

Homelessness Strategy 2011-2014



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Foreword

The Rochford District Council's Homelessness Strategy 2011 - 2014 identifies the actions required by the Council over the next three years to tackle homelessness in the District.

The strategy has been developed at a challenging, time both locally and nationally. The economic downturn has increased the financial pressures on households and the Council. As a result, the Homelessness and Housing Advice Team will need to use its resources more intelligently to meet any increase in enquiries or applications.

Following the Large Scale Voluntary Transfer in September 2007, all social rented homes are now owned by Registered Social Landlords, with the Council's housing stock now transferred to Rochford Housing Association.

The Homelessness and Housing Advice Team will work closely with all its local partners to minimise the use of temporary accommodation and work proactively to help homeless people.

Councillor Mr Malcolm Maddocks
Portfolio Holder: Council Tax Collections, Benefits and Strategic Housing.

1 Introduction

1.1 The Homelessness Act 2002

The Government introduced an initiative in the Homelessness Act 2002 requiring all Local Authorities to review the levels of homelessness in their area and produce a strategy to tackle identified problems. Following the Act's introduction, Rochford District Council published its first Homelessness Strategy in 2003.

This new strategy replaces the previous document and defines the strategic approach to homelessness in the District for the next three years.

1.2 National Context

The number of homeless households accepted by Local Authorities has steadily reduced since its peak in 2003/04 (when 135,430 households were accepted). In 2008/09, a duty was owed to 53,430 households, the lowest recorded figure since (at least) 1990.

The Sustainable Communities: Settled Homes; Changing lives (March 2005) Strategy outlined the Government's approach for reducing the number of people living in temporary accommodation. Since then, the number of people living in temporary accommodation has fallen from 101,070 in 2005 to 64,000 people by the end of June 2009.

In 2001, 681 people were estimated to be sleeping rough in England (on any single night). By 2009, this figure had reduced to 464¹. The overall trend has seen a steady decline in numbers following the introduction of the Rough Sleepers Count. This demonstrates continued improvement in tackling homelessness in England.

In December 2007, the Government announced it would provide £150 million (over three years) to tackle homelessness in England. A further £20 million was allocated in 2009/10 to help families at risk of homelessness through either repossession or eviction from their home.

1.3 Sub-regional Working

Many homeless issues cross Local Authority boundaries. Rochford District Council is a member of the Thames Gateway South Essex (TGSE) sub-region and as such it works with neighbouring authorities to tackle similar problems, share ideas and best practice. Recent successes of the group include:

- Securing additional funding to extend the Rent and Deposit Scheme within the TGSE. This will help more households avoid becoming homeless by offering private rented accommodation to people who would have become homeless.

¹ Source: Communities Local Government – National Rough Sleeping Estimate.

- Commissioning GVA Grimley to prepare a Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) of the Thames Gateway South Essex sub-region. Published in September 2008, this report provides the TGSE with detailed information to help develop future housing policies including current and future housing need. An update of the SHMA was undertaken and published in 2010.

The TGSE recognises that there are low levels of affordable housing in the sub-region and is working to address this. The sub-region published its own Housing Strategy for 2008-11. This highlights the priorities and actions needed to increase affordability levels and develop more suitable housing.

1.4 Local Context

The Council's vision is to make Rochford District a place which provides opportunities for the best possible quality of life for all who live, work and visit here. The Council aims to create an environment that is vibrant, inclusive, safe, sustainable and modern while retaining its historic character.

The Council's key priorities are highlighted in the Community Strategy and Corporate Plan 2010-15. The overarching objectives are to make a difference to:

- Our People
- Our Community
- Our Environment
- Our Local Economy

By tackling homelessness in the District, this strategy aims to improve the quality of life for its most vulnerable residents thus meeting the Council's aims and objectives.

1.5 Rochford District – Key Facts

- The District borders Southend-on-Sea Borough Council, Castle Point Borough Council and Basildon Borough Council.
- 76% of the District is designated Green Belt².
- The average house price is £247,733³.
- The District is predominantly rural/semi rural.
- Overall levels of deprivation in the District are low. Rochford District is ranked 282⁴ out of 326 areas in England (number 1 being the most deprived).
- Half of all residents live in the three main towns of Hockley, Rayleigh and Rochford.
- The District's population is approximately 83,100⁵.
- 98.2%⁶ of residents in the District are white.
- Average gross pay per annum is £24,009⁷.
- The District has low levels of unemployment. Only 3.9% of the District's working population is classified as unemployed compared to the national average of 5.7%⁸.
- Teenage pregnancy rates are approximately half the national average⁹.
- 58% of the adult population are unable to either afford private rented accommodation or purchase their own home¹⁰.

² The total land mass in the District is 16,800 hectares, 12,763 hectares are Greenbelt.

³ Quarter 4 2010 mean house prices based on Land Registry data. Communities Local Government.

⁴ Communities Local Government – Indices of Deprivation 2010.

⁵ Office of National Statistics 2009.

⁶ Office of National Statistics Census 2001.

⁷ Thames Gateway South Essex Strategic Housing Market Assessment 2008.

⁸ Office for National Statistics January-December 2008.

⁹ Office of National Statistics 2001.

¹⁰ Thames Gateway South Essex Strategic Housing Market Assessment Update 2010.

1.6 Rochford District Council's approach to tackling Homelessness

The approach taken by Rochford District Council in tackling homelessness is to focus on prevention with an emphasis on early intervention. The Homelessness and Housing Advice Team have identified and implemented a number of best practice procedures. These include:

- Providing help, including financial assistance, to enable people to stay in their home or find a new home.
- Mediating between families, landlords, tenants, owner occupiers and mortgage lenders.
- Offering tenancy sustainment through floating support.
- Making referrals to support agencies.
- Liaising closely with the Council's Housing Benefit Department.
- Operating effective and appropriate referral procedures.

1.7 Achievements since the last Homelessness Strategy

Since the introduction of the first Homelessness Strategy, a number of key actions have been achieved. These include:

1 Improvement in decision times for Homelessness Applications

One of the commitments made in the first Homelessness Strategy was to increase the speed of Homelessness Application decision making. By making fast, accurate decisions, the Homelessness and Housing Advice Team are able to reduce uncertainty about an applicants housing prospects.

A target for determining 78% of applications within 33 working days was introduced and regularly met. However, since 2009/10, this target has been difficult to achieve and steps are being taken to address this.

Action 1

Improve processes and procedures for dealing with homelessness applications.

2 Undertake regular satisfaction surveys

Satisfaction Surveys are sent to a cross section of clients following their contact with the Homelessness and Housing Advice Team and after spending time in temporary accommodation. Their responses are used to judge the quality of the advice/assistance given and to highlight areas for improvement. The majority of clients who respond tell us they are very satisfied with the service and very few complaints are received.

The Housing Advice questionnaire has recently been updated to improve customer feedback. The Homelessness and temporary accommodation questionnaires will be updated in the near future.

Action 2

Review and update homelessness and temporary accommodation questionnaires.

3 Improved interview facilities at the Council’s main offices in South Street Rochford

A new office suite was erected on part of the car park at the rear of the offices. The facility accommodates the main reception and interview rooms for customers.

4 Amended Allocations Policy to take account of homeless families

The Council’s Allocations Policy was reviewed and updated in 2006 to give greater priority to homeless households. The objective was to reduce the number of people in temporary accommodation.

The introduction of Choice Based Lettings in 2011 will provide an opportunity to further review and update the Policy.

Action 3

Review and update the Council's Allocations Policy, incorporating choice based lettings.

1.8 Structure of the Strategy

2 – Key Strategic Aims	Presents the District’s five strategic aims/priorities with regards to homelessness.
3 – Profile of Homelessness	Provides a profile of the levels of homelessness in the District and forecasts possible future issues.
4 – Existing Housing and Support	Details existing housing and support available for homeless households in the District.
5 – Specialist Supported Housing	Highlights the specialist support and supported accommodation for different client groups.
6 – Homeless Prevention Activities	Describes the range of activities the Council undertakes to help people avoid becoming homeless.
7 – The Future	Highlights future plans and initiatives the Council plans to undertake during the course of the strategy.
8 – Customer Satisfaction Surveys	Introduces the Action Plan which highlights a programme of activities to improve the service.

2 Key Strategic Aims

Having considered the Government's national agenda and undertaken a review of homelessness issues in the District, the Homelessness and Housing Advice Team have identified five key strategic aims. These are:

1 **Helping people stay in their home or find a new home**

By preventing homelessness, the service will avoid the need to place people in temporary accommodation. This will help keep households in appropriate accommodation and maintain support networks, children's education etc.

2 **Provide effective housing advice and information**

By providing effective advice and information, clients will be empowered to make informed decisions about the choices they have.

3 **Intervene early to avoid homelessness**

By intervening early, the Homelessness and Housing Advice Team will help clients avoid becoming homeless. As soon as an approach is made, the service will act quickly to assess the underlying issues and signpost them to appropriate agencies.

4 **Treat all clients with respect and dignity**

To offer the best and most appropriate advice, Officers will need to ask people searching questions to find out why they are homeless. However, everyone will be treated compassionately and sympathetically.

5 **Minimise the threat of repeat homelessness**

By developing effective relationships, the Homelessness and Housing Advice Team can identify where clients are at risk of repeated homelessness. Where any such risk arises, the Homelessness and Housing Advice Team will minimise this by working with relevant support agencies.

3 Profile of Homelessness

The Homelessness and Housing Advice Team provide a free housing advice service to all residents in the District. Clients can discuss their problems over the telephone, meet with Officers at the Council or request a home visit if they prefer. All enquiries are recorded on the Council’s database to help monitor service demand and actions taken.

3.1 Enquiries Received

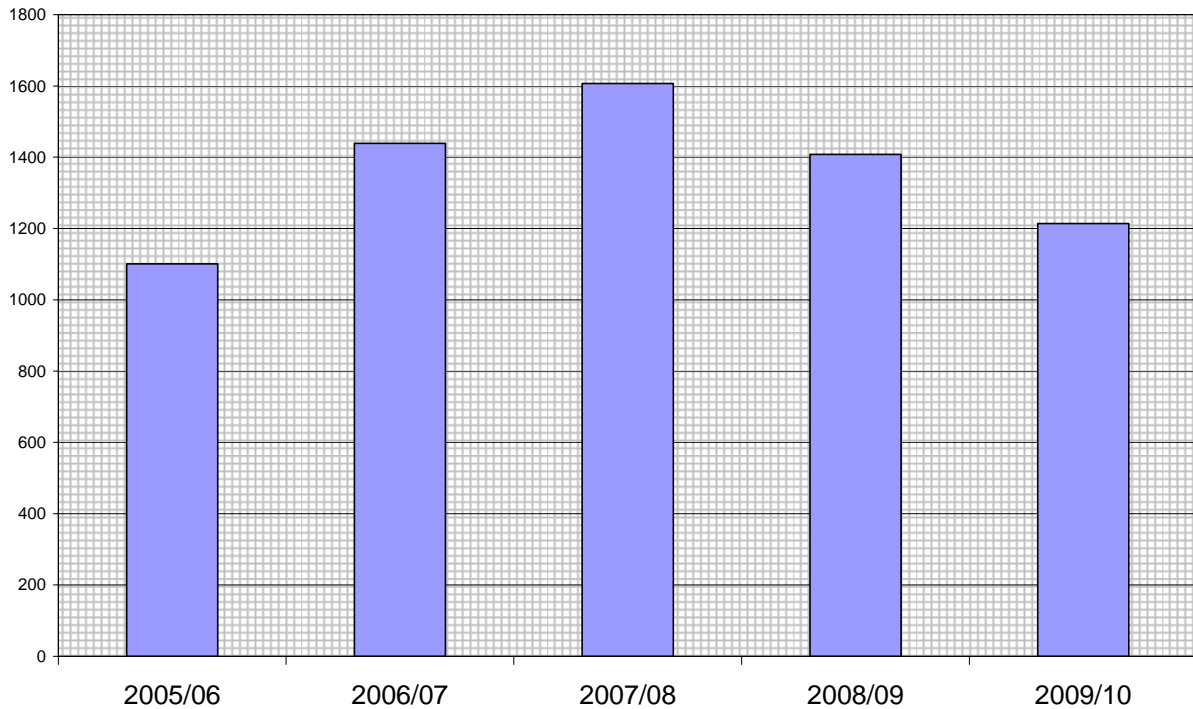


Figure 1 – Housing Advice/Homeless enquiries

The number of Housing Advice enquiries reached its peak in 2007/08. This was driven by people making Housing Register enquiries/applications and those seeking accommodation. Since 2008/09, the number of enquiries has reduced. It is interesting to note that the drop was mainly experienced in these same categories. The reduction in enquiries indicates that the current economic outlook has discouraged some people from moving and if accurate, suggests this reduction will continue for some time.

3.2 Homelessness Applications

On average, half (50.6%) of all applicants are found to be eligible, unintentionally homeless and in priority need. In 2010/11, 59% of all homelessness applications were owed a duty (found to be eligible, unintentionally homeless and in priority need).

Typically, 10% of all applicants are eligible but intentionally homeless. In 2010/11 this reduced to 6%.

Year	Eligible unintentionally homeless and in priority need	Eligible, homeless and in priority need but intentionally so	Eligible homeless but not in priority need	Eligible but not homeless	Ineligible Households	Total decisions
2003/04	68	6	3	33	0	110
2004/05	46	10	6	63	1	126
2005/06	35	5	7	15	0	62
2006/07	24	3	6	13	1	47
2007/08	40	12	6	28	0	86
2008/09	45	10	7	22	1	85
2009/10	27	14	8	17	0	66
2010/11	48	5	4	24	0	81

Figure 2 – Results of Homeless Applications received from 2003 to 2011

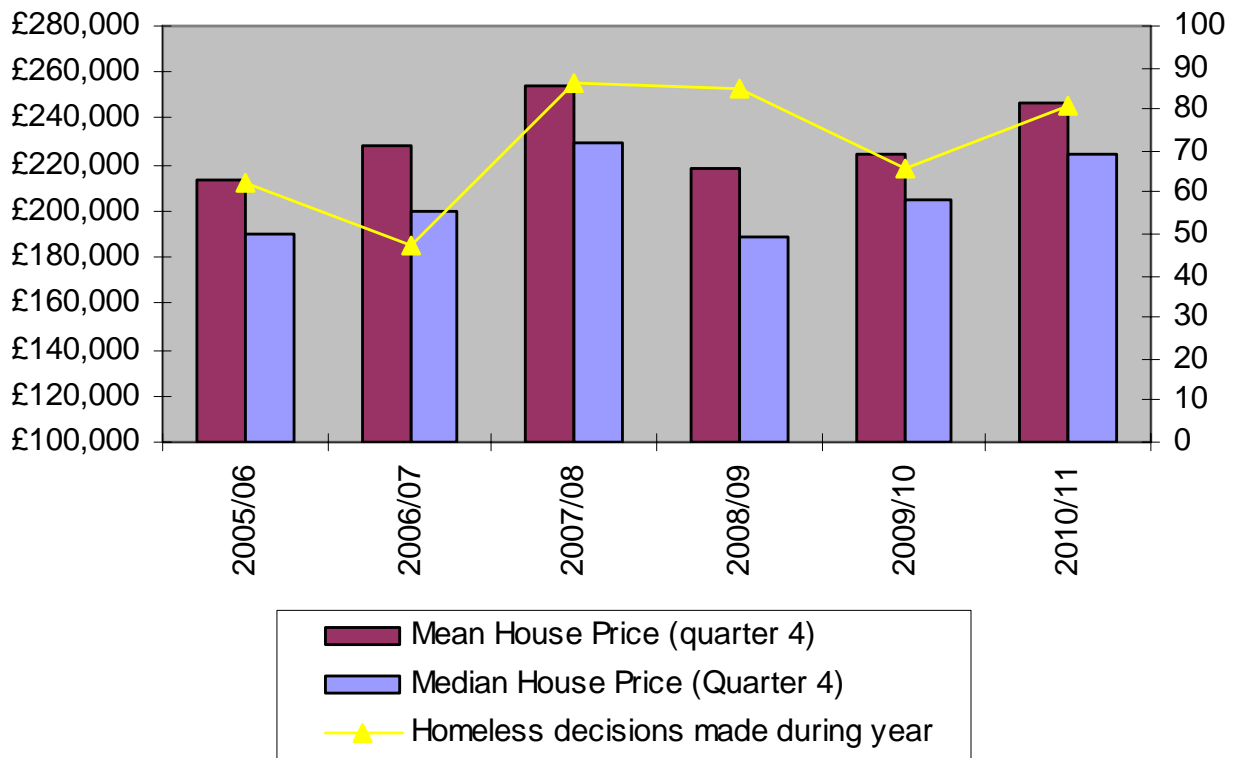


Figure 3 – Numbers of Homelessness Applications received, compared to average house prices

Figure 3 plots the average house price (in the District) compared to the total number of homeless decisions made. It is interesting to note that both house prices and homeless decisions follow similar tracks. It may be that the increase in house prices has led to more people becoming homeless. However, it should be noted that although there is a correlation of the data, there is no evidence of causation.

The Council’s Housing Strategy (2008-11) aims to increase the levels of affordable housing in the District. If the lack of affordable housing is a driver of homelessness, then increasing levels of affordable housing should have an impact on the number of homelessness applications.

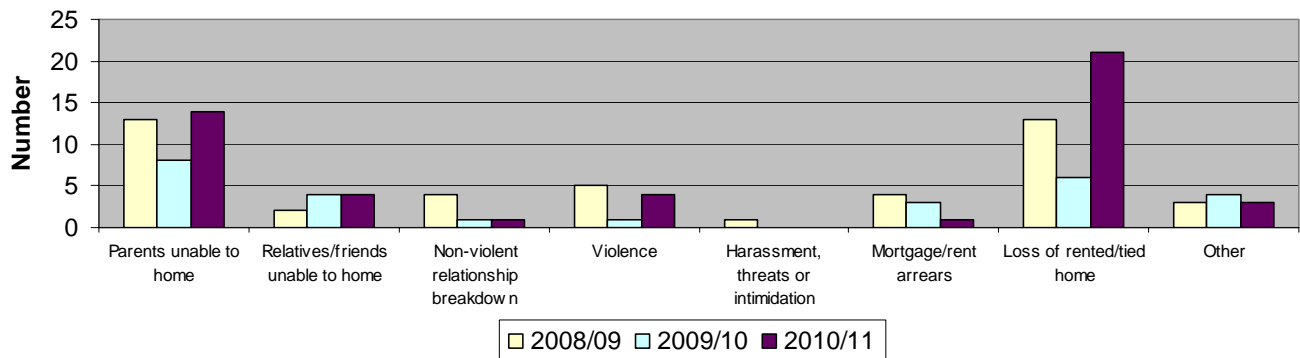
3.3 Causes of Homelessness

There are a variety of reasons why individuals and households become homeless. The most common in the District are:

- Parents not willing to accommodate children.
- Loss of rented or tied accommodation due to termination of assured shorthold tenancy.

These main causes mirror the national trend.

Reason for loss of Home



Source: P1E Returns

Figure 4 – Reason for loss of home

Young people who simply want to move away from the parental home often do not have a high priority on the Housing Register. This can force some families to live together for longer periods of time which can lead to relationship breakdowns with parents ultimately evicting their children¹¹. The Allocations Policy at Rochford District Council mirrors the common approach taken by other Authorities. To try and avert this, the Council offers an informal mediation service to families to help them overcome relationship breakdowns. Officers also refer families to Family Mosaic who offer trained Mediation Officers to help address family problems. Young people often only approach the Council once the situation has become incredibly difficult and therefore eviction is often inevitable.

¹¹ In 2010/11 parental eviction was the second most common reason for homelessness in the District.

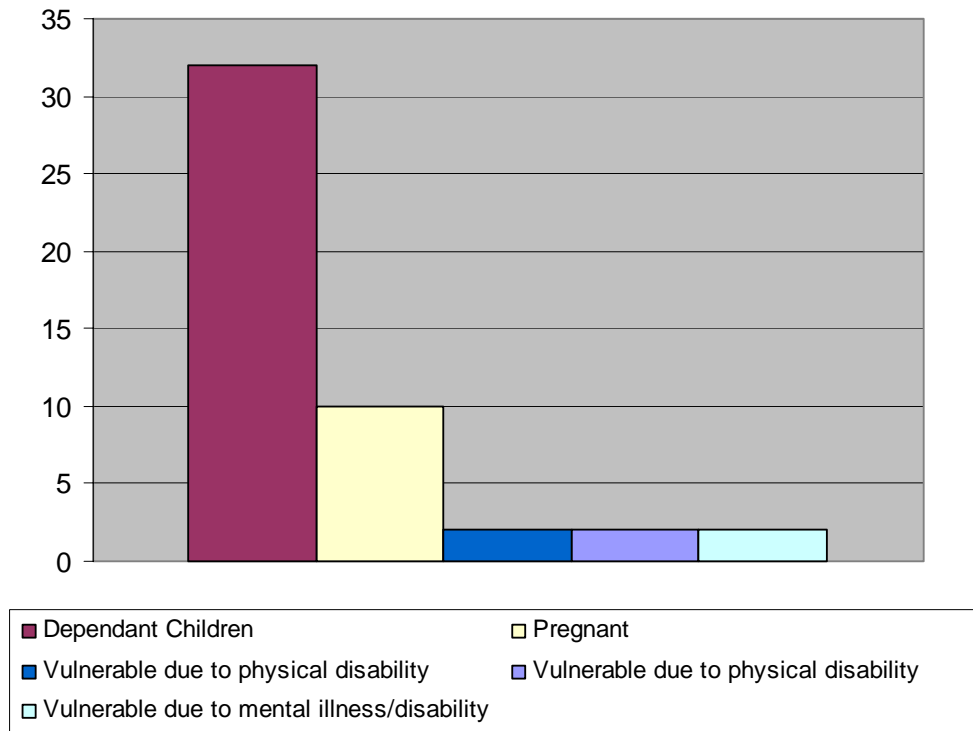
Whenever someone faces eviction from a private rented property, Officers work with both landlords and tenants to address the reasons for the eviction and try and avoid the tenant becoming homeless. Unfortunately, the very nature of private rented accommodation means that the Council has limited control over this type of housing.

3.4 Profile of Needs

The majority of households accepted as homeless by the Council are people with dependent children^{12 13} (in 2010/11, approximately 66% of all priority applicants included dependant children). Providing family type temporary/permanent accommodation is a major focus for the Council.

On average, 14.8% of homeless households¹⁴ were vulnerable because of old age, physical disability or a mental illness. In 2010/11, this fell back to 8.3% in 2010/11.

A large proportion of homelessness applications are from 16-24 year olds. In 2010/11, 37%¹⁵ of all homelessness applicants who were accepted as eligible, unintentionally homeless, in priority need were from this age group.



Source: P1E Returns

Figure 5 – Households accepted as homeless 2010/11

¹² Households found to be eligible for assistance, unintentionally homeless and in priority need.
¹³ The average number of applicants involving children is 63%.
¹⁴ Accepted as homeless, eligible for assistance, unintentionally homeless and in priority need.
¹⁵ On average 39.3% of homeless applicants are aged 16-24 (years 2006-2010).

3.5 Rough Sleeping

Rough sleeping is arguably the most visible and extreme form of homelessness. Information obtained from a variety of sources, (including direct approaches, complaints from residents, the Police etc.) indicate that there is not a significant rough sleeper problem in the District and numbers are estimated to be less than 10 at any one time¹⁶.

From 2005/06 to 2009/10, only six approaches were made to the Council for advice or assistance regarding rough sleeping¹⁷.

Although there are no plans to undertake a rough sleeper count in the near future, this will be kept under review.

Action 4

Keep the issue of rough sleeping under review and undertake a count if necessary.

3.6 Ethnicity

Very few approaches are made to the Council from Black or Minority Ethnic (BME) groups. Over the last four years, only five clients were found to be homeless, in priority need and from a BME group. This is in line expectations and current population trends.

Year	White	Black	Asian	Mixed	Other	Not stated	Total	% BME
2004/05	45	0	1	0	0	0	46	2.17%
2005/06	35	0	0	0	0	0	35	0.00%
2006/07	24	0	0	0	0	0	24	0.00%
2007/08	38	1	0	0	1	0	40	5.00%
2008/09	40	0	0	1	0	4	45	2.22%
2009/10	25	1	0	0	0	1	27	3.70%
2010/11	47	0	0	1	0	0	48	2.08%

Source: P1E returns.

Figure 6 – Ethnicity of people accepted as homeless and in priority need

¹⁶ Details are reported to the Communities Local Government.

¹⁷ Advice Enquiry Analysis 2005 – 2010.

3.7 Future Levels of Homelessness

The housing market in the District is dominated by owner occupied properties¹⁸. Change in property prices, interest rates, unemployment or national policy could have a profound effect on the levels of housing affordability and thus the ability of individuals to stay in their homes.

The current economic downturn could impact on the levels of homeless approaches made in the future. Almost 35%¹⁹ of workers in the District are employed in either the construction, financial or the real estate sector. The 'credit crunch' could affect employment levels in these sectors and thus the number of households approaching the Council for assistance.

The 2010 Strategic Housing Market Assessment (update) highlights that all new housing in the District would have to be affordable to meet current housing need. This obviously creates a challenging environment and requires all stakeholders to work together to create a sustainable community. If a 'step change' in affordable housing delivery is not realised, the numbers of homeless households could increase.

¹⁸ 85.8% of all homes in the District are privately owned. Thames Gateway South Essex Strategic Housing Market Assessment 2008.

¹⁹ Office of National Statistics. Industry of employment 2001.

4 Existing Housing and Support

4.1 Total Housing

There are over 34,500 properties in the District, of these, approximately 82% either detached or semi detached homes.

The District has the second highest level of owner occupation in the Country with only 9% of all homes provided as social housing.

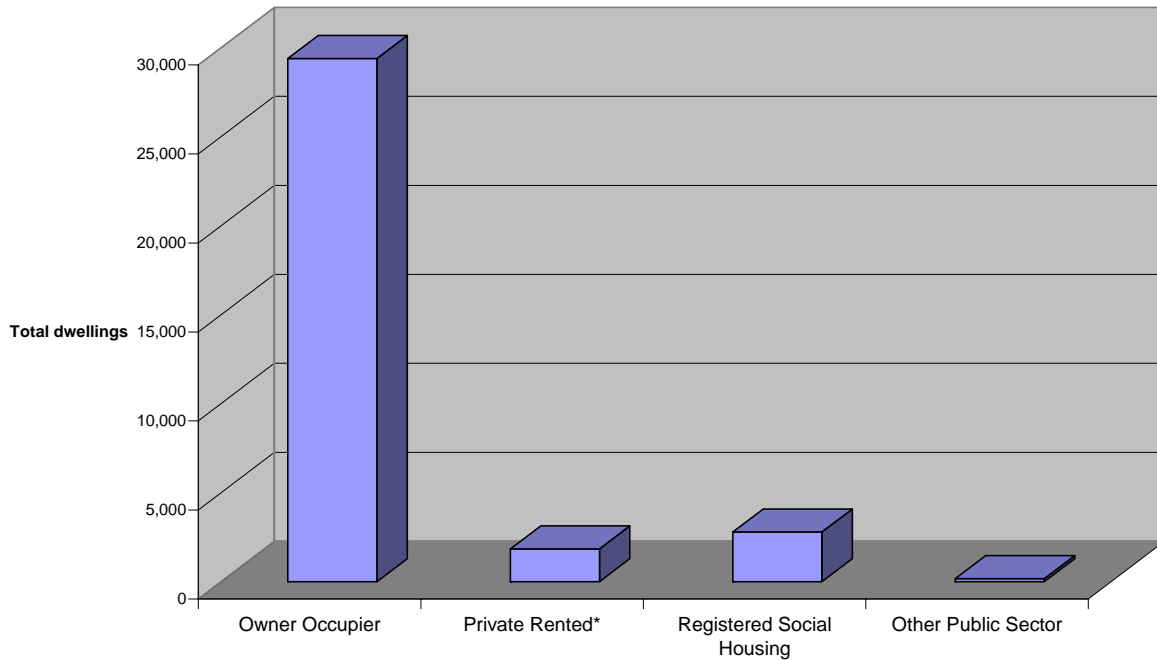


Figure 7 – Profile of Housing Stock in Rochford District

The District is considered to be reasonably affluent and is the least deprived Local Authority in the TGSE. Such affluence has supported strong house prices, high rent levels and encouraged wealthy achievers/families into the District.

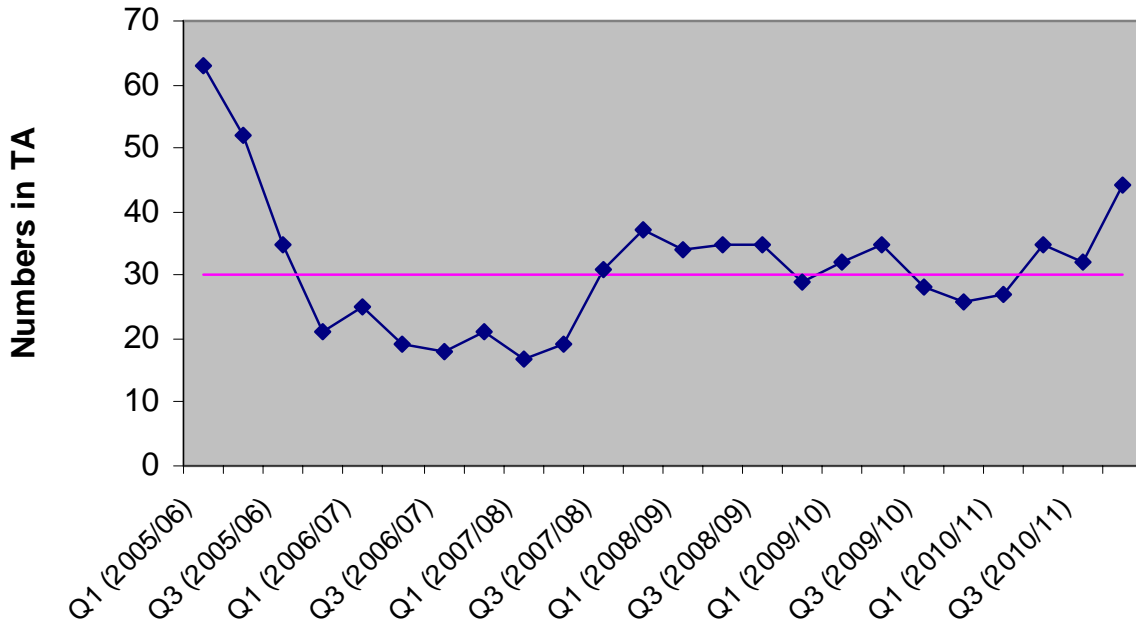
The private rented sector provides a vital role in the supply of accommodation in the District. Although it only plays a small role in the housing sector²⁰ it is recognised and valued for its role in helping to reduce homelessness.

4.2 Temporary Accommodation

To reduce the number of people in temporary accommodation (TA), the Government introduced a target for all authorities to reduce numbers of households in TA by 50%.

²⁰ 5.9% of privately owned properties are let to private tenants.

To achieve this target, the Council must not have more than 32 households in temporary accommodation by 2010²¹.



Source: P1E Returns

Figure 8 – Numbers of people in temporary accommodation

The Council has worked hard to reduce the number of people in TA and from 2006 to 2008 it consistently achieved its target. Since then, the number of people in TA increased but still remained close to the target. However, the last quarter of 2010/11 saw a dramatic increase. This was caused largely by a very limited supply of permanent accommodation becoming available. This trend is likely to continue for the immediate future.

The Council has agreements with certain Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) in the District to provide specific temporary accommodation units, together with a number of “floating” units which can be requested as need arises.

A continuing aim for the service is to provide good quality temporary accommodation and minimise the length of stay.

The Council is a member of the Essex Policy and Performance Network. The group regularly shares benchmarking data to help compare authorities against one another. National Indicator 156 forms part of the data sharing agreement. Analysing this data has helped produce the following graph. It highlights that Rochford District has a low level of people in TA compared to its population and that of other LAs.

²¹ December 31 2004 became the baseline date. On this day, the Council had 64 people in temporary accommodation.

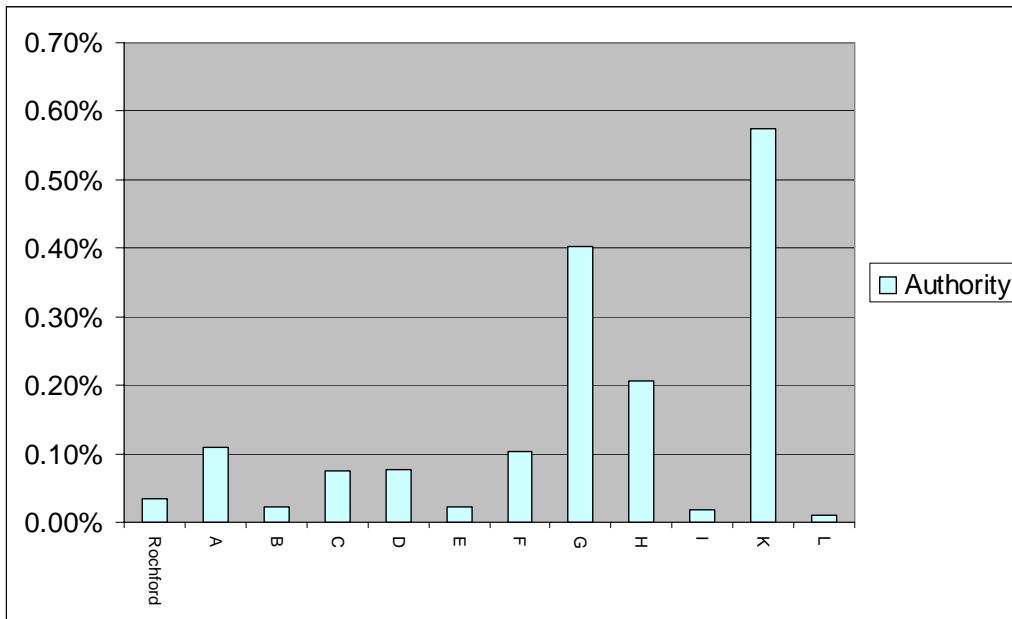


Figure 9 – Number of households living in temporary accommodation^{22 23} compared to LA populations²⁴

Action 5

Increase homelessness prevention.

4.3 Bed and Breakfast accommodation

The Council does have to use Bed and Breakfast accommodation for emergency purposes and whilst some applications are decided. It is recognised however, that this type of accommodation is not entirely suitable and its use is minimised wherever possible.

The Council’s ultimate aim is to cease the use of Bed and Breakfast accommodation, however, this is likely to be very difficult to achieve.

Action 6

Find alternatives to Bed and Breakfast accommodation.

4.4 Hostels

The Council does not own or operate a temporary accommodation hostel and as such, it has limited options to house homeless people.

A long term aim is to develop a general needs hostel in the District. However, this will require close cooperation with a Housing Association, significant capital investment, continued operational funding and a suitable development site.

²² Number of households living in temporary accommodation provided under homelessness legislation.

²³ Quarter 3 2009/10.

²⁴ Office of National Statistics 2009.

Action 7

Consider options for the provision of a temporary accommodation hostel in the District, including associated costs and permissions.

4.5 Protection of Possessions

If someone becomes homeless and cannot store their possessions, the Council can arrange for the belongings to be stored until permanent accommodation is found.

The Homelessness and Housing Advice Team work with a local removal/storage company. They collect, store and return belongings to households that are placed in temporary accommodation.

The policy for recharging applicants for all or some of the costs incurred in storing their possessions is to be reviewed, with the aim to complete this process in 2011.

Action 8

Review the policy to recharge applicants in respect of costs incurred for bed and breakfast accommodation and removals and storage .

5 Specialist Supported Housing

5.1 Supporting People

Supporting People is a Government programme that helps fund housing related support for vulnerable people.

The Supported People East Region Group produced a regional strategy in 2008. This highlighted the strategic priorities from 2008-11 including:

- Ensuring that supported housing services meet future needs.
- Securing access to housing support services for vulnerable people.
- Ensuring supported housing services meet future demographic changes.
- Supporting the development of shared practices across the region.
- Ensuring service users have equal access to services across boundaries.

Within the District, the programme is operated by Essex County Council. The Essex Supported People Strategy 2005-10 contains the priorities for the County and how it will help vulnerable people become more independent.

5.2 Care Leavers

Care Leavers who need support after the age of 16 could be eligible for continued help from social services.

Young people cared for by Essex County Council, are transferred to a Leaving and Aftercare Team shortly before the age of 16. The Council has a good relationship with the Rochford team and meet with them on a quarterly basis to ensure Care Leavers (who have a connection with the District) have suitable accommodation when a need arises.

5.3 Young People

A young homeless person (someone aged below 25) often does not just have a housing problem. Their homelessness is frequently a result of problems they experience over many years (including misbehaviour, domestic abuse, unwillingness to get a job and their sexuality). A recent study by Staffordshire University²⁵ found that two-fifths of young homeless people reported either long-term abuse from within their families or violence in the household and a third reported mental health problems. In addressing their homelessness, agencies often need to work together to overcome problems simultaneously.

²⁵ Housing and Community Research Unit. Staffordshire University (1997).

Contrary to popular belief²⁶, the majority of homeless young people are from two-parent families. The main issue with divorced parents is when/if they re-marry. Where this occurs the step-parent is often the person who asks them to leave and the biological parent feels unable to take sides²⁷.

Where necessary, the Council can nominate young people to the following organisations:

- NACRO (a registered charity) operates a supported housing centre in Rochford for single homeless young people. The Council has access to three bed spaces in one property.
- Swan Housing Association provides two self-contained one bedroom flats for 'Move On' accommodation. The units offer accommodation for people during their transitional period between supported accommodation and independent living.
- The Essex Leaving and After Care Service offer support for 16-21 year olds in Essex. The service helps young people with a range of issues including accommodation, education and employment. The organisation provides personal advisors to help young people plan for the future and it has a base in Rochford.

5.4 Teenage Pregnancy

Tackling teenage pregnancy is another key priority for the Government and as such, they have included levels of teenage pregnancy as a factor of measuring social deprivation.

The District has low levels of teenage pregnancy rates when compared to national levels. The Council can refer pregnant young women to the Bartletts Parent and Child Centre, who manage two properties, each having two bed spaces, which provide support and help to young mothers to enable them to develop independent living skills.

5.5 Older People

In 2006, approximately 18.5% of the District's population was over 65 years of age²⁸. By 2026, this is anticipated to grow to 24.8%²⁹. This increase will provide new and additional pressures on the District's housing, health and support services.

Although there are a range of accommodation schemes available to the elderly, the vast majority of people wish to stay in their own homes. Just a small proportion of older people live in sheltered or extra care homes in the District (of those aged over 85, just 19% live in such schemes).

²⁶ Young people from broken families are more likely to experience homelessness.

²⁷ Tackling Homelessness: Colchester's Review and Strategy (2003).

²⁸ Office of National Statistics. 2006-based sub national population projections.

²⁹ Office of National Statistics. 2006-based sub national population projections.

Although Extra Care sheltered housing is available in the District³⁰, vacancies are common and the Council receives few enquiries from people wishing to move there. If this continues, the Council will need to review the facility and consider options to improve occupation rates.

In 2010/11, one applicant over 65 years of age was accepted as eligible, unintentionally homeless and in priority need³¹. As the elderly population increases it is inevitable that older people will start approaching the Council for help and will be owed a duty. The challenge will be to source suitable temporary accommodation for elderly people. This issue becomes difficult when considering that 35% of people over 65 (living in private accommodation) have a disability³².

5.6 Offenders

There is significant evidence to suggest that suitable/stable accommodation is an essential element in the rehabilitation and resettlement of offenders³³. The Council understands the importance of appropriate housing support and works with the Probation Service (and other agencies) to consider Offenders' housing needs when securing suitable accommodation.

5.7 Mental Health

Approximately 25% of the population will suffer from a mental health problem at some point in their lives with around one in six suffering at any one time³⁴. If these figures provide an accurate picture of Essex, approximately 17,000 people in the county have a major mental health problem and 141,600 have a minor mental health problem³⁵. It is interesting to note that Essex Mental Health Services only have active care plans for 10,000 users.

The District itself has one of the lowest rates of mental health disorder in the Country. However, it has often been difficult to establish the true extent of housing need for this group of people. To address this, the Council will work with Essex County Council and supporting agencies/partners to identify their needs and what can be done to help.

Most people who experience mental health problems prefer to live in their own homes. However, where help is required, there are a variety of services and support agencies available, these include:

- Coombewood Mental Health Resource Centre. This unit provides help for people with severe and long-term mental health problems. The centre works closely with a variety of teams and organisations to help operate drop in clubs and employment schemes for people with mental health needs.

³⁰ Dobson House.

³¹ Source P1E Returns 2010/11.

³² Annual Health Survey for England 2000.

³³ Joseph Rowntree Foundation et al.

³⁴ Office Deputy Prime Minister June 2004. Mental Health and Social Exclusion Social Exclusion Unit Report.

³⁵ Essex Adults, Health & Community Wellbeing Mental Health Housing and Accommodation Strategy 2010 (Draft).

- The Richmond Fellowship/East Thames Housing Trust provide accommodation for homeless people with mental health needs. The trust operates a housing scheme in Westcliff which offers 24 hour, seven day a week support for all its residents.
- Both Advance and Estuary Housing Associations operate a 'group' homes in the District. The properties offer shared facilities and are let on an assured tenancy basis³⁶.

Action 9

Work with Essex County Council to identify the needs of people with mental health problems in the District.

5.8 Learning Disabilities

The Joint Strategic Needs Assessment for Essex (2008) estimates that 123 people over the age of 18 have a learning disability and live in the District.

Genesis Housing Association has recently built a new supported housing scheme to address the needs of people with learning disabilities³⁷. The development was partly funded by a £915,000 grant from the Homes and Communities Agency and provides 14 self-contained flats. The scheme will help residents make the transfer from residential care into more independent living.

5.9 Gypsies and Travellers

A Gypsy or Traveller could qualify as homeless if they could not find a suitable site to place their mobile home.

The need for Gypsy and Traveller sites in the District has traditionally been low especially when compared to other areas. However, this demand has rarely been met. The East of England Regional Assembly prepared a single-issue review on Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation, which highlighted the need to provide more sites in the District.

The Council has reviewed the conclusions reached by the East of England Regional Assembly and has taken into account the Gypsy & Traveller Accommodation Assessment (2009) (in accordance with the Housing Act 2004 and government advice). As a result, it plans to increase the number of gypsy and traveller sites to 14 by 2021 to meet local need. Provision of any additional pitches will be subject to further review of need.

Action 10

Increase the number of Gypsy/Traveller sites.

³⁶ Advance have recently reviewed their scheme and propose converting it into self-contained flats for independent living.

³⁷ Ken Start House opened on 18 December 2009.

5.10 Floating Support

Floating Support was launched in April 2007 by the Essex Supporting People Programme. It was introduced to help vulnerable people live independently, promote social inclusion and avoid vulnerable people becoming homeless. The Essex Floating Support Service helps homeowners, street homeless, Housing Association tenants, private sector rented tenants and people in temporary accommodation.

Rochford District Council worked in partnership with Basildon and Castle Point Council's to secure 2003 hours (per month) of tenancy sustainment from Family Mosaic. It can refer people to the service to help them tackle problems they are experiencing.

The Floating Support Service is currently heavily over subscribed and a waiting list for help is in operation. The Council is working to increase the number of hours available and thereby increase help to applicants.

In addition, Swan Housing Association provides a Floating Support service for people with learning disabilities.

Action 11

Explore options to increase the hours of Floating Support

5.11 Domestic Abuse

Rochford District Council takes domestic abuse very seriously. The Council has placed a strong emphasis on tackling this issue and works hard to support all its victims. The Council works proactively to engage with victims by:

- 1 Operating a domestic violence forum, which helps develop and support services for victims of domestic abuse
- 2 Increase awareness of domestic abuse and support services at schools, doctor's surgeries and hospitals, etc.
- 3 Hold a domestic abuse awareness week each year in partnership with Castle Point Borough Council.

The Homelessness and Housing Advice Team works with Basildon Women's Aid to provide outreach services to victims of domestic abuse in the District.

A second stage refuge has been developed (in partnership with Swan Housing Association) to offer accommodation to victims of abuse who have moved into temporary accommodation to escape violence and are awaiting a permanent home.

The Council operates a Sanctuary Scheme for victims of domestic abuse³⁸. This scheme enables victims to stay in their home whilst offering support and practical measures to minimise the problems they may experience. The Scheme can also provide a safe room where victims can shelter from abuse and wait for emergency assistance.

Action 12

Monitor the effectiveness of the Sanctuary Scheme

5.12 Drug/Alcohol issues

It is commonly understood that someone with a drug or alcohol dependency is more likely to become homeless than someone who is not. It is also likely that they are vulnerable and need support to help them maintain their home.

The Council receives very few approaches from people identified as unintentionally homeless, eligible for assistance and in priority need because of a drug or alcohol dependence. From 2006/07 to 2010/11 no applicants were accepted as homeless principally because of a drug or alcohol addiction³⁹.

Where approaches are made for advice/assistance, clients are referred to the Southend Drug Action Team or Family Mosaic for help.

³⁸ Funded by the Rochford Local Strategic Partnership and Crime & Disorder Reduction Partnership.

³⁹ Source: P1E Returns.

6 Homeless Prevention Activities

6.1 The Council's Homelessness and Housing Advice Team

The Council provides advice and information on a range of housing matters including; disrepair, domestic violence, property rights, harassment, re-housing options, housing benefits, illegal eviction, security of tenure and rights of occupation.

The team aims to offer a single point of contact for clients, which helps to improve relationships with them, eliminates conflicting information being received and improves accuracy of decisions.

The Council has undertaken a Business Process Re-engineering review of Homelessness Applications and Homelessness Prevention activities.

Action 13

Implement the Action Plan resulting from the Homelessness Business Process Re-engineering project.

6.2 Rent Deposit Scheme

The Rent Deposit Scheme helps people threatened with homelessness to access private rented accommodation. To help low income residents overcome the affordability gap, the Council provides loans to help pay the initial deposit and/or rent in advance for qualifying residents⁴⁰.

Traditionally, the Council provided grants and loans to households with the intention of recovering the money at the end of the tenancy. However, this process has been reviewed and new loan agreements have been introduced. Where possible, tenants now repay loans on a monthly basis. This should help recycle available funding and minimise the risk of debts being generated.

The Council provides £10,000 per year to operate this scheme and aims to help at least six households into private sector rented accommodation (per year).

The Council has received additional funding from Essex County Council (as part of a successful Local Area Agreement bid) to increase resources for the Rent Deposit Scheme. For 2010/2011, a further £6,532 was made available.

Action 14

Implement the Council's deposit and rent in advance scheme

6.3 Repossession and Prevention Fund

The Repossession and Prevention Fund has been introduced by the Government to help households stay in their home and avoid eviction/repossession. The fund provides loans to people struggling with their mortgage (or private/social rent) and offers a 'breathing space' to tackle the effects of the economic downturn.

⁴⁰ To qualify for the scheme, applicants must demonstrate that the Council is their only option for assistance, they are assessed as homeless (or likely to be homeless), a low earner and have a good record with other Landlords.

Rochford District Council has been awarded £28,500 from the Communities Local Government to operate the scheme. The Council has already helped one household avoid becoming homeless and others are being considered.

Action 15

Provide loans from the repossession prevention fund.

6.4 Mortgage Rescue Scheme

The Mortgage Rescue Scheme is a Government initiative designed to help households with serious mortgage repayment difficulties avoid becoming homeless. The scheme enables homeowners to stay in their home, whilst transferring their mortgage to Moat Housing Limited⁴¹ and either sharing ownership of the property (with Moat) or becoming a tenant and renting it.

The Council has agreed procedures for operating the scheme (with its partners) and actively works to identify households it considers would benefit from the scheme. Where any such households are identified, the Homelessness and Housing Advice Team works with the Citizens Advice Bureau and Moat to help avoid the household being evicted. The eligibility criteria (for the scheme) does however restrict the availability of assistance. In addition the Government's funding for Mortgage Rescue has recently been reduced. This will further limit the help available to households who are struggling to pay their mortgage (and face possible eviction).

6.5 Bringing Empty Homes Back into Use

Within the District, 528 properties have been empty for more than six months⁴² (this represents 1.5% of all housing stock).

Historically, the Council relied on providing advice to owners to encourage them to return properties back into use. However in 2009, Rochford District Council successfully sponsored a bid⁴³ to help tackle the number of empty properties in Rochford District and the TGSE. The scheme aims to help owners return a property back into use by providing grants (to refurbish a property) in return for housing a homeless household. In total, £1.5 million has been allocated to the TGSE and Rochford District Council was allocated £100,000. No further funding for this scheme was made available after April 2011 however Landlords will continue to be assisted whilst existing funding remains.

Action 16

Return empty properties back into use

⁴¹ The Government appointed Moat Housing Association to operate the Mortgage Rescue Scheme in Essex.

⁴² HSSA 2010.

⁴³ Bid made to the Government Office for the East of England.

6.6 Home Maintenance and Adaptation Grants

The Council provides Home Maintenance and Adaptation Grants to help vulnerable people stay in their own homes. The grants help fund essential repairs to bring homes up to the Decent Homes Standard⁴⁴. A maximum of £10,000 is available for residents in any two year period. However, additional Government funding that has previously been available for the scheme has recently been withdrawn and in the light of this the grant policy is being reviewed.

Action 17

Implement Home Maintenance and Adaptation Grants scheme.

6.7 Disabled Facilities Grant

Almost 10% of the District's households have a disabled person living in the property⁴⁵.

The Council works in partnership with Essex County Council (and the appropriate Home Improvement Agency) to provide Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG) to help people remain in their homes. The grants enable a range of adaptations to be installed including level access showers, stair lifts and kitchen alterations.

Occupational Therapists and the Council's Private Sector Team work proactively in trying to identify households who would benefit from adaptations (and aim to install facilities as quick as possible). Following a review of the DFG process in 2010/11, the length of time taken to process (and complete) grants reduced from 52 to 40 weeks. The current target is to complete installation of disabled facilities within 43 weeks of receiving the recommendation from the Occupational Therapist.

DFGs were traditionally funded by central Government and the Council. Regrettably, the Government has withdrawn its funding which will impact on the number of grants the Council can provide. Nevertheless, the number of applications (who apply for DFGs) are likely to grow as life expectancy increases and awareness of the scheme spreads.

Action 18

Improve Disabled Facilities Grant Process.

6.8 Citizens Advice Bureau

Rochford District Council provides funding to the Citizens Advice Bureau to operate advice centres in Rochford, Rayleigh and Hullbridge. The Citizens Advice Bureau provides advice on a range of issues and signposts visitors to the Homelessness and Housing Advice Team and other agencies, when necessary.

⁴⁴ Work can include replacement windows, electrical re-wiring and improvements to thermal insulation.

⁴⁵ The House Condition and Energy Efficiency Report 2007 (3,145 households have at least one disabled person living in it).

In operating the Mortgage Rescue Scheme, the Council must refer qualifying households to an independent Money Adviser (to discuss their financial position and the options available to them). The Council has agreed with the Citizens Advice Bureau for them to undertake this important role and will refer cases to them as and when required.

Action 19

Refer households to the Citizens Advice Bureau if they qualify for the Mortgage Rescue Scheme.

7 The Future

7.1 Social Services

A recent House of Lords ruling will have a dramatic affect on the way 16-17 year old homeless people are treated. Following the R (G) v Southwark judgment, Children Services Departments must now accommodate and support certain young people as opposed to referring them directly to a Local Authority Housing Department. Rochford District Council will need to work closely with Essex County Council's Social Services Department to ensure homeless young people are quickly assessed and housed where needed. Developing a close working relationship between the County and District Council will help provide a seamless service between the two organisations.

Action 20

Develop a close working relationship with Social Services.

7.2 Allocations Policy and Choice Based Lettings

The Council is changing the way in which it allocates housing to people on its Housing Register. Currently, properties are awarded to people who choose an area and have the highest points for a particular type of property. The proposed new Allocation Policy will use a banding system instead of points and furthermore will incorporate Choice Based Lettings which enable many Housing Register Applicants to have more choice over where they live.

This change in policy will create a significant difference in the way properties are allocated to people in the District and will require applicants to express an interest in available properties and will be implemented in conjunction with the revised Allocations Policy. The emphasis will change from simply waiting and being given a home to applicants having to take an active role in finding themselves a property.

7.3 Landlords Accreditation Scheme

TGSE partners have recently introduced a Landlords Accreditation Scheme for all private sector landlords in the TGSE sub-region. The scheme should ensure landlords maintain their properties to a high standard and have a good relationship with their tenants. This scheme will also encourage good landlords to enter the market and reduce the number of 'rogue' landlords operating in the sub-region. The scheme will be operated by the London Landlord Accreditation Scheme but will require local input and assistance by TGSE partners.

8 Customer Satisfaction Surveys

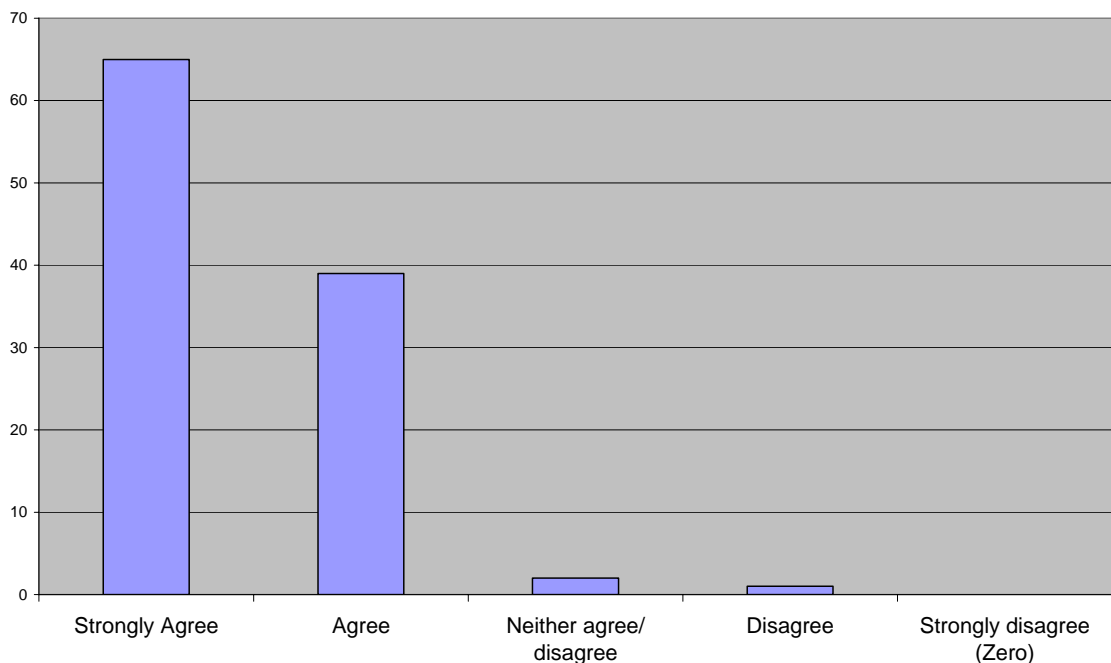
Regular satisfaction surveys are conducted following contact with the Housing Advice and Homelessness Team. Responses enable senior managers to monitor the quality of the service and identify any potential weaknesses.

Clients have told us that:

- The Council provides a good service
- Officers are very helpful.

What improvements can be made?

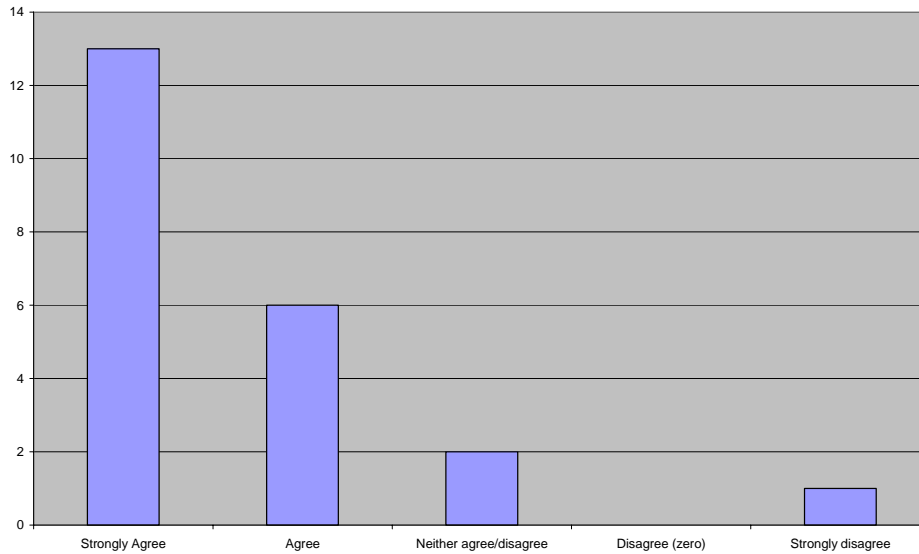
- Finding alternatives to Bed and Breakfast accommodation outside the District, in order to help applicants to maintain their support networks.



Survey period 01/04/06 – 31/05/10

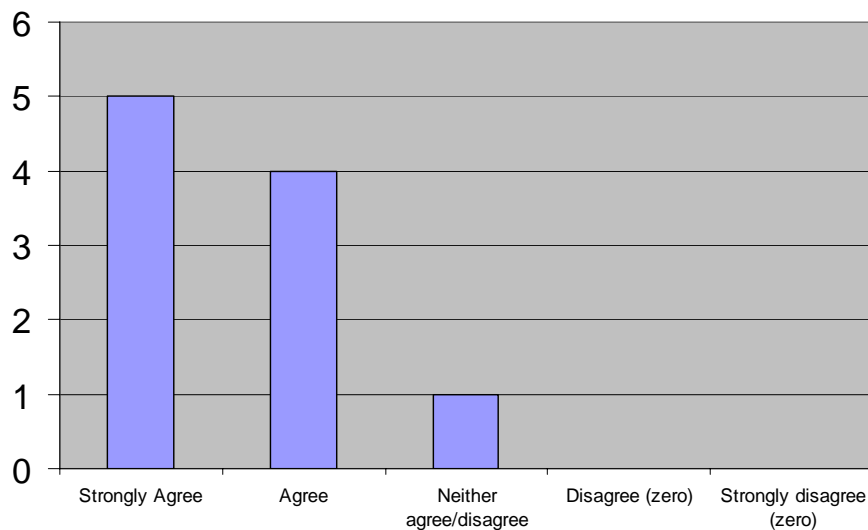
Figure 11 – Satisfaction with the Housing Advice Team⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Question asked 'Overall, I was satisfied with the service provided'.



Survey period 01/04/06 – 30/05/10

Figure 12 – Satisfaction with homelessness application process⁴⁷



Survey period 01/07/07 – 30/05/10

Figure 13: Satisfaction with the Temporary Accommodation Service⁴⁸

The Homelessness and Housing Advice Team **are** determined to maintain these high levels of satisfaction and will regularly monitor its results. It aims to achieve a satisfaction level of 90% during the life of this strategy and will continue to consider better ways to deliver its service. The questionnaires will be regularly reviewed help the team providing a first class service.

⁴⁷ Question asked – Overall, I was satisfied with the way the homelessness application was handled.

⁴⁸ Question asked – Overall, I was satisfied with the [temporary accommodation] service.

9 Action Plan

The Action Plan forms a vital part of the Homelessness Strategy. It defines what actions are needed following the strategic review.

The Action Plan will be monitored on a quarterly basis and reviewed periodically.

Please note that some of the actions may evolve over the course of this strategy and as such some tasks will inevitably change.

Corporate Objective	Strategic Aim/ Objective	Action No.	Action required	Target	Lead	Resources	Desired Outcome
Make a difference to our people	Make fast, accurate decisions	1	Improve processes and procedures for dealing with homelessness applications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 80% within 33 days 90% within 45 days 	SHHAO	Within existing resources	Greater customer satisfaction and reduced service costs
Make a difference to our people	Provide a first class service	2	Review and update the homelessness and temporary accommodation questionnaires	New questionnaires introduced by Sept 2011	AHSO	Within existing resources	Customer feedback is improved and any weaknesses are identified/addressed
Make a difference to our community	Provide a first class service	3	Review and update the Council's Allocations Policy, incorporating choice based lettings	July 2011	HATL	Within existing resources	New policy implemented
Make a difference to our community	Monitor, review and react to change	4	Keep the issue of rough sleeping under review and undertake a count if necessary	Ongoing	SHHAO	Within existing resources unless count required	If rough sleeping becomes a issue, actions introduced to tackle causes

Rochford District Council – Homelessness Strategy 2011-2014

Corporate Objective	Strategic Aim/ Objective	Action No.	Action required	Target	Lead	Resources	Desired Outcome
Make a difference to our community	Minimise use of temporary accommodation	5	Increase homelessness prevention	Max 40 households in temporary accommodation by 1/4/12, reducing to 35 by 1/4/13	SHHAO	Within existing resources	Increased homelessness prevention and customer satisfaction. Reduction in use of temporary accommodation and associated costs
Make a difference to our community	Provide emergency B&B accommodation	6	Find alternatives to Bed and Breakfast accommodation	31/03/2012	SHHAO	Within existing resources	Reduction in use of Bed & Breakfast. Greater customer satisfaction and reduction in associated costs
Make a difference to our community	The provision of temporary accommodation hostel	7	To consider options for the provision of a temporary accommodation hostel in the District, including associated costs and permissions	Provide a temporary accommodation hostel in the district by 31/3/13	HSO and SHHAO	Additional resources required	Reduction in use of bed and breakfast
Make a difference to our people	Maximise service resources	8	Review the policy to recharge applicants in respect of costs incurred for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • bed and breakfast • removals and storage 	Charging policy agreed and implemented by 31/3/12	SHHAO	Within existing resources	Reduced budget expenditure.
Make a difference to our community	Provide a first class service	9	Work with Essex County Council to identify the needs of people with mental health problems in the District	Ongoing	HSO & SHHAO	Within existing resources	The housing needs of people with Mental Health disabilities are understood and actions taken to address them

Rochford District Council – Homelessness Strategy 2011-2014

Corporate Objective	Strategic Aim/ Objective	Action No.	Action required	Target	Lead	Resources	Desired Outcome
Make a difference to our people	Minimise homelessness	10	Increase the number of Gypsy/Traveller sites	14 sites by 2021	HPT	Within existing resources	Demand for Gypsy and Traveller sites met
Make a difference to our community	Minimise homelessness	11	Explore options to increase the hours of Floating Support	Ongoing	SHHAO	Possible budgetary implications	More hours are available and the waiting list is reduced
Make a difference to our people	Maximise service resources	12	Monitor the effectiveness of the Sanctuary Scheme	Review completed by 31/3/2012	HDVO	Within existing resources	Improvements identified and actions introduced
Make a difference to our people	Improve service efficiency	13	Implement the Action Plan resulting from the Homelessness Business Process Re-engineering project	Actions implemented by 1/11/2011	SHM and SHHAO	Within existing resources	Contract procedures in place for bed and breakfast & removals and storage. Protocols & procedures reviewed
Make a difference to our community	Help people to stay in their home, or find a new one	14	Implement the Council's deposit and rent in advance scheme	Ongoing programme - minimum six households assisted per year	SHHAO	Within existing resources	Increased homelessness prevention
Make a difference to our people	Help people to stay in their home, or find a new one	15	Provide loans from the repossession prevention fund	Ongoing	SHHAO	Within existing resources	Increased homelessness prevention
Make a difference to our people	Maximise the use of existing housing stock	16	Return empty properties back into use	Five properties per annum	PEHO	Within existing resources	increased homelessness prevention
Make a difference to our community	Help vulnerable people live in their home	17	Implement Home Maintenance and Adaptation Grants scheme	50 grants per year (subject to demand and available budget)	PEHO	Within existing resources	Improved housing conditions for vulnerable home owners

Rochford District Council – Homelessness Strategy 2011-2014

Corporate Objective	Strategic Aim/ Objective	Action No.	Action required	Target	Lead	Resources	Desired Outcome
Make a difference to our people	Enabled independent living	18	Improve Disabled Facilities Grant Process	Approve applications and install equipment within 43 weeks	PEHO	Within existing resources	Improved customer satisfaction
Make a difference to our community	Help people stay in their own home	19	Refer households to the Citizens Advice Bureau if they qualify for the Mortgage Rescue Scheme	Ongoing	SHHAO	Within existing resources	Increased homelessness prevention
Make a difference to our people	Provide a first class service	20	Develop a close working relationship with Social Services	Ongoing	SHHAO	Within existing resources	Increased homelessness prevention. Referrals are quickly received and resolved

Key:

AHSO	Assistant Housing Strategy Officer
HATL	Housing Allocations Team Leader
HDVO	Housing & Domestic Violence Officer
HHAO	Homelessness and Housing Advice Officers
HPT	Head of Planning & Transportation
HSO	Housing Strategy Officer
PEHO	Principle Environmental Health Officer
SHHAO	Senior Homelessness and Housing Advice Officer
SHM	Strategic Housing Manager



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