Development Manager are recommended and should be supported by a viability appraisal showing the need for grant and use of other funding where appropriate. In excess of £3m has already been approved to support affordable housing development throughout 2012/13. Currently over £6m has been allocated to the Housing Capital Programme to fund schemes in 2013/14 and 2014/15.

9.19 New housing developments need to provide a percentage of affordable housing. Where this is not possible onsite, the planning process allows for a payment to be made in lieu of provision. These sums form the Affordable Housing Fund (AHF) which is used to grant-fund the provision of affordable homes elsewhere in the borough. Where appropriate, on-site provision is prioritised. As a result, the fund does not provide a regular and predictable source of grant. Recent changes in planning policy enable contributions from a greater number of small development sites, which should increase the level of contributions to this funding stream.

Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP)

9.20 For private rented tenancies the Council receives Discretionary Housing Benefit payments which can be used to support households affected by Local Housing Allowance changes.

9.21 The Discretionary Housing Payments fund for 2010/11 is £137,113, this will increase to £202,337 in 2012/13.

9.22 Where appropriate the Council will use Discretionary Housing Payments to help prevent vulnerable households in the private rented sector from becoming homeless.