



Rochford District Council

Homelessness Review 2018

CONTENTS	PAGE
1. Introduction	2
2. Homelessness in Rochford	2
3. Review of activities to prevent homelessness	8
4. Considering the needs of vulnerable groups	15
5. Review of temporary accommodation	21
6. Housing Options to relieve homelessness	23
7. Implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017	23
8. Housing supply	25
9. Staffing structure	27
10. Resources	27
11. Consultation	28
12. Conclusions	28

1. Introduction

The Council published its first Homelessness Strategy in 2003, and again in 2010 and 2016 providing plans for tackling homelessness in the district. With the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 and new duties to prevent and relieve homelessness, the 2016 Homelessness Strategy is no longer fit for purpose.

In order to develop a new Homelessness Strategy the Council has carried out a review of homelessness in the district, taking into account the requirements of the Homelessness Act 2002 and the new Homelessness Code of Guidance. This review therefore covers the following key areas:

- The levels, and likely future levels of homelessness
- A review of activities to prevent homelessness
- The needs of vulnerable groups
- A review of temporary accommodation
- Housing options to relieve homelessness
- Housing Register and Allocations Policy
- Implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017
- New housing supply
- Staff structure and resources

The findings of this review will provide the basis for formulating the Council's new Housing & Homelessness Strategy 2018-22 and accompanying action plan.

2. Homelessness in Rochford.

2.1 The Rochford District

Rochford covers an area of 65 square miles and is predominantly rural in character with over 12,000 hectares of Metropolitan Green Belt. It has miles of coastline as well as vast areas of countryside. The District shares borders with Castle Point, Basildon and Southend-on-Sea Borough Councils. According to the 2011 Census, the district was home to 83,287 people, this is estimated to have increased to 85,144 people in 2015 according to the Office for National Statistics. The population is predicted to increase to 89,494 by 2025. The District's residents are unevenly

distributed across 14 Parish's, with the majority located in the main towns of Rayleigh, Hockley and Rochford. The location of facilities and services across the district broadly reflects this distribution.

In 2014 there were 34,810 dwellings in Rochford, of which the predominant house type are detached and semi-detached dwellings, which comprise roughly 80% of total households. The percentage of owner occupiers in Rochford is higher than the national average at 83.1% compared with 64.2% in England. It has the lowest proportion of private rented homes 9.3%, when compared to the rest of South Essex and this is compared to 18.1% nationally and just 7.5% of homes are rented from social landlords compared to 18.1% nationally.

Following the national trend and across all of the South Essex there has been a long-term worsening in affordability of accommodation, which is particularly pronounced in the Rochford district. As of August 2018 there are over 700 households on the Housing Waiting List.

The average house price in 2016/17 was £334,595 and average earnings £30,415. According to the South Essex Housing Market Analysis, the cost of renting a property privately in South Essex is most expensive in Rochford at £233 per week, for a one bedroom property. There is a gap between the cost of rents and the Local Housing Allowance. This has widened by as much as £109 per week, increasing in Rochford more than five-fold from May 2016 making accessing rented housing difficult for people on low incomes or reliant on benefits.

2.2 Current levels of homelessness

Homelessness Acceptances

The number of homeless applications where a full housing duty was accepted has remained fairly stable over the last few years with a slight increase seen in 2016/17.

Table 1 : Homeless Accepted households – last four years				
Years	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
Accepted	73	74	94	80

Reasons for homelessness

The three main causes of homelessness in the district are:

- Parents no longer willing to accommodate
- Loss of private tenancy - assured shorthold tenancy
- Relationship breakdown (both violent and non-violent)

Table 2: Reasons for homelessness					
Reason for homelessness	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total 17/18
Parental eviction	3	9	4	6	22
Loss of private tenancy -AST	4	6	6	3	19
Non-violent relationship breakdown	1	2	2	5	10
Violent relationship breakdown	2	2	2	2	8
Friends/relatives eviction	0	2	1	2	5
Loss of private tenancy other	2	1	1	0	4
Other forms of violence	0	2	0	0	2
Mortgage arrears	1	1	1	0	3
Left hospital / prison/care	0	0	0	1	1
other	0	3	0	3	6
Total	13	28	17	22	80

This has remained the same for a number of years and largely reflects the National picture.

Breakdown of homelessness acceptances by household type

Table 3: Homeless acceptances by household type					
Household type	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total 17/18
Family with children	9	18	11	14	52
Single People	4	10	6	8	28
Total	13	28	17	22	80

The majority of households accepted as homeless are families with children, although a third are single people. This also reflects the national picture with a lack of affordable housing across the board.

Breakdown of acceptances by priority need

Table 4: Homeless acceptances by priority need					
Priority Need category	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	17/18 total
Dependent children	9	18	9	13	49
Pregnant	1	0	2	2	5
16/17 years old	0	0	0	0	0
Care leaver	0	1	0	0	1
Physical disability	0	1	1	1	3
Mental illness/disability	3	7	5	5	20
domestic violence	0	1	0	1	2
Old age	0	0	0	0	0
Total	13	28	17	22	80

As reflected in Table 4, the highest category of priority need is dependent children or pregnancy. This is unsurprising given the lack of alternative housing options for households in the district.

Another priority need to note, accounting for a quarter of all cases, is a high number of acceptances for those with mental health problems. In order to be classed as having a priority need through poor mental health, there needs to be quite significant health issues that impact on a person’s ability to fend for themselves, and cope if they are literally roofless. The Housing Options service report that they are regularly dealing with clients with some level of anxiety and depression, although many of them are families where the primary priority need is dependent children, so they do not show up in these figures.

Breakdown of acceptances by age

Table 5: Homeless acceptances by age					
Age	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total 17/18
16 - 24	3	9	7	10	29
25 - 44	8	14	6	10	38
45 - 59	1	3	3	2	9
60 - 64	0	2	0	0	2
65 - 74	1	0	0	0	1
75 and over	0	0	1	0	1
Total	13	28	17	22	80

It is clear from Table 5 that homelessness amongst those over the age of 60 is rare. This is mainly due to the availability of sheltered housing, which makes up around a third of the social housing stock and the fact that older people are more likely to be settled in accommodation, either owned or rented, in later life.

It is significant that 36% of households are under 25 years of age reflecting the difficulties young people have in finding accommodation they can afford. With property prices escalating all the time it is not surprising that young people find it difficult to get onto the property ladder.

Homeless acceptances per 1000 household population

	Q1	Q2	Q3
All England	0.61	0.65	0.58
London	1.10	1.20	1.01
Rest of England	0.52	0.55	0.50
East of England	0.62	0.61	0.57
Rochford	0.37	0.80	0.49
Castle Point	0.37	0.40	0.51
Maldon	0.44	0.33	0.37
Southend-on-Sea	0.40	0.47	0.50

The number of accepted households was compared with other authorities using a per 1000 household analysis. The table above shows that apart from a slight increase in Quarter 2 the level of homeless acceptances in Rochford is broadly in line with neighbouring councils, and lower than the East of England average.

2.3 Demand on the housing options team.

The Housing Options Service is based in the Council offices in Rochford and is available during normal working hours providing both a drop in and appointment system. Out of hours emergencies are dealt with by officers who can be accessed through a corporate out of hour's emergency service.

Demands on the Housing Options service continue to rise. In 2016/17 there were 1216 approaches for housing advice, rising to 1953 in 2017/18. This demonstrates an increase in demand of nearly a third in a year.

Some limited data is available on the number of approaches since the Homelessness Reduction Act came into force in April 2018. These show 306 approaches in April. If demand continues at this level then the annual figure for 2018/19 will be approaching 3,500.

The biggest change for the service will be the requirement to engage in ongoing homelessness prevention casework for those meeting the new ‘homeless in the next 56 days’ criteria. At the end of May caseloads for Prevention Officers were in the region of 30 cases per officer. This is likely to increase and should be monitored closely.

2.4 Future levels of homelessness

It is difficult to predict future levels of homelessness; however it is predicted to continue to rise nationally. The introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 will ensure that advice and support is delivered to anybody facing homelessness to try to prevent homelessness in future. The following factors are likely to impact on the demand for services:

- Welfare Reform including the roll out of Universal Credit
- Escalating private rent levels
- Lack of new affordable housing supply

With a renewed emphasis on preventing homelessness and Government funding to help relieve rough sleeping, the objective is that current levels can be maintained if not reduced.

3. Review of activities to prevent homelessness

The Council monitors and records the number of approaches, how many households receive advice and how many cases of homelessness are prevented or relieved. The table below shows the position for the last two years.

Table 7: Homeless Prevention activity		
	2016/17	2017/18
Approaches	1216	1953
Advice given	936	1619
Prevented / relieved	141	209

As seen in Table 7, compared to the numbers of approaches the official number of preventions, as reported on the Government statistical return is relatively low, but this is not necessarily providing a full picture of all housing advice outcomes.

The disparity in data is likely to be due to the fact that government data only captures formal homelessness applications rather approaches for detailed housing advice to help retain existing accommodation or secure alternative accommodation. The new government enhanced data collection system (known as (H-CLIC) introduced from April 2018 will help in producing detailed consistent data regarding homelessness.

3.1 Housing advice

The Council provides a Housing Advice service from its main office in Rochford, delivering frontline housing advice and information to people approaching the Council in housing need. A duty officer is available each day, providing a triage approach. Clients who meet the 56 day criteria are provided with an information pack and a two hour appointment is made for them to come back and complete a Personal Housing Plan. This allows time to consider solutions, agree a more detailed prevention action plan including intervention and support.

The Housing Options service includes officers who take responsibility for a variety of specific service areas: working with young people/care leavers, mental health, domestic abuse, mediation, Anti Social Behaviour/offenders, drugs/alcohol

Home visits are now carried out routinely in cases of threatened homelessness from family or friends. Prevention officers report that home visits and the introduction of a pro-active approach to parental evictions has been successful and that prevention is 'working' for this group. It is reported that parents can see that their child is being supported to find a solution, with the completion of a Personalised Housing Plan. Behaviour Agreements have also been used with this group with some success.

The introduction of the prevention approach and additional staff has had a significant impact on the ability to prevent homelessness amongst private tenants too. Officers can take time to go and speak to the landlord and resolve any issues; this is building good relationships with private landlords and letting agents who are beginning to make contact with the team much earlier if there are problems.

There are also effective links with the Council's Revenues and Benefits service with a dedicated officer assigned to working with the Housing Options service. Applications for assistance and/or Discretionary Housing Payments are dealt with efficiently.

The Council's website has been updated to include information and links on housing advice and work is in progress to develop factsheet that can be downloaded. With the statutory Duty to Refer coming into force in October 2018, it is recommended that these are also promoted to partners and stakeholders.

Recommendation 1: Ensure easy access and availability of information, detailing the new prevention approach and the support services available.

3.2 Housing Register and Allocations Policy

Housing advice and homelessness prevention will include recommending an application to the Housing Register, ensuring applicants' needs are correctly assessed, that they receive appropriate priority banding, and information and advice about how the Allocation Scheme works.

Social housing in the district is provided by housing associations, the Council having transferred its housing stock in 2007. Sanctuary Housing Association (SHA) is the big provider and own around 2000 homes. The Council has nomination rights to 75% of properties with registered providers and the remaining 25% are let through the registered providers separate register. A number of other registered social landlords are active in the district, including Genesis, Estuary, Housing 21, Hanover, London & Quadrant, Moat, Swan and Chelmer Housing Partnership. The total stock of general needs affordable homes is around 2,700. Shared ownership and supported housing (including extra care) account for a further 150 homes.

The number of households on the Housing Register has reduced overall from 825 in March 2017 to 638 in March 2018. The numbers of households housed from the register has nearly doubled from 97 in 2016/17 to 160 in 2017/18 reflecting an increase in the number of new homes delivered (43 in 2017/18 compared to 8 the year before). Increased supply has a significant impact on homelessness and the numbers in temporary accommodation and best use is made of any vacancies through using transfers to free up larger homes.

The Housing Allocations Policy was reviewed in February 2018 and has since been subject to public consultation. The final policy is due to be adopted in October 2018. This policy was amended to be compliant with law (Homelessness Reduction Act 2017) and practice, ensuring the Council effectively allocates increasingly limited resources. For example, currently, it is forecast that there will be around 65 general needs lets available in 2018/19 which is a fall of around 10%; this is set against an increasing demand for homeless services.

3.3 Debt and money advice

The Council funds the services of the Citizens Advice Rochford & Rayleigh Bureau (CAB), which has a presence in 2 of the main towns.

It is a relatively small generic service and offers an advice and information service to people who live and work in the community. They are equipped to respond to any issue, including benefits, consumer, relationships, housing, employment and money advice. There is however no specialist services available for Money advice or Debt which can often lead to homelessness.

A 2018/19 funding bid to the Department of Works and Pensions (DWP) for a Community Engagement Officer has recently been successful. This new partnership will fund a 1yr post, which will help to improve employment outcomes or prospects of future employment outcomes for long-term unemployed individuals and groups facing complex barriers to work.

The Housing Options service works effectively with Housing Benefit colleagues on a day to day basis holding informal case reviews for housing clients and considering whether Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) would be appropriate to prevent homelessness. DHP should always be considered as a short term emergency fund and is not a method by which claimants can seek to permanently resolve a rental shortfall.

3.4 Housing Options Prevention Fund Policy

The Council has adopted a Prevention Fund Policy that provides financial support to people facing homelessness. The policy aims to:

- Prevent homelessness by improving the range of available early interventions
- Support vulnerable people
- Assist the Council in reducing numbers of households in B&B and temporary accommodation

Types of support include financial assistance through a loan for a rent deposit/rent in advance, one off rent arrears payment, landlord incentive and deposit bond.

Funds are limited by budget but this is an effective policy that will help to prevent homelessness. In 2017/18 it is estimated that use of the Homelessness Prevention Fund saved the Council £189,700, the sum it would have spent if those households had been made homeless.

At present the prevention fund is only available to households who fall into a priority need category. With the new relief duties towards single people, it is recommended that consideration be given to making this available for anybody threatened with homelessness.

Recommendation 2: Expand the Prevention Fund policy to make it available for anybody threatened with homelessness, including non-priority households.

3.5 Private Landlords and Letting Agents

While the number of private landlords working with the Council directly to meet housing need is low, steps are being taken to further develop these relationships. A joint Landlord Forum with neighbouring authorities is now in place. The last forum was arranged jointly with the National Landlords Association and was attended by 40 landlords and letting agents. One landlord is now working with the service and taking on clients referred by them. Where evictions are taking place officers are also working closely with landlords at an earlier stage around such issues as housing benefit and homeless prevention.

A new Private Sector Housing Officer is matrix managed by Environmental Health and Housing Options Managers providing understanding and links across the teams, including support to deal with cases of harassment and illegal eviction and property checks. This is working well and demonstrates effective cross departmental working.

The Council is keen to explore whether it can establish a Social Lettings Agency and this is definitely something that should be explored further perhaps in collaboration with other local authorities in Essex.

Recommendation 3: Continue to promote joint working and strong links with the private rented sector and explore any opportunities to develop a Social Lettings Agency.

3.6 Mortgage rescue schemes

There are very low levels of homelessness due to mortgage repossession with only three cases being accepted in 2017/18 so this is not a priority area for service development. Information and advice on financial planning is of benefit in these cases and owners referred to agencies as appropriate. The Homelessness Prevention fund can be accessed if small grants can be used to solve homelessness.

3.7 Social Landlords

There is some anecdotal evidence of partner housing associations failing to notify the housing team of the potential eviction of social housing tenants until quite late in the day. With the Homelessness Reduction Act now in force, it is important to ensure that protocols are in place with all social housing providers in the district to allow early intervention and support to be offered. Rochford is promoting the adoption of a new Homelessness Charter and social landlords are one of the key partners that will be asked to sign up to this.

Recommendation 4: Work with social housing providers to ensure they identify at an early stage tenants in rent arrears or otherwise at risk of eviction.

3.8 Partnerships

The Council has some strong partnerships with organisations that seek to prevent homelessness. These include SHA, CAB, Peabody, South Essex Domestic Abuse Hub, local church community groups and other local authorities. Significant progress has been made in partnership working over the last two years and some innovative projects have emerged from these relationships.

The Council is part of the Essex Trailblazer Homelessness Prevention Project with a dedicated housing support mentor linked to the team to support clients with complex needs. The Trailblazer project is monitored by a strategic steering group and is managed by Essex County Council.

An initiative with local faith group Hawkwell Baptist Church has provided an opportunity to access different tiers of support services and two new community led initiatives providing meals and a 'Helpful box' scheme also help to meet needs on a very practical level.

A Homelessness Prevention officer chairs the Rochford Referral Group, a multi-agency group established to deal with complex cases, which aims to identify solutions and agree an approach across a number of agencies. This is well attended and meets regularly.

A multi-agency Homelessness Forum met on 25th June 2018 and contributed to this review of homeless services. Rochford is promoting the adoption of a Homelessness Charter as the vehicle for multi-agency partnership working and to ensure awareness and implementation of the Duty to Refer across all partners from October 2018. It is planned that the Forum will continue to meet regularly to review progress on the recommendations in the Strategy.

Recommendation 5: Promote the Homelessness Charter and use this to ensure implementation of the Duty to Refer from October. Ensure that the Homelessness Forum continues to meet at least annually.

4. Considering the needs of vulnerable groups

In order to develop effective partnerships and homelessness prevention services the Council has considered what the needs of vulnerable groups in Rochford district are, and what services are in place to support them.

4.1 Rough Sleepers

Rough sleepers visibly sleeping on the streets are rare in Rochford; however partner agencies identified 11 at the last official count in November 2017. This was a desktop exercise asking partners how many they were aware of but does indicate that the numbers are growing.

The Housing Options team are currently exploring options on how they can work more closely with neighbouring authority, Southend for the commissioning and access to support services. Southend's main night shelter provider, HARP, have recorded over 50 clients with a Rochford connection being supported by their

service and formal referral processes are now being set up. Links with Southend's church liaison officer for night provision are also being made via Rochford's new faith/community group, with the objective of considering a proposal to deliver joint Severe Weather Emergency Provision (SWEP) across Rochford, improving on Southend's current provision.

Recommendation 6: Explore the provision of joint commissioning and SWEP provision with neighbouring authorities to support the needs of those who are homeless now and at risk of homelessness.

4.2 Single homeless people / 'sofa surfers'

There are also people in the District who are not rough sleeping but have nowhere settled to live. Experience elsewhere shows that these are likely to be mainly younger people who move from one friend or relative to another as they are unable to secure a permanent social rented home, and do not have sufficient income to afford privately rented accommodation. The only option for this group is to share with friends, try to access the private sector or hope to be housed through the Housing Register, where there is a significant waiting time.

Support can be provided through the floating support service for sofa surfers with support needs. Close links with the HARP project in Southend will also provides support for single homeless people or those sofa surfing. It is this group in particular that the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act (HRA) will assist through providing a personalised housing plan and support needs assessment. The new HRA relief duty also applies to single people who do not have a priority need, so options to increase the number of properties available to this group will be key.

4.3 Young People and Care Leavers

The number of young people approaching the Council is relatively low, and joint protocol arrangements are in place with Essex County Council to assess the needs of any young person aged 16/17 who may be at risk of homelessness.

The identification of a 'young person's champion' in the team to work with young people, their families and partner agencies, and deliver some family mediation is already delivering benefits.

The joint working protocol between Essex Housing Authorities and Essex County Council in dealing with homeless 16 and 17 year olds has been reviewed and a new Draft Protocol has been prepared, to be adopted once the MHCLG Code of Guidance relating to young people recently issued has been reviewed.

4.4 Vulnerable families

Families who are at risk of homelessness or who have become homeless and have moved into temporary accommodation have a variety of support needs. They may have to move away from their usual family support networks, and children may have to change schools. This combined with a relationship breakdown or financial worries can result in households with support needs of one type or another. Financial support can be offered through arrangements with the local CAB.

The Council also has good links with Rochford Extended Services. This service was established by schools across the district who formed a charitable trust, working together to help the schools, families and the community make the best of their resources. The service runs Multi Agency Cluster (MAC) Meetings, promoting partnership working between statutory, non statutory and voluntary organisations, to provide support for children and their families. Essex County Council also provides a Family Hub in each district offering a range of professionals who can support families.

Housing officers can refer to health visitors, provide food bank vouchers and ensure that all support needs are met. For young parents supported housing is available in the district through the National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders (NACRO) funded by Essex County Council.

4.5 Victims of domestic abuse (DA)

Incidents of domestic abuse leading to homelessness are relatively high and require a multi-agency response to keep victims safe. The Essex County Council commissioned DA provider, is Safer Places and provides advisory services across all local authorities and some limited refuge space. Housing Options officers are able to access this resource, but locally there are also good links with domestic violence services including Changing Pathways who has a five unit refuge in the District.

The Council is also participating in the new South Essex Domestic Abuse Hub funded by MHCLG with access to a dedicated DA liaison officer, available at Rochford half a day a week. This is reported to be working well and provides additional resource to the team.

Homelessness Prevention officers are involved with multi-agency partnership working around domestic abuse including attendance at the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) which aims to reduce the risk of serious harm to high-risk victims and their children by sharing information.

There is little provision for male victims of domestic abuse in line with many other areas, however temporary accommodation would be provided should an approach be made and the generic floating support could be accessed.

4.6 People with a mental health problem

With mental health being one of the highest 'priority need' categories of those accepted as homeless, it is essential that good relationships exist with partners in this field.

Within the team one experienced officer has taken on the role of Mental Health Champion, and has developed excellent links with both Rochford hospital psychiatric ward and the Community Mental Health team.

Individual relationships formed with key professionals ensures that needs are assessed effectively, however, with thresholds for statutory services raised there is a resulting need for more low level mental health support. There is also no supported housing available for people with mental health issues in the district.

The Peabody Housing Floating support service reports that around a third of their referrals are for people with a primary need around mental health. This provides an essential service to people who may not meet the statutory threshold for mental health services.

Recommendation 7: Consider the availability of floating support for people with mental health issues not meeting statutory thresholds for services and whether additional resources could be made available.

4.7 Offenders, former offenders and those at risk of offending

There are historically few approaches from offenders or former offenders however this may change in light of the HRA and the new prevention and relief duties for people released from prison or youth detention accommodation.

Officers are represented on the Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) panel and cases are dealt with through a partnership approach. Links with Community Safety colleagues and housing association partners are well developed and cases of anti-social behaviour considered on a case by case basis and joint visits undertaken.

4.8 People with substance misuse or drug and alcohol problems

People with substance misuse issues haven't historically approached the Council for assistance in great numbers although those that do often have complex needs, including mental health problems and can be hard to engage and work with. Services available include Open Road and Synergy who both provide practical support.

4.9 Older people

The number of older people becoming homeless is minimal due to the availability of sheltered and general older persons housing. Older people can usually be housed through the Housing Register into suitable sheltered accommodation before homelessness occurs. Supported housing consists of a number of sheltered housing schemes with non-resident wardens and two extra care schemes.

4.10 People with a learning or physical disability

Numbers of people approaching the Council with either physical or learning disabilities are low. Housing with support is provided at Ken Start House, Rochford. This 14 bed home was built in 2009 on the grounds of the former Rochford Hospital to provide specialist accommodation for young adults with learning difficulties.

4.11 Identifying what supported accommodation is available

There are a number of supported housing accommodation schemes in Rochford as shown below:

Client Group	Number of support units available		
	Accommodation based	Floating support	Provider
Young People	3		Genesis/NACRO
Mental Health	1		Richmond Fellowship
Young parents	4		Swan / NACRO
Domestic Abuse	5 (Refuge)		Basildon Changing Pathways
Learning Disabilities	2 14		Swan Housing Essex County Council (shared nomination rights)
Older People	2 Extra Care		Swan Housing Genesis Housing

While there is sufficient provision for the number of young people and young parents approaching the Council, there is no supported housing specifically for people with mental health issues, one of the main issues.

Housing floating support is delivered by Peabody and includes a worker based at Rochford on a Tuesday, enabling support to be offered easily. The service received 37 referrals in 2016/17, doubling to 87 in 2017/18 due to new ways of working and the service provides support to households with a variety of support needs including families. A high percentage of clients have mental health issues. Essex CC confirms that funding will continue for this service in 2018/19, but the model of provision may change, to compliment the current homelessness trailblazer approach.

With the Governments proposals for the funding of short term supported housing due out this summer, it is important that Rochford engages with Essex County Council and neighbouring authorities to ensure the support needs of Rochford residents are included in any strategic documents produced in future.

Recommendation 8: Work in partnership with ECC and other housing authorities to develop a Supported Housing Strategic Plan for Essex.

5. Review of Temporary accommodation

A Review of temporary accommodation has been carried out. The table below illustrates the position with placements in temporary accommodation over the last two years.

Table 10: Temporary Accommodation numbers		
Type of accommodation	31/03/17	31/03/18
Self-contained with housing association	38	39
Self-contained nightly let	11	11
HMO (New South Street)	0	12
Refuge (in district)	3	5
HMO (Southend)	5	3

B&B (commercial)	21	6
Homeless at home (with relatives/friends)	2	2
TOTAL	80	78
Of the total – those placed out of district	34	17

Officers have been very pro-active in developing new temporary accommodation, resulting in an overall reduction in the number of households being accommodated in bed and breakfast and fewer being placed outside the district. Numbers in bed and breakfast have reduced significantly from an all time high of 54 in July 2017 to 4 as at 31st July 2018.

SHA have been one of the main partners in delivering new provision, developing 15 units of self-contained temporary housing in the last year at Francis Cottee Lodge, a former sheltered housing complex. This is now fully occupied and is managed by SHA.

A 10 year lease agreement has also been signed with a new developer partner, for a 12 unit house in multiple occupation (HMO)-hostel in South Street, Rochford. The Council has taken on the responsibility of managing this accommodation and providing basic support for residents. Joint sign ups are carried out and the agency deals with void properties and any maintenance issues. This developer is also working closely with officers on an additional temporary accommodation site for single people, through a further 10 year lease for the use of an 11 unit HMO in the centre of Rochford town

While the Council has few young people aged 16/17 approaching as homeless, when they do it is often difficult to find and secure suitable temporary accommodation. The Council recognises the importance of ensuring that temporary accommodation is available when needed and this new development should ensure this need is met.

These new developments are very welcome and will continue to reduce the use of B&B further, ensure that people are housed within the district and provide much improved value for money for the Council.

Recommendation 9: Continue to work in partnership with both housing association and private sector partners to deliver new temporary and settled accommodation to eliminate the use of B&B.

If, however, the Council continues to provide rent collection, management and support to households living in these units, this will place additional pressure on a Housing Options service that is already working at full capacity. Management of temporary accommodation is resource intensive and consideration should be given to either tendering the management and/or support function, or employing dedicated officers to manage and provide support in Council run temporary accommodation.

Recommendation 10: Review support arrangements at the Council run temporary accommodation to ensure that there is capacity to do this effectively.

6. Housing Options to relieve homelessness

As mentioned in 3.3 above, good relationships are being developed with private landlords and letting agents and this is being used to help support the availability of privately rented properties for families and single people.

For single people in particular there are opportunities to encourage private landlords to consider taking on groups of single people sharing properties either through lead tenant models or joint tenancies and to develop more affordable shared properties and HMOs. While these may seem like risky options to landlords, the support that the Council can now offer will be key to encouraging that offer and developing the partnership approach.

The availability of lodgings can be promoted through encouraging people to rent out a room in their home and providing information and advice on letting a room in your home. This can be promoted to home owners and can improve incomes for households struggling to manage high housing costs.

Recommendation 11: Develop and promote information and advice on letting rooms in your home widely in all sectors to encourage people to make available rooms for single people at affordable rents.

7. Implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017

7.1 The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 (HRA)

The HRA places new legal duties on English local authorities, so that everyone who is homeless or at risk of becoming homeless has access to meaningful help, irrespective of their priority need status; as long as they are eligible for housing assistance.

The Act largely amends part VII of the Housing Act 1996. It redefines the meaning of threat of homelessness by extending the period of threatened with homelessness from 28 to 56 days. There are six key aims of the Act which include:

- a) Prevention – Duty to provide casework intervention to resolve threatened homelessness. Local authorities work with applicants to draw up a personalised housing plan tailored towards their individual circumstances to help identify the best solutions in each case rather than standard advice.
- b) Relief - Homelessness relief occurs when an authority has been unable to prevent homelessness but helps someone to secure alternative accommodation, even though the authority is under no statutory obligation to do so. An example of relieved homelessness cases includes; non-priority and intentional homelessness cases.

- c) Duty to provide advisory services - Local authorities must provide free homelessness advice and information to any person in their local authority area. This should include advice and information on preventing homelessness, securing accommodation when homeless, the rights of homeless people or those threatened with homelessness, the help that is available from the local authority or others and how to access that help. It also requires advice services to be designed with certain vulnerable groups in mind.
- d) Main Homelessness Duty - The main homelessness duty of settled accommodation for priority need , unintentionally homeless and have a local connection where prevention or relief duties have failed still remains in place.
- e) Cooperation - Applicants will be expected to cooperate with local authorities as the duties outlined can be ended if applicants are found to have deliberately and unreasonably refuse to cooperate.
- f) Duty to refer - There will be a new duty on other public services to refer people to homelessness teams if they are working with people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. This comes into force in October 2018.

7.2 Rochford progress on implementation

In Rochford significant progress has been made to implement the HRA. This has included:

- ✓ Recruitment to 2 additional fixed term Homeless Prevention Officer posts
- ✓ Proposals for a Senior Homeless Prevention Officer to support the team with the changes at an operational level.
- ✓ New triage procedures on the front line.
- ✓ The purchase of an ICT system to monitor and review cases.
- ✓ The adoption of best practice template plans and letters for applicants.
- ✓ A Homelessness Review and plans to develop a Housing & Homelessness Strategy.

- ✓ Renewed focus on strategic partnerships and developing new services.
- ✓ Plans to increase the supply temporary accommodation in the district.
- ✓ A Homelessness Forum and engagement with key partners to develop a Homeless Charter

This Review forms part of the progress to date. The new Housing & Homelessness Strategy will identify the Council's priorities and include recommendations for further changes to meet the requirements of the Act and deliver a pro-active homeless prevention service.

8. Housing supply

8.1 New affordable housing

While good progress has been made in delivering new temporary accommodation, without a pipeline of new housing supply this will not in itself solve the housing pressures on the Council. Delivery of new affordable housing must be a key corporate priority for the council as this presents a significant risk to the Council's ability to manage the demands on the homelessness service.

The Council adopted their Core Planning Strategy in January 2013 which covers a plan period from 2012 – 2027. The Strategy outlines the requirement for new affordable housing on sites within the borough and includes a target to deliver 1,140 affordable homes in the plan period, equivalent to 76 affordable dwellings each year.

Sanctuary Housing Association are currently in an agreement with the Council to deliver 500 new homes in the District. There are 7 other housing associations with stock in Rochford, but only 3 are active developers.

The number of new affordable homes in the development pipeline is high compared to that delivered in recent years. The following table demonstrates the expected increase compared with historical figures:

Table 11: New affordable housing supply 2012 - 2021									
	12/13	13/14	14/15	15/16	16/17	17/18	18/19	19/20	20/21
Delivery of new affordable /social rented	33	59	28	32	8	43	100	150	271
Delivery of shared o/ship	34 in the period								

Housing supply is covered in more detail in the new Housing & Homelessness Strategy but it is encouraging that the pipeline of new homes has significantly increased in the last year. The need for smaller units for single people and newly formed households should be included in any new developments of affordable housing.

Recommendation 12: Consider opportunities for new affordable homes using the Council’s land-bank or other publicly owned land, the Councils borrowing abilities and developing partnerships to deliver these.

9. Staffing structure

9.1 Restructure of Housing Services

The Housing Options service continues to re-structure its service, to ensure a robust approach to the ongoing HRA implementation, the recent approval of a new Senior Homelessness Prevention Officer to lead the Housing Options service, will free up the Housing Options Team Leader to develop new strategic partnerships and deliver the Housing and Homelessness Strategy.

In addition, 2 additional fixed term Homelessness Prevention Officer posts, funded from the Government Flexible Homelessness Support Grant have been brought in to support the service to manage the change required by the new legislative framework and implement the recommendations in the Housing & Homelessness Strategy.

10. Resources

10.1 Income and Expenditure on homelessness services

The Government has provided additional resources in order to support local authorities to deliver the HRA up to 2019/20.

	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
	£	£	£
Flexible Homeless Support Grant (FHSG) (ring fenced)	103,670	117,389	191,531
Burdens Fund (ring fenced)	21,402	19,604	22,530
Homeless Prevention Fund (non ring fenced)	49,180	49,371	49,322
ICT Fund (ring fenced)	9,202	0	0
H- Click payment (ring fenced)	3,421	0	0
Discretionary Housing Payments	143,073	136,169	u/k

The Council has utilised some of its Flexible Homeless Support Grant to recruit into the 2 fixed term prevention posts and an invest to save approach continues to be taken e.g. based on estimated prevention savings in 2017/18, x1 prevention officer is averaging an estimated £7,000 per month prevention, when compared with emergency accommodation costs.

FHSG monies will be used exclusively for developing prevention work and access to new services with partners i.e. Charities, HARP and Isaiah Project and for supporting new commissioning opportunities with Southend Council.

All the ICT/H-Click funding has been fully spent on new software to fully implement the new HRA approach, plans and monitoring needs.

The allocation of financial assistance from the Government is confirmed up until 2020 and is by no means certain and needs to be kept under review.

11. Consultation

11.1 Homelessness Forum

A Homelessness Forum was held in June 2018 attended by over 40 representatives from local statutory services and the voluntary and community sector. A workshop was held to understand the challenges for Rochford in terms of homelessness and to comment and agree on the values and commitments in the new local Homeless Charter. There was general agreement to the values and commitments in the Charter and the key issues arising from the Homelessness Review and partners shared a desire to know more about what services are available to help and signpost clients to, and supported the intention to maximise resources by joining with neighbouring authorities and other agencies.

The Forum also considered what actions could be undertaken to tackle these issues, which will form part of the Housing & Homelessness Strategy for the Rochford district. Wider public consultation is planned for the Strategy in September 2018.

12. Conclusions

Demand for homeless prevention services in the Rochford district is likely to grow due to a general lack of affordable housing supply. There will be many challenges in seeking new solutions to prevent homelessness in line with the requirements of the Homelessness Reduction Act, however the new structures and renewed energy within the team provides a solid foundation on which to build a strong prevention service.

The main cause of homelessness is eviction from family and friends, therefore a priority is to develop a service that provides early home visits from officers skilled in mediation, who take a holistic approach to the whole household's circumstances and seek innovative ways to resolve the issues that may lead to homelessness. Solutions should be sustainable, and if homelessness is inevitable, to work with people to plan a move into alternative housing, rather than have to deal with a crisis.

A priority is also to further develop the relationship with landlords, both private landlords/letting agencies and housing associations to ensure that any problem with tenants is identified at an early stage. Developing protocols to refer tenants to homelessness prevention officers at a much earlier stage will allow solutions to be identified before tenancies are put at risk.

In order to seek solutions to support people with complex problems a multi-agency response is required and priority should be given to continuing to develop effective partnerships with both statutory, voluntary and community organisations in order to ensure people receive the support they need, not only in terms of accommodation but ongoing support to maintain it.

Numbers in temporary accommodation continue to rise and although numbers placed outside the district in bed and breakfast accommodation are reducing, there is still some reliance on B&B and this must be avoided in future. Plans are in place to develop more temporary accommodation in the district and once this is in place to carry out a further review of out of area accommodation and develop a plan to reduce this over time.

New supply of affordable housing is required and further work is needed to ensure the pipeline of new affordable homes is delivered in order to meet future need. The focus will be on working with partner associations and other internal departments to deliver affordable homes in the main areas of need.

The conclusions in this review of the homeless service along with wider consideration of the strategic approach to the supply of new affordable housing along and the Council's role in relation to private sector housing has led to specific priorities for the new Housing and Homelessness Strategy:

Priority 1: Place

- We support the delivery of appropriate housing growth in Rochford and will use all available resources to deliver affordable housing to meet needs.

Priority 2: People

- We will meet housing needs and reduce homelessness in partnership
- We will meet the needs of our ageing population and other vulnerable groups.

Priority 3: Property

- We will raise standards of housing management and property conditions in the private sector.
- We will maximise the use of existing private housing stock including empty homes.
- We will prevent homelessness from the private rented sector.

Priority 4: Partnership

- We will work in partnership to achieve our housing objectives, and channel internal and external resources to deliver this Strategy.