

# Runnymede Borough Council Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy

2025-2028

**DRAFT**



## Contents

Our Vision.....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Executive Summary.....	4
Introduction.....	4
Defining homelessness .....	5
Our Homelessness review .....	7
Key challenges.....	10
Rough Sleeping.....	15
Our priorities.....	16
Delivering the Strategy.....	20
Monitoring .....	21



# Our Vision

*To provide a high quality, empathetic service where we support those at risk of or experiencing homelessness and rough sleeping at the earliest opportunity. This will be achieved through the delivery of targeted, tailored and holistic support alongside our partners, to resolve housing issues as swiftly as possible*

## **Executive Summary**

Welcome to Runnymede Borough Council's Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2025-2028 ('the Strategy'). The central aim of this Strategy is to outline the steps the Council will take to prevent homelessness, support those individuals who are rough sleeping into more sustainable accommodation and ensure that those who experience homelessness have access to the support and advice they need.

The Strategy is formulated following a review of all forms of homelessness and rough sleeping within the Borough. We have analysed this data to measure the progress we have made since the last Strategy and identify our targets and vision for the new Strategy. Key points of the review are detailed in this Strategy.

Homelessness and rough sleeping is damaging to both the individuals its affects and the wider Community. The impact of homelessness on children has an inevitable profound effect on their future well-being. We are therefore determined to do all we can to intervene swiftly and work closely with our partners to provide a holistic service that can assist those facing homelessness in addition to undertaking targeted work to tackle the root causes of homelessness and rough sleeping in the Borough. In the current socio-economic climate, we know that this presents a significant challenge that we cannot overcome alone. However, we are firm in our vigour that together with our partner agencies, we can achieve the targets we set.

We have been deliberately ambitious in our approach to tackling homelessness and rough sleeping as we strive to develop our service further to deliver high quality, robust and effective support that is tailored to the needs of the household. We believe that by changing the perception of homelessness and rough sleeping to beyond simply the need to provide a dwelling, we can work together to improve the lives of residents now and for generations beyond.

## **Introduction**

The Homelessness Act 2002 requires all local authorities to have a Homelessness Strategy which sets out the priorities for the Council, in partnership with its key stakeholders, to achieve the best outcomes for those in housing need across the borough

This Strategy builds into the overarching themes as set out in Runnymede's Corporate Business Plan, which has the following priorities:

- To play a key role in creating a greener environment and effective response to climate change
- To support groups and societies with initiatives to strengthen their communities and to represent and advocate for our residents' interests
- To improve the health and wellbeing of our residents, working in partnership with the NHS and other stakeholders
- To support sustainable growth in the local economy

We have done this to ensure that the work that we will do to tackle homelessness and rough sleeping will be undertaken by addressing a wide range of factors that contribute to homelessness rather than narrowly focusing on 'housing' issues.

Since the last Strategy, there have been significant changes in both legislation and the socio-economic climate, such as:

- The introduction of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021
- The introduction of First Homes
- A renewed focus on damp and mould through the Social Housing Regulation Act 2023
- The introduction of the Fire Safety Act 2021 for high rise flats
- The Armed Forces Act 2021
- International crises and supporting Afghan and Ukrainian refugees
- The cost of living crisis
- The ongoing impact of COVID-19

We feel that it is important that our response to homelessness and rough sleeping is agile and adaptable to the fast changing nature of the world that we live in. To that end, we have decided to change the duration of our Strategy from five years to three years.

## Defining homelessness

### The Legislative & Policy Context

**The Housing Act 1996** (as amended) is the key legislation that underpins the strategic framework for the work we do to resolve all forms of homelessness. Specifically, Part VII defines homelessness as a person who has no accommodation in the UK or elsewhere, which is available for their occupation, and which that person has a legal right to occupy. A person is also homeless if they have accommodation but cannot secure entry to it, or their accommodation is a moveable structure and there is nowhere it can lawfully be placed in order to provide accommodation.



**The Homelessness Act 2002** included notable changes in the way Councils use temporary accommodation and brought in a stronger emphasis on the need to have prevention as a key tool to reduce actual homelessness.



**The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017** is one of the biggest changes in housing legislation since the Homelessness Act 2002 and came into force on 3 April 2018. It brought in significant new duties and responsibilities for local authorities to undertake when responding to homelessness.

This includes:

*The prevention duty* which aims to prevent a household that is threatened with homelessness from becoming homeless. This may include activities to enable applicants to remain in their

current home or find alternative accommodation. The duty lasts for 56 days but may be extended if the local authority is continuing with efforts to prevent homelessness

*The relief duty* which is owed to households that are already homeless and require help to secure settled accommodation. The duty lasts 56 days and can only be extended by a local authority if the households do not qualify for the main homelessness duty.

*The duty to refer* was introduced to place a duty on specified public bodies to refer people who may be at risk of, or actually homeless, to the local housing authority for assistance.

The Homeless Reduction Act 2017 is widely recognised as bringing in vast changes to the ways local authorities provided housing advice. For example, there is a stronger emphasis on intervening at the earliest opportunity to prevent homelessness as well as provide homelessness advice and assistance to people experiencing homelessness who are not deemed to be 'in priority need'. It also brought in a requirement for people approaching homelessness assistance to be given a 'Personal Housing Plan (PHP)' which clearly outlines what actions the local authority will do to take reasonable steps to prevent or resolve homelessness and the steps the applicant should take to prevent or resolve their homelessness. A Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities was also published for local authorities to use as a guide about how to apply the legislation.

A new reporting mechanism was also introduced which enables a more robust oversight of the trends and detail of each homeless approach.

Other legislative changes since RBC's last Strategy include:

- [The Domestic Abuse Act 2021](#) which introduced further duties such as undertaking a needs assessment, providing 'Safe Accommodation' and having stronger working relations with Surrey County Council
- [The Care Act 2014](#) placed a stronger emphasis on agencies to work in a more uniformed approach to protect children, young adults and people with care and support needs
- [The Renters Reform Bill](#) which seeks to abolish no fault evictions (section 21 notices) for those in the private rented sector in addition to bringing enhanced protection for tenants in relation to the quality of their home. This Bill will be debated in Parliament, and if enacted, we will take steps to prepare for any increased homelessness should Landlords decide to evict quickly prior to the Act coming into force. We will work closely with our Landlords to mitigate any risk of them seeking to leave the private rental market altogether as a direct result of the Act. We will also monitor any scope for opportunities to work with more Landlords as they may consider it easier to have their properties managed on their behalf due to changes brought in by the proposed Bill. We will work with our Landlords to provide clear information about the legislative changes to tackle any misinformation
- [Armed Forces Act 2021](#) further enshrines the Armed Forces Covenant into law to help prevent service personnel and veterans being disadvantaged when accessing public services by introducing a duty to have 'due regard' to the principles of the Armed Forces Covenant

- [The Rough Sleeping Strategy](#) was published by the Government in 2018 and set out the vision to halve rough sleeping by 2022 and end it by 2027. This Strategy was later withdrawn and the [Ending rough sleeping for good](#) Strategy implemented in 2022 which continued the focus on prevention, intervention and recovery as well having a joined up approach to tackling rough sleeping

All of the above legislation underpins the way our homelessness service is shaped. Our assessment forms, staff training, content of Personal Housing Plans and procedures incorporate the ethos and direction from each of the legislation and policy guidance.

Other legislation that underpins our work is the Equality Act 2010. The Public Sector Equality Duty (Equality Act 2010) requires public bodies to have due regard of the need to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act.
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

When drafting and consulting on this Strategy we have been mindful of our duty at Runnymede to have due regard to advancing equality. We have also been mindful in our Action Plan to deliver this Strategy that we adhere to this responsibility, including:

- Removing or minimising disadvantages suffered by people due to their protected characteristics
- Taking steps to meet the needs of people from protected groups where these are different from the needs of other people
- Encouraging people from protected groups to participate in public life or in other activities where their participation is disproportionately low.

We are committed to providing the very best homelessness service at Runnymede in a respectful, transparent and mindful manner.

## **Our Homelessness review**

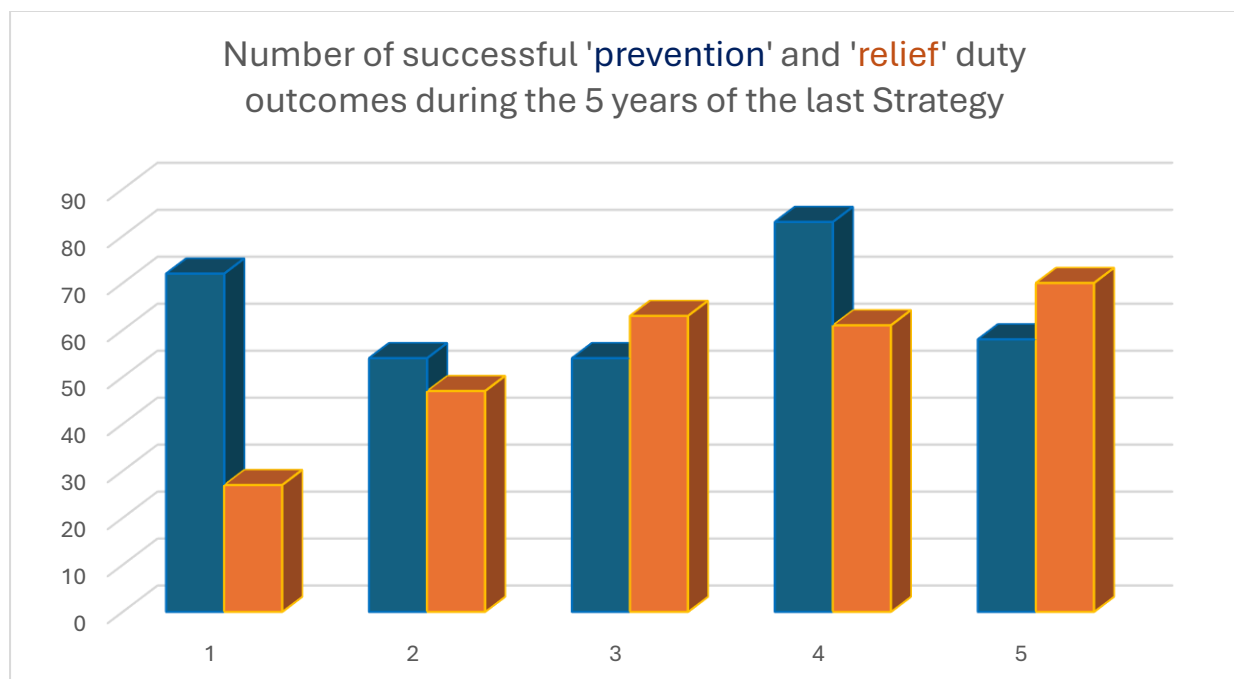
### **What does our data tell us?**

In order to develop this Strategy, we conducted a review into homelessness and rough sleeping in Runnymede. The triggers and causes for homelessness are often multiple and complex. In developing services which effectively tackle homelessness it is necessary to understand the current and future levels of homelessness and the interplay between all the factors that cause it. It is also important to reflect upon what activities are already being carried out and the resource required to achieve our longer term aims. This review has highlighted the gaps in service provision in Runnymede and has formed the basis for the objectives we will set out to achieve.

In carrying out the review of all levels of homelessness within Runnymede, we analysed a range of information including data extracted from our IT system which captured the numbers and trends regarding homeless approaches, rough sleeping figures, data from our private rented sector scheme, numbers and trends from the housing register, data given by Runnymede to central Government, national and local data relating to Runnymede.

Some of the key features of the Review are:

- There has been a significant rise in homeless applications since the commencement of the Homelessness Reduction Act. This is in line with national trends. There has been a 55% increase in the number of homelessness approaches between the beginning and end of the previous Strategy with 406 approaches in 2019/2020 and 739 in 2023/24.
- In terms of the ratio of total initial assessments per thousand households, Runnymede is the 179th highest out of 292 local authorities and the 2nd highest out of 6 similar local authorities
- Over the course of the last five years of the Strategy the trend has been towards more successful outcomes at 'relief duty' stage rather than prevention. This has partly been down to a general shift in people approaching at a 'relief duty' stage rather than at the earliest outset. We have detailed the plan we intend to take to identify people at risk of homelessness within this document.



- Runnymede has experienced a 10% increase in population since the last Census data, which is the second highest out of all other Surrey Boroughs. This further increases the strain on housing need.
- The cost of living crisis has had an effect on our ability to access the private rented sector market with fewer Landlords and agents willing to work with us to secure tenancies. At the time of writing this Strategy, there has already been signs of improved access to the private rented sector with the number of tenancies secured in this quarter already exceeding the total for 2023-2024.



- We have seen an increase in the number of owner occupiers and renters unable to afford their mortgage or rent in 2023-24, which is in keeping with national trends.
- Over the course of the last Strategy, we have been able to reduce the number of applications that are accepted as being owed a 'main housing duty'. This is an assessment of whether the household are considered to be eligible, homeless, in priority need, not intentionally homeless and if they have a local connection to Runnymede
- We have successfully developed our support service for single applicants by providing them with temporary accommodation in our shared house, which has given them a platform to provide wraparound support to address the root causes of their homelessness
- Our 'Housing Led' scheme, whereby rough sleepers are provided accommodation alongside an intensive support package by one of our partner agencies, has been a key success
- Despite the challenges in securing a final offer of settled accommodation, both the use of and duration of stay in temporary accommodation has been reduced over the course of the previous Strategy. Our measurement at the half way point of the Strategy shows that the average stay in temporary accommodation was 237 days, which was reduced to 180 days in the final year of the previous Strategy.
- The recent top three dominant reasons for loss of accommodation at both the Prevention and Relief stage are: end of an assured shorthold tenancy, family no longer willing to accommodate and domestic abuse
- The demand for social housing continues to outweigh supply. This is in keeping with national trends. The most significant bedroom need continues to be one bedroom properties, closely followed by two bedrooms.
- Whilst a higher percentage of our relief duty outcomes are still discharged in private sector tenancies compared to the national picture, there has been an increase in reliance on social housing to resolve homelessness at the 'relief duty' stage:

Percentage of households whose <u>relief</u> duty ended by type of accommodation secured - <b>Runnymede BC</b>							
Financial Year	Private Rented Sector	Social Rented Sector	Staying with family	Staying with friends	Owner-Occupation	Other	Not known
2019/2020	44%	41%	9%	0%	0%	6%	0%
2020/2021	62%	28%	6%	0%	0%	4%	0%
2021/2022	44%	39%	3%	3%	0%	2%	10%
2022/2023	37%	51%	4%	0%	1%	6%	0%
All years above	45%	41%	5%	1%	0%	4%	3%

- Whilst social housing provision is crucial to some households facing homelessness it is important to acknowledge that there is not enough social housing stock available to meet the needs of all those who seek assistance.

- We have successfully helped to re-house vulnerable families fleeing war torn regions such as Afghanistan through our in-house Private Rented Sector Lettings Service. All the refugee families who were supported by Runnymede were assisted into private rented sector accommodation which are still being sustained.
- The Housing Register has over 1,100 households registered. The majority of whom are single non-dependents living with family or friends
- We continue to develop and grow our working relationship with MARAC (Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference) and MAPPA (Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements), including improving data recording methods to comply with General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR). We have also developed good working links with North West Surrey Domestic Abuse forum and Citizens Advice
- We have successfully implemented numerous schemes such as bringing into use properties that we worked alongside one of our partner agency to resolve 12 households' ongoing homelessness. We also made use of Local Authority Housing Fund funding to secure 8 properties, all of which were used to resolve homelessness in the Borough
- The use of Bed and Breakfast emergency accommodation has increased towards the end of the last Strategy. This was primarily in part to implementing the Government's "Everyone In" Scheme, which at short notice placed a requirement on local authorities to accommodate all homeless households and more recently, the number of single approaching with complex needs who are deemed to be in priority need.

## Key challenges

In order to tackle homelessness and rough sleeping it is important to examine the challenges that lead to homelessness. Understanding the causes of homelessness has enabled us to put together an action plan to tackle those causes (see Appendix A). Some of the challenges include:



### Increased Cost of Living

The impact of Covid-19 and the war in Ukraine led to an unprecedented increase in the level of inflation, with the peak of 11% not being seen in the UK since the 1970s. This resulted in a 'Cost of Living crisis' which had an impact on almost all households in the UK. In particular, the cost of buying food, energy bills and fuel rose exponentially. This had an impact on household disposable income and resulted in more people experiencing economic hardship.

The impact of increasing interest rates resulted in mortgage payments rising steeply by several hundreds of pounds overnight. Many households were and continue to be under huge pressure to meet mortgage, rental, childcare and basic household bills.

What we have seen in Runnymede is that those who have previously been relatively economically well off have also experienced financial difficulties over the course of the last 18 months. Our work with our partners in the third sector has shown that the numbers accessing foodbanks has increased sharply, with some never having used the food bank ever before.

We have reacted to this by maximising the use of the Household Support Fund for households eligible to receive assistance with energy, food and water bills. The staff were also provided training to be adept at spotting where additional financial hardship is evident but not necessarily disclosed by those seeking homelessness assistance. For example, the appearance of a child's school uniform triggered a conversation between an Officer and the child's mother in a sensitive manner. The Officer ascertained the extent of the financial hardship that the applicant was facing in not being able to replace worn school uniform. The Officer arranged for vouchers to be delivered so that new uniform could be purchased. We will continue with the work that we have put in to maximise the financial support we can access for applicants, as well as work with our partners to ensure we are able to signpost to their expertise.



### **Private Rented sector**

Our data has shown that one of the main causes of homelessness in the Borough is the loss of privately rented accommodation. Many landlords require high initial upfront payments for rent in advance, deposit and fees but the largest barrier to accessing housing is when a landlord requires a guarantor. Most guarantors are expected to earn at least 30 times the monthly rent per year or be a home owner.

The cost of living crisis detailed above has been the main driver of people losing their home. The rise in rents against capped housing benefit levels means that securing private rental within Runnymede and across the South East is increasingly difficult for households on low incomes or benefits. Households that are benefit capped struggle to find anything within the borough that is affordable. Our landlords inform us that they are simply unable to afford their own mortgages and are therefore left with little choice other than to sell, thus shrinking the pool of available properties further. Although the team at Runnymede have worked hard to negotiate with Landlords and agents where possible, the financial pressures caused by the volatile economic climate has simply been too strong, leaving little room for persuasion.

Our data analysis shows that there has been a significant increase in the number of housing register applicants (386) living with friends or relatives compared to 209 in 2019. This is in line with the regional trend we have seen where households simply cannot afford to live in the private rented sector and therefore resort to living with friends and relatives in overcrowded conditions.

Runnymede has always had a strong relationship with Landlords through the success of the Council's in-house Lettings team – Magna Carta Lettings (MCL). Some landlords have worked with Runnymede for several years and continue to be happy to let their properties through our service. Most tenancies continue past the initial fixed term tenancy due to the satisfaction of the landlord and MCL incentives, including guaranteed rent. In addition to this, if tenancies end, most MCL landlords re-let their properties to us. For instance, one landlord has three properties with MCL and has so far had eight tenancies. We will continue to work very closely with our landlords and actively pursue other opportunities to secure private rented sector properties for homeless households.

Other work that MCL has been involved with is supporting three Afghanistan refugee family into tenancies over the past 3 years. Due to the large size of the families, they required 4 bedroom properties, however could not afford the high market rents for such properties due to being subject to the benefit cap and low LHA rents. We were able to work with MCL landlords to negotiate long term tenancies with a low rent, whilst paying an incentive to ensure the landlord was receiving the required amount over the term of the initial years of the tenancy.

The increase in the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) in April 2024 was welcomed by all. This restored the rates to the 30<sup>th</sup> percentile and whilst this means that still only 3 in 10 private homes are affordable, we have seen a stabilisation in the market. In particular, we have seen landlords willing to continue with our Lettings Service when they had previously given an indication that they would be forced to sell their property. We have also had greater success in sourcing new private rented sector properties since the announcement. We will continue to monitor the impact of the increase in the LHA, coupled with the decrease in inflation, during the course of this Strategy.

Although accessing and sustaining accommodation within the private rented sector is a challenge, in the absence of a sufficient supply of social housing, it is the main option we have in preventing or resolving a housing situation. We will continue to target tenancy sustainment to reduce the number of households becoming homeless as a result.

The Renters Reform Bill will also have an impact on the private rented sector. Amongst some of the proposals is to remove Section 21 notices, the so called “no fault eviction”. We will continue to closely monitor the progress of this Bill through Parliament and prepare for any proposed changes.



### **Single People with Complex Needs**

Single people are often most likely to be affected by affordability issues owing to changes in welfare benefits, the cost of living rises and the employment market reducing the prospect of suitable long-term employment.

The second most common cause of homelessness in Runnymede is family or friends no longer willing to accommodate. This disproportionately affects single people who are often left with little support or available accommodation following the rapid escalation of family or relationship issues. Runnymede’s Housing team has vast experience in negotiating with excluders to either revoke any notices or to negotiate an extended stay whilst alternative accommodation options are explored. However, most of our single applicants are under the age of 35 which means, unless they fall under an exemption, will be subject to the Local Housing Allowance at the shared room rate. The high cost of private rental properties in the Borough mean that single people will often be ‘priced out’ of the area and will need to resort to looking in and around the Borough to secure alternative accommodation.

We have experienced that during the course of the last Strategy increasing numbers of the single people seeking our assistance have complex needs. These range from mental health illness, physical health issues, disability, domestic abuse or are young people leaving care and ex-offenders. Many young people who experience homelessness will be in particular need of support to develop skills to manage their affairs and prepare to take on and sustain a tenancy or operate a household budget. Those estranged from their family, particularly care leavers, may lack the advice and support normally available to young people.

To assist this group of applicants, we work closely with our strategic supported housing partners who offer high-quality housing, support and homecare to enhance the lives of their residents. However, in the last financial year, we saw a reduction in available places owing to move on delays from supported accommodation or the individual’s needs were deemed to be too high. Nevertheless, we continue to strive to strengthen our working relationships with our supported housing partners further and utilise our Allocations Scheme to support those

currently in supported housing and who are ready to move on to more permanent accommodation.

We have successfully utilised our two shared houses for single individuals which provide them with a safe platform in which to take stock and build other elements of their life that are crucial to the overall path away from homelessness. In particular, the individuals work closely with our staff to seek employment. This has helped us to avoid expensive, out of borough placements in Bed and Breakfasts.

We also attend Surrey County Council's Surrey Adults Matter meetings. These assist with having a multiagency approach to individuals with severe and multiple complex needs.

Whilst we are fully aware of the ongoing challenge of securing suitable long term alternative accommodation, we are strongly focused in our determination to do all we can to assist single people. To achieve this, some of the actions we are taking and will continue to take are:

- Continue with home visits and robust negotiation with parents and family where there is a risk of homelessness
- Strengthen our links with private and social landlords where a notice to end the tenancy has been issued by holding in person and virtual landlord forums
- Early intervention alongside Probation Officers to help people leaving institutions (e.g. prison, care)
- Strengthen our links with our Environmental Services to identify single applicants residing in unfit properties.
- Continue to maximise the reach of our Support team to provide tenancy sustainment packages once someone has moved into newly identified PRS accommodation
- Continue to maximise the use of funding streams such as Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) to pay rent in advance or rent deposits or pay off some arrears so the person can remain in their accommodation

This will maximise our chances of repeat successes as the one below:

A single applicant approached for housing assistance, who has a history of repeat homelessness. Within less than 24 hours, they were sourced private rented sector accommodation in a neighbouring borough within the local housing allowance. The service worked in a person-centred approach and holistic manner, ensuring that all agencies the individual was working with were kept up to date. We provided financial assistance in the form of rent in advance and deposit to secure the tenancy. Following this, the individual was referred to the tenancy sustainment team to ensure that we supported the individual as much as possible to sustain their tenancy.



### **Domestic abuse**

It is well known that domestic abuse (DA) is damaging to an individual's life. The domestic abuse charity, Refuge, states that *'Women who experience domestic abuse are twice as likely to experience depression, and 40% of homeless women state domestic abuse as a contributory factor to their homelessness'*. At Runnymede we are keen to work closely

with our DA partners to ensure that we provide the very best, tailored and trauma informed approach to assisting those who approach us as homeless as a result of domestic abuse.

To that end, we have used the introduction of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 as an opportunity to re-evaluate the way our service is equipped to deal with survivors. This includes:

- Strengthening the work with our Sanctuary Schemes and refuges
- Ensuring all staff have an extensive training and understand the definition of what 'Safe Accommodation' means in the context of the Act
- Introduction of a new needs assessment as per the legislation
- Forging strong links with Surrey County Council's Domestic Abuse Executive group so that we are at the forefront of the county-wide approach to resolving the homelessness of DA survivors
- Reviewing our Allocations Scheme to ensure that it appropriately reflects the legislative requirements for those fleeing social housing tenancies.

We are confident that over the course of this Strategy we will be able to secure outcomes for both male and females survivors such as the ones described below:

A social tenant with a secure tenancy approached RBC fleeing high level domestic abuse. Within 6 weeks she was offered a social rented tenancy in RBC stock and accepted the offer. She expressed her gratitude and was very happy with the outcome for her and her children.

A male was homeless after fleeing his privately rented home as his partner had been abusive. He was provided with interim accommodation and refuges were explored but before a male refuge could be identified, his Housing Officer found a privately rented property within the Borough of his preference. In addition to his housing need, his mental health was impacted and he was supported by the housing team to engage with mental health services. A private rented sector accommodation was identified and he was provided with a deposit and rent in advance to secure that property. He is very happy with his new home and continues to receive tenancy sustainment support whilst he settles in.



### **Lack of sufficient social housing supply to meet demand**

The increased costs with sustaining a private rented sector tenancy and the general cost of living means that the demand for social housing is high. Declining social housing supply has meant that there is a disparity between supply and demand. Our data analysis shows that there has been a reduction in the total number of lettings over the course of the last Strategy. For example, the number of lets was down 30% from the previous year in the last year of the Strategy. Nevertheless, over the course of the last Strategy we have been able to:

- Offer social housing to homeless households where possible and where this makes best use of our stock
- Work with our Registered Providers to push for rents to be set at social rates rather than 'affordable rates'
- Explore every opportunity for existing tenants to remain in their property by undertaking property adaptations where this is cost effective to do so
- Deliver a number of new units including a 34 unit affordable housing scheme, a 9 unit scheme with our local hospital and a further 12 units to prevent homelessness

Whilst it is unlikely for the disparity between supply and demand to be reduced significantly in the near future, we will take steps to ensure that we explore all options including strengthening our relationship with our Registered Provers to maximise lettings opportunities. We will also explore new opportunities for further housing development, where possible.

## **Rough Sleeping**

It is widely accepted that rough sleeping is a damaging and isolating experience. People who sleep rough are more likely to be victims of crime and violence. The longer a person remains on the streets, or actively engages in street life culture, the more likely it will have significant implications on their physical and mental health. At Runnymede, we take a wide approach to rough sleeping and extend the support we offer to those who we consider as being 'hidden rough sleeping', such as sofa surfers.

We have been able to build an intensive support programme for those we verify as rough sleeper by relying on rapid intervention at the earliest opportunity. We broadly follow the 2022 Government's approach to rough sleeping as set out in their 'Ending Rough Sleeping For Good' Strategy:

- Prevention (working with individuals to maximise income and address their additional needs prior to facing rough sleeping)
- Intervention (providing intensive assistance to support individuals off the street) and
- Recovery (providing bespoke pathways and wraparound support through our partners to facilitate accommodation through either supported housing, private rented sector or social housing)

Our No Second Night Out Policy emphasises our resolve in tackling any reports of rough sleeping as well as the causes of rough sleeping as swiftly as possible. Since the inception of the Policy we have responded to all reports of rough sleeping with the target timeframe set by the Policy. We aim to make suitable offers of accommodation. Unfortunately, sometimes the individuals refuse the offer of accommodation or to engage with the process, despite our repeated efforts to assist.

We successfully utilised the funding given by Government to appoint a Housing Navigator who established clear and up to date pathway plans for those particularly at risk of rough sleeping such as a route out of prison or hospital into accommodation rather than to the streets.

Runnymede's successful RSAP (Rough Sleeper Accommodation Programme) bid through DLUHC (Department for Levelling Up Housing and Communities) and Homes England enabled us to purchase three properties on the private market. These three properties have provided vital accommodation for individuals with complex and multiple needs as part of our 'Housing Led' approach. We have enlisted the support of one of our key supported housing providers to give wrap around intensive support to these individuals to enable them to manage their tenancy and start to overcome the difficulties in their lives.

Over the course of this Strategy, we will strengthen our partnership work with various agencies as we know that housing alone is not a sustainable route to a life away from rough sleeping. It is imperative that we work with our partners to ensure that there is clear, directed support for an individual to address all issues putting them at risk of rough sleeping such as: health, education, employment, debt advice. We will do this by regularly liaising with key partners such as: the Probation Service, NHS service providers such as local hospitals and

GP surgeries, the faith sector, employment agencies such as Job Centre Plus, supported housing providers, amongst many others.

We are confident that our approach will lead to further successes such as the ones below:

We found 'Peter' who was rough sleeping in building doorways following a relationship breakdown. He was subsequently forced to leave the property and was unaware, and in his words, ashamed, to approach any service. 'Peter' had no tenancy experience, having lived in a relationship where his ex-partner had handled all of such affairs.

Once we swiftly verified his rough sleeping, he was given suitable temporary accommodation to give him a stable base to re-build his life. Pathways appropriate for his needs and requirements were quickly identified such as health, finance, tenancy education and sustainment. Following our rapid intervention, his financial situation was consolidated and increased. We worked closely with our partners to arrange support for him to secure benefits in his own name.

Our Housing Navigator provided regular support to 'Peter' to build his confidence and knowledge about how to manage a tenancy, seek medical advice, prepare and cook meals. 'Peter' was assisted into supported accommodation which has given him the platform to learn the skills to live independently in a tenancy of his own. 'Peter' is flourishing in the placement and is looking forward to securing move on accommodation into independent living.

*"thankyou  
soooooooooo  
very very much"  
for finding &  
putting me  
forward for such  
a perfect flat for  
my needs & I'm  
very happy  
here.*

## Our priorities

Over the course of this Strategy, we will focus on the following priorities to tackle homelessness and rough sleeping:



**Objective 1**  
**To focus on**  
**early**  
**intervention**  
**and prevention**

Our experience at Runnymede has shown that early intervention and targeted prevention work is a key pillar in our response to homelessness and rough sleeping. Not only does it prevent homelessness but also reduces its direct and indirect impact. It is well known that the best way to tackle homelessness is to prevent it from happening in the first place. The

later a household comes to the attention of a statutory homeless service, the fewer opportunities remain to intervene meaningfully. It also leads to a response that is reactive, unplanned and limited in the available options where there is little time left before actual homelessness.

Our ethos is based on doing our utmost to help people to remain in their homes via support, intervention and advocacy. We know that it is essential that we identify people at risk of crisis at an earlier stage in their journey towards homelessness and work with them to create a plan that enables them to resolve their situation. We acknowledge that too often, people approach our service when there is little room for manoeuvre in negotiating with the excluder or being



able to secure alternative accommodation before the person is required to leave. The actions we will take in this Strategy will be targeted to maximise the opportunity for households to approach our service or be identified and referred into the service at the earliest opportunity.

*We will:*

Some of the key tasks we aim to achieve to meet this objective include:

- Work closely with those approaching our service to identify other 'touch points' they have approached prior to coming to our service. This will help us to map where individuals are approaching first to relay their housing, financial, relationship issues so that we can build links with those organisations and be informed of households at risk of homelessness at an earlier stage
- Continue to invest in staff training to be adept at identifying households at risk, negotiating with excluders and continue to be swift and effective in our response to 'duty to refer' notifications
- Improve awareness and public knowledge more generally about local housing shortages and the factors that lead to homelessness so that people are able to be proactive in resolving their housing difficulty as well as be aware of how to approach our service.
- Have a stronger community presence by working with our Community Services team to widen our reach and awareness of the support we can offer
- Work with partner agencies to ensure there is a high level of awareness of the available housing options and appropriate use of the Duty to Refer pathway to ensure early referrals into the service
- Strengthen our working relationship with local landlords and lettings agents to identify tenancies at risk at the earliest outset
- Improving methods for social landlords, social services, refuges, support services to notify us of any housing related difficulties so that we can work to resolve them before the person is asked to leave the home
- Strengthen our existing links with social services so that engagement with our service occurs at an early stage and joint working paths established



## Objective 2

### Provide holistic support to those experiencing rough sleeping and those with complex needs

Rough sleeping is one of the most harmful and dangerous form of homelessness. Whilst any duration of rough sleeping is undesirable, the effects of long term rough sleeping in particular can be difficult to address. This is because the individual is likely to feel disenfranchised, unmotivated and this is likely to be against the backdrop of trauma, mental health issues or substance misuse.

We recognise that it is not always as simple as placing an individual found rough sleeping into accommodation. The building blocks to a safe and sustained pathway away from the streets is often more complex than this. This is why our approach to rough sleeping is to take a person centred approach which involves the individual in the decision making process and identifies their strengths and aspirations. For example, where an individual is not willing to move off the street on our first engagement, we will continue to work with the individual and involve our partner agencies to encourage them to move from the street into interim accommodation whilst a longer term solution is found. We then work with our partners who are experts in dealing with those with complex needs to ensure that the recovery from the street for that individual is in sharp focus. For example, enlisting the help of other agencies such as iAccess, the substance misuse team at Adult Social Care and Surrey Adult Matters, to name but a few.

We will:

- Strengthen our links with community, charity and faith sector organisations to ensure that our 'intel' on rough sleeping within the Borough is up to date
- Continue to work in partnership with our providers of supported housing
- Maximise appropriate move on options by strengthening our work with local landlords
- Improve our links with institutions such as hospitals and prison to identify those at risk of leaving with no fixed abode
- Re-refresh and develop our existing pathways to ensure that our intervention still meets the objectives of our 'Rough Sleeping No Second Night Out' policy.
- Continue to identify new funding streams to build on all our existing work
- Work with our providers and undertake joint working with Surrey County Council to increase our access to the level of accommodation available to people with complex needs
- Develop our links with our local businesses further to build on our current package of welfare support
- Review our shared houses provision to ensure that it is still at the forefront of our approach to tackling rough sleeping



### Objective 3 Maximise 'move on' options

As outlined earlier in the Strategy, identifying suitable 'move on' accommodation from either the household's current property where it is no longer an option for them to remain or from actual homelessness, is crucial to securing a sustained path away from homelessness and rough sleeping.

The challenges set out above make the quick identification of move on options within the Borough more difficult to

obtain. Nevertheless, the success we have had through our Magna Carta Lettings service since the increase in the Local Housing Allowance in April 2024 with 29 properties secured for homeless households gives us strong conviction that we will be able to meet the targets we have set for this Objective.

#### *We will*

- We will explore new opportunities to work with Lettings agents and landlords in and around the vicinity of the Borough as well as continue with the landlord forum to build stronger relationships
- Continue to make the best use of existing stock by considering mutual exchanges, reciprocal moves, downsizing incentives and support for those in Independent Retirement Living (IRL)
- Promote Homefinder UK, HomeSwapper and other national mobility schemes to enable move on between social housing tenants
- Promote Reciprocal schemes with other social landlords for people fleeing their social tenancies due to violence or risk
- We will review our nominations agreements with Registered Providers to ensure we receive our nomination agreement quotas
- Seek to increase our options within the private rented sector, including shared properties for single people
- Review the current incentive we offer and making improvements if financially viable
- Building our tenancy support package for those who we help secure move on accommodation to maximise their chances of long term sustainment of that tenancy
- Support the Private Sector Housing team to improve the condition of the private rented sector so that all move on options are safe



#### Objective 4

### Work collectively with our partners to secure positive and sustained outcomes

We are of the firm view that we cannot tackle all forms of homelessness and the causes of homelessness alone. Some households will require a range of support services, not just the provision of accommodation in order to resolve their homelessness. This could be housing related support to enable them to sustain a tenancy or personal support to manage issues caused by relationship breakdown, domestic abuse, mental health problems,

drug and alcohol addiction, poverty, debt or unemployment. We recognise that a multi-agency approach that builds on the expertise and knowledge of each partner to build a support network around the household is crucial.

We are proud of the fact that we work closely with our partners to achieve tangible, positive outcomes for our households. However, we recognise that there is more work to be done and we are committed to growing our strong links with partner services to enable us to provide a holistic service to our service users.

We will:

- Improve our links with areas where there is more work to be done, such as with our health, substance misuse, wellbeing, domestic abuse and faith partners so that we can provide a more joined up, holistic approach
- Launch a new Homelessness Intervention Forum to provide a platform for our key partners to discuss issues and collectively provide impactful assistance for homeless households
- Provide tailored advice in our Personal Housing Plans (PHPs) that gives more holistic advice such as drug and alcohol recovery advice, smoking cessation advice, advice of how to register with a GP and a dentist and promote access to training, employment, volunteering and education
- Continue to work with foodbanks to ensure vulnerable people are able to eat but also to provide further support to enable them to become independent of the foodbanks
- Undertake training sessions for our partners so that there is mutual understanding of what is required for efficient and effective referrals so that we can provide support to homeless households quickly
- Ensure we have more involvement in the County-wide work being undertaken by Surrey County Council in respect of domestic abuse, mental health and substance misuse

## Delivering the Strategy

Runnymede has a statutory duty to prevent homelessness and as such this Strategy will be directly delivered within the Council's Housing Solutions team. We will continue to utilise

funding streams from central Government such as the full allocation of our Homelessness Prevention Grant 2024, Rough Sleeping Initiative Grant funding for as long as they are available. We will actively pursue new funding schemes in order further enhance our current work or develop new initiatives during the course of this Strategy.

Whilst overall responsibility of the delivery lies within the Housing Solutions team, we are clear that we will need to work collectively with our internal and external partners in order to deliver the set targets. Partnership working strongly underpins this document and the success of this Strategy cannot be achieved alone. The partnership work we have identified between Runnymede and local agencies, community links, the voluntary sector as well as supported accommodation providers will enhance our response to homelessness and rough sleeping.

In order to ensure that we deliver against this strategy we will:

- Develop an Action Plan and update this as needed to account for changes in funding or other major socio-economic factors over the next three years
- Build on positive partnership work mainly through our Homelessness Intervention Forum and Landlord forums so that we can a) listen to and consult with our partners b) develop early intervention workstreams and c) provide up to date housing training to ensure appropriate and swift referrals into the service
- Continue to listen to the households approaching our service to ensure that the delivery of our Strategy is still relevant, impactful and adept at meeting the needs of those facing homelessness.
- Provide staff training and regular 'check-ins' to ensure there is a good understanding of the Strategy amongst the staff who are tasked with the collective delivery

## **Monitoring**

The Strategy will be reviewed regularly to ensure it is up to date. Our Action Plan will be a live document for amendments to be made where necessary. This will ensure that we remain at the forefront of tackling homelessness and rough sleeping. The Action Plan sets out what tasks we have set to meet each of our strategic Objectives, identify who will take the lead role for each task and how success will be measured.

To ensure we are meeting the objectives in this plan, the Housing Solutions team will collect monthly performance indicators. This data will feed into the Strategy document which will be reviewed at least annually to monitor implementation.

Our regular meetings with our partners will enable us to obtain feedback to monitor the progress of each task as well as highlight any changes needed.

## **Consultation**

We thank the organisations and members of the public who have worked with us and contributed to the development of this strategy. The input from groups such as Registered Providers of Social Housing, Landlords, members of the public, employees, current homeless and housing register applicants, third sector and community based organisations, amongst others, has been vital to enable us to shape our response to tackling homelessness and rough sleeping.

## **Appendix A - Action plan**

**For all information contained within this document contact:**

Runnymede Borough Council  
The Civic Centre  
Station Road  
Addlestone  
Surrey KT15 2AH

Tel 01932 838383

Further copies of this publication can be obtained from  
the above address, or

email: [housingsolutions@runnymede.gov.uk](mailto:housingsolutions@runnymede.gov.uk)

[Runnymede Borough Council LinkedIn](#)

[www.runnymede.gov.uk](http://www.runnymede.gov.uk)

September 2024