

SLOUGH BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Cabinet **DATE:** 22nd September 2009

CONTACT OFFICER: Anne Bateman Housing Needs Manager
(For all enquiries) (01753) 875408

WARD(S): All

PORTFOLIO: Neighbourhoods and Renewal – Councillor Swindlehurst

PART I **NON-KEY DECISION**

HOUSING NEEDS ACTIVITY 2008- 2009

1. Purpose of Report

To inform members of the level of supply and demand for housing and of the strategies, services and practices in place to tackle housing need and homelessness. To seek approval for the annual lettings plan and minor policy changes effecting the supply of housing

2. Recommendations

The Cabinet is requested to resolve:

- (a) That the report be noted
- (b) That the Homelessness Strategy for Slough be approved
- (c) That the lettings plan for 2009 /10 be approved
- (d) That the proposed changes to the tenants' incentive scheme be approved
- (e) That the policy amendment to include the process for re housing secure tenancies on sites subject to re development be approved.

3 Community Strategy Priorities

Tackling homelessness is at the heart of the governments Sustainable Communities strategy.

This strategy meets many of the aims of Slough's Sustainable Community Strategy. Decent, settled housing can add years, create a sense of well being and provide the basis from which people can thrive

4 **Other Implications**

(a) Financial

Investing to reduce homelessness can result in savings on temporary accommodation provision

(b) Risk Management

Recommendation	Risk/Threat/Opportunity	Mitigation(s)
Adoption of the homelessness strategy	<p>There is a Legal requirement for all Local Authorities to have a homelessness strategy.</p> <p>Such a strategy provides an opportunity to continue to tackle homelessness and the circumstances that cause it.</p> <p>The strategy presents an opportunity for multi disciplinary working to benefit the community and individuals.</p> <p>The economic recession presents a real threat that could increase homelessness as a result of unemployment and debt .</p>	<p>There is a high level strategic economic task force which meets each month to review data</p>
Lettings Plan	<p>Opportunity to prevent homelessness and tackle housing need by a planned approach to quota's to each band.</p>	
Tenants Incentive Scheme	<p>By changing the scheme to reduce cost but improve support we may achieve more family homes for re letting</p>	

(c) Human Rights Act and Other Legal Implications

Compliance with the Councils statutory obligations underpins this report.

(d) Equalities Impact Assessment

An initial screening has been undertaken of the homelessness strategy and there is no negative impact on any sector of the community

5. **Supporting Information**

5.1 Tackling Homelessness

Housing and tackling homelessness is at the heart of the governments strategy 'Sustainable Communities; settled homes changing lives'

5.2 The housing needs section has received in the region of £2,000,000 of revenue funding from the Government to support the councils homelessness prevention work since 1998. We currently receive £140,000 a year .The funding ends in March 2011.This funding has been used to employ additional posts which offer prevention or support role to households who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. In addition, we have developed a range of options which reduce the potential of homelessness and have received additional grants this year of £68,000 to tackle the effects of the recession. £30,000 of this is shared with Reading Borough Council.

5.3 Although the number of homeless approaches has increased the level of acceptances has remained fairly constant as a result of successfully applying the options approach. We have yet to experience any significant recession led increase in homelessness, although, because of the lender forbearance schemes and other government involvement currently operating, the impact on homelessness may be delayed until the recession begins to recede.

5.4 Temporary Accommodation

As a result of these types of intervention homelessness in Slough remains low. The government set a target for local authorities to reduce the number of households living in temporary accommodation in December 2004 by 50% by 2010. In December 2004 287 households were living in temporary accommodation in Slough and in June 2009 111 households were in temporary accommodation. We have already met our target and the reduction in demand for temporary accommodation has led to a review of supply.

5.3.1 As a result we are closing Rochfords shared facility hostel. The site is not suitable for re development owing to the presence of high voltage overhead cables and we are therefore seeking expressions of interest from other organisations who may have a strategically beneficial use for it following a refurbishment. We are re-developing the site of the Laurels hostel, which also offered temporary, shared facility bed-sits to provide 18 new general needs family sized homes.

5.3.2 With regard to our leased stock we are negotiating with our RSL providers of temporary accommodation to change the property use to permanent accommodation and provide Slough Borough Council with 100% nominations.

This will reduce our costs and increase the supply of much needed permanent homes in the Borough.

Table 1
Homelessness trends

Homeless decisions	2002/3	2003/4	2004/5	2005/6	2006/7	2007/8	2008/9
Accepted	230	183	130	54	78	72	65
Intentional	66	82	34	36	25	39	46
No priority need	40	61	28	9	34	16	19
Not homeless	81	71	56	48	30	24	34
Not eligible	6	15	8	2	9	4	4
Total Approaches	426	412	256	149	176	155	168

5.6 The Homelessness Strategy 2008 - 2011

The Homelessness Act 2002 required all local housing authorities to develop a strategy for tackling homelessness. Since the first strategy in 2003 rough sleeping levels have remained low, homelessness has reduced, we have met and exceeded our temporary accommodation target. Slough's homelessness forum was re launched last year following a workshop event to look at homelessness issues in the Borough. The forum has continued to meet and has produced the third corporate Homelessness Strategy for Slough covering the period from 2008 to 2011. The draft strategy is found at Appendix 1

5.7 There are three strategic priorities; Prevention, Support and Supply. In order to deliver these priorities effectively there needs to be a corporate commitment and progress will be monitored through the Neighbourhood and Renewal Scrutiny Panel.

5.8 To coincide with the drafting of this strategy the audit commission introduced a revised Key Line of Enquiry (KLOE) from 2008 covering Homelessness and Housing Advice services and applications_which it uses in conducting inspections of the service. The KLOE measures:

- How effectively does the Homelessness Strategy set out plans for the prevention of homelessness and for ensuring that sufficient accommodation and support will be available for all people who become homeless or who are at risk of becoming so? How effectively does the strategy set out plans for access to appropriate move on accommodation for those that no longer require residential support?
- Has the housing authority developed effective action plans to help ensure the objectives set out in the Homelessness Strategy are achieved?

- How efficient, effective and customer focused is the homelessness service and are homelessness applications administered in line with the relevant legislation; Codes of Guidance on Homelessness and Allocations; Priority Needs Orders; and good practice?
- 5.9 The Slough Homelessness Strategy and its implementation plan will contribute to ensure that the service is achieving a high level of performance in meeting these standards.
- 5.10 Housing Advice & Resettlement
This service underpins the support element of the homelessness strategy and contributes to the prevention work of the section. The advisors saw over 1000 customers in the year and have successfully prevented homelessness or supported people in pursuing their rights to retain their homes for 50% of their cases. As a result only a very few homeless households have had to be referred for more detailed assessment and temporary accommodation.
- 5.11 The resettlement and tenancy support service is unique in that it offers support to families and some young people who have no parental guidance and are homeless. The team are funded through the Supporting People initiative and provide practical assistance to families and young people coping with homelessness and temporary accommodation, setting up their new homes and budgeting in order to avoid debt and potential homelessness. No clients of this service have ever become homeless and nearly 90% of families have achieved some or all of the Supporting People positive outcomes, including increasing their income.
- 5.12 There is a dedicated Young People's worker in this team funded through the CLG grant until 2011, providing a service directly to 16 to 21 year olds who present with a housing issue, mainly homeless. This worker also provides information and support to agencies such as YOT, Connexions and the Pathways service on housing matters. Over 380 young people accessed this service between 2008/9. No homeless children have been placed in bed and breakfast by housing.
- 5.13 A recent House of Lords ruling R.(G) vs Southwark LB in 2009 has indicated that more homeless children are owed more duties by social services under the Children Acts than has previously been the case. We will be working closely with the children's services to agree an appropriate process to incorporate this ruling and ensure homeless children are safe.
- 5.14 The Housing Register and Lettings: Supply and Demand
The housing register and allocations policy was reviewed in June 2008 and the changes adopted by cabinet. There are 4 bands, A, B, C & D. Customers circumstances are assessed according to the information they provide in the application form and the application is then allocated into the appropriate band.
- 5.15 Between April 2008 and March 2009 the demand on the housing register has increased by over 800 applications. Between April and September 2009 it has

increased by another 700 to just over 5,700. This reflects an overall increase since March 2007 of 25%. This does not mean the level of need has increased in the Borough but probably indicates more people have applied as a result of the recession removing other options for them, than would otherwise apply.

5.16 We made 657 social housing lettings in the year, of which at least 650 went to local people. We completed 195 new build homes with RSL partners which including new homes built on disused and run down garage sites. Both of the new extra care homes for older people also came on line providing 126 units. All prospective tenants for social housing are visited and lettings officers undertake a rigorous assessment to ensure that they have provided correct information are eligible for an offer and are suitable to be a tenant.

5.17 In 2008/9 183 lets were made to private sector properties through the deposit guarantee scheme. This scheme, of all the options we offer has the most significant impact on reducing homelessness and the use of temporary accommodation

Table 2
Lettings Plan 2009/10

SIZE	BAND				total
	A	B	C	D	
Older peoples lets					
Extra care	7	7	3		17
1 bed 50+	5	16	13	0	34
1 bed 60+	5	45	25	0	75
General needs lets					
Studio /1 bed	38	90	42	0	170
2	20	110	85	0	215
3	10	65	40	0	115
4	6	8	4	0	18
5	1	4	1	0	6
TOTAL	92	345	213	0	650

5.18 Table 2 is the proposed lettings plan for 2009 -10 .It takes account of previous vacancy trends, new build completions expected in the year and an element of vacancies leading to re-lets of general needs from transfers into the remaining extra care schemes. New build completions for rent include 158 family sized general needs units and 38 general needs units for shared ownership.

5.19 Overcrowding and Under occupation

A successful bid to the communities and local government department has led to an initial grant of £50,000 to develop a strategy to tackle severe overcrowding, defined as lacking two rooms by the Bedroom Standard We have identified 34 social housing tenants who are severely overcrowded.

5.20 The strategy will provide the following options to existing overcrowded households

- A priority offer of rehousing from Band A within 6 -12 months but no choice on location or landlord.
- A move to larger but temporary accommodation until larger permanent property available. The application will be in band B and dealt with as homeless with three offers.
- A move into appropriately sized private sector accommodation. Application placed in band C and unlimited offers
- Options for adult members of overcrowded households for separate housing

5.21 The current policy seeks to prevent future overcrowding by offering homes to ensure children of any age of opposite sex have a room each. We are also planning to promote the benefits of becoming a Housing Association tenant as this will increase choice and they are the sole providers of the new larger housing supply

Tenants Incentive Scheme

5.22 We regained 24 family sized homes from tenants under occupying their homes. Additionally a further thirty five tenants are under occupying their social housing tenancy and have requested moves to smaller homes. We believe there are more social housing tenants who could be attracted to returning their homes if there was a scheme which suited their needs.

5.23 We are therefore proposing to develop an incentive scheme which has three options and is restricted to households requiring one bedroom.

1. A cash incentive of £1000 per room vacated
2. Removal service including packing and un packing + £500 per room vacated
3. A full service including support through out, packing and un packing and the property fully fitted with carpets in living room and bedroom ,curtains, home safety equipment ,minor adaptations and smoke detectors + personal assistance, follow up visits and £250 per room returned.

5.24 To improve mobility through our stock and out of Borough tenancies we have joined Home Swapper a national scheme which helps tenants find property matches to exchange with.

5.25 Redevelopment Policy

On occasions, in order to make best use of land to provide homes currently in demand we may have to redevelop sites e.g. Wentworth Avenue. The Housing

Act 1985 sets the criteria for Local Housing Authorities to gain possession to re develop land for homes. Although the Housing Register and Lettings policy does state that tenants whose homes are subject to redevelopment have a choice of their future home and will receive an urgent offer of housing it does not offer any further guidelines.

- 5.26 It is proposed that the Housing Register policy should be amended to include:
- Secure tenants whose homes are on a re development site will be consulted and will be offered up to 3 reasonable properties that meet the needs of their household and which are within the councils remit to provide.
 - In addition Home Loss grant will be paid to the tenant once they have given vacant possession and moved to their new home. Every effort will be made to ensure that the offers are acceptable however if three reasonable offers are refused the council will proceed to court for possession .On granting of possession a further offer will be made of any suitable available property at the time. Home Loss grant will still be paid.

5.27 Social housing Lettings Forum

This forum was launched in 2008. and is attended by People 1st and the housing associations who have a portfolio in the Borough. The terms of reference are:

- Share good practice and updates on legislative policy.
- To work together to improve tenancy sustainment and reduce homelessness,
- Develop operational sub groups to draft protocols on specific themes of interest or concern
- To work to improve performance around voids, nominations and selection of suitable tenants.
- To exchange information on performance statistics and trouble shoot common and recurring problems.
- To work with SBC to develop an excellent and appropriate advert & bid system by 2010.
- To participate in and agree a work programme to achieve the above

5.28 The forum aims are to:

- Provide a consistent and excellent service to all customers
- Increase the demand for RSL properties amongst the councils applicants
- Contribute to reducing homelessness and debt in the Borough
- Develop a portfolio of protocols to address shared issues for the benefit of Sloughs council nominees, existing tenants and each other.

- 5.29 We have already implemented a protocol for selecting suitable tenants and have a draft pre eviction protocol aimed at reducing evictions by re assessment of support needs. This group will also work with the council to implement and choice based lettings scheme by December 2010.

6. **Conclusion**

The Housing Needs section is successfully managing increased housing demand whilst keeping homelessness and the use of temporary accommodation stable and relatively low.

This is achieved as a result of

1. An effective Homelessness Strategy which seeks to spread the issue of homelessness across the corporate agenda – homelessness is not solely a housing issue.
2. A service structure which has prevention and support at its core and is able to offer choices which enables customers to remedy their housing issues.
3. Effective joint working across the teams and with other agencies and partners to achieve common goals which focus on the customers needs

7. **Back ground papers**

1. The Housing Acts 1985, 1996
2. Homelessness Act 2002
3. 'Sustainable Communities; settled homes changing lives' Communities and Local Government.
4. Audit Commission: Key Line of Enquiry Homelessness and Housing Advice

8. **Appendices**

Appendix A The Homelessness Strategy for Slough 2008 -2011 and Implementation Plan.

Appendix B Housing Demand. Comparison between March 2008 and March 2009

Appendix C Housing demand by ethnicity of household

Appendix Di Lettings made by bed size to each band

Appendix Dii Where vacancies occurred