



*Alison Stuart  
Head of Legal and  
Democratic Services*

**MEETING** : OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE  
**VENUE** : COUNCIL CHAMBER, WALLFIELDS, HERTFORD  
**DATE** : TUESDAY 6 NOVEMBER 2018  
**TIME** : 7.00 PM

**MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE**

Councillor M Allen (Chairman)  
Councillors D Abbott, S Bull, M Casey, G Cutting, B Deering,  
I Devonshire, H Drake, Mrs D Hollebon, J Jones (Vice-Chairman),  
M McMullen, P Moore, M Stevenson and N Symonds

**Substitutes**

Conservative Group: Councillors D Andrews, P Kenealy,  
C Snowdon and K Warnell

*(Note: Substitution arrangements must be notified by the absent Member  
to Democratic Services 24 hours before the meeting)*

**CONTACT OFFICER: LORRAINE  
BLACKBURN**  
[lorraine.blackburn@eastherts.gov.uk](mailto:lorraine.blackburn@eastherts.gov.uk)  
**01279 502172**

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## DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTERESTS

1. A Member, present at a meeting of the Authority, or any committee, sub-committee, joint committee or joint sub-committee of the Authority, with a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest (DPI) in any matter to be considered or being considered at a meeting:
  - must not participate in any discussion of the matter at the meeting;
  - must not participate in any vote taken on the matter at the meeting;
  - must disclose the interest to the meeting, whether registered or not, subject to the provisions of section 32 of the Localism Act 2011;
  - if the interest is not registered and is not the subject of a pending notification, must notify the Monitoring Officer of the interest within 28 days;
  - must leave the room while any discussion or voting takes place.
2. A DPI is an interest of a Member or their partner (which means spouse or civil partner, a person with whom they are living as husband or wife, or a person with whom they are living as if they were civil partners) within the descriptions as defined in the Localism Act 2011.
3. The Authority may grant a Member dispensation, but only in limited circumstances, to enable him/her to participate and vote on a matter in which they have a DPI.
4. It is a criminal offence to:
  - fail to disclose a disclosable pecuniary interest at a meeting if it is not on the register;
  - fail to notify the Monitoring Officer, within 28 days, of a DPI that is not on the register that a Member disclosed to a meeting;
  - participate in any discussion or vote on a matter in which a Member has a DPI;
  - knowingly or recklessly provide information that is false or misleading in notifying the Monitoring Officer of a DPI or in disclosing such interest to a meeting.

(Note: The criminal penalties available to a court are to impose a fine not exceeding level 5 on the standard scale and disqualification from being a councillor for up to 5 years.)

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East Herts Council welcomes public attendance at its meetings and will provide a reasonable number of agendas for viewing at the meeting. Please note that there is seating for 27 members of the public and space for a further 30 standing in the Council Chamber on a “first come first served” basis. When the Council anticipates a large attendance, an additional 30 members of the public can be accommodated in Room 27 (standing room only), again on a “first come, first served” basis, to view the meeting via webcast.

If you think a meeting you plan to attend could be very busy, you can check if the extra space will be available by emailing [democraticservices@eastherts.gov.uk](mailto:democraticservices@eastherts.gov.uk) or calling the Council on 01279 655261 and asking to speak to Democratic Services.

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## AGENDA

1. Apologies

*To receive apologies for absence.*

2. Minutes (Pages 7 - 16)

*To approve as a correct record the Minutes of the meeting held on 18 September 2018*

3. Chairman's Announcements

4. Declarations of Interest

*To receive any Members' Declarations of Interest and Party Whip arrangements.*

5. Revenues and Benefits - Shared Services (Pages 17 - 44)

6. Homelessness Strategy 2019 - 2024 (Pages 45 - 78)

7. Executive Update by the Executive Member for Housing

*The Executive Member for Housing will provide Members with a presentation.*

8. Work Programme 2018/19 (Pages 79 - 94)

9. Urgent Items

*To consider such other business as, in the opinion of the Chairman of the meeting, is of sufficient urgency to warrant consideration and is not likely to involve the disclosure of exempt information.*

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MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE  
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE  
HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER,  
WALLFIELDS, HERTFORD ON TUESDAY 18  
SEPTEMBER 2018, AT 7.00 PM

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PRESENT: Councillor M Allen (Chairman)  
Councillors D Abbott, S Bull, M Casey,  
G Cutting, B Deering, I Devonshire,  
H Drake, Mrs D Hollebon, J Jones,  
M Stevenson, N Symonds and K Warnell

ALSO PRESENT:

Councillors A Alder, S Bell, G Jones and  
S Rutland-Barsby

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Lorraine Blackburn	- Democratic Services Officer
Claire Carter	- Service Manager - Community Wellbeing and Partnerships
Andrew Figgis	- Economic Development Officer
Jonathan Geall	- Head of Housing and Health
Chris Smith	- Business Engagement

Ben Wood

Manager  
- Head of  
Communications, Strategy  
and Policy

193 EXECUTIVE MEMBER – PRESENTATION

The Executive Member for Development Management and Council Support gave a presentation summarising the results of the Mystery Shopping exercise which had been carried out towards the end of last year. The Executive Member provided an overview of the feedback received.

Councillor N Symonds thanked the Executive Member for her presentation and queried whether the mystery shopping was done before the need to refer to the requirements of the GDPR. It was her view that the dialogue on phone message was too long and that other Councils included an option to opt out by pressing the keypad.

Councillor M Stevenson queried whether the customer services staff taking calls, were permanent and whether training had been given. The Executive Member explained that it was a mixture of staff.

The Head of Communications, Strategy and Policy explained that the point of the exercise was to deliberately ask complicated questions to establish where weaknesses lay and to make sure everyone was equipped to answer questions. He added that the feedback had been very helpful and overall, the results had been positive, but that further work was needed in relation to a uniform and more professional approach.



In response to a query from Councillor B Deering, the Head of Communications, Strategy and Policy explained that over the years, there had been a move from a federated customer service model dealing with service specific questions, to a central customer services approach.

In response to a comment by Councillor G Cutting on call monitoring, the Head explained that it was possible to cut in and listen in on calls but that the Council did not record. Councillor N Symonds explained that it should be borne in mind that answering Council Tax benefits calls could take longer to answer. Councillor J Jones hoped that customer services did not read from a crib sheet and spoke of the need to maintain a friendly approach.

The Chairman, on behalf of Members, thanked the Executive Member of Development Management and Council Support for her presentation.

RESOLVED – that the presentation be received.

194 APOLOGY

An apology for absence was received on behalf of Councillor P Moore. It was noted that Councillor K Warnell was substituting on behalf of Councillor P Moore.

195 MINUTES

It was moved by Councillor M Allen and seconded by Councillor M Casey that the Minutes of the meeting held on 10 July 2018 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman. After being put to the meeting and a vote taken, the motion was declared CARRIED.

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the meeting held on 10 July 2018 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

196 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman welcomed Councillor S Bell, the new Member for Watton at Stone to the meeting.

The Chairman referred to a number of housekeeping issues in relation to the fire alarm, exits, the need to silence mobile devices and the unisex toilets outside of the Council Chamber.

The Chairman also reminded Members of the need to move and second recommendations.

197 DRAFT COMMUNITY TRANSPORT STRATEGY 2018 - 2021

The Head of Housing and Health submitted a Draft Community Transport Strategy report covering the period 2018 – 21. He explained that community transport was an element of Council activities and played a key part of the Council's approach to health and wellbeing in the district, particularly to vulnerable residents. The Services Manager, Community Wellbeing and Partnerships provided an overview of the proposed vision for community transport.

Councillor J Jones welcomed the approach, especially in Buntingford, which he said had poor bus services to the town and outlying villages. Councillor J Jones referred to some voluntary services which struggled to get volunteers especially from younger people.

Councillor S Bull commented that car ownership was lower in Buntingford and that it was in desperate need of

improved transport in the town and villages. He referred to the difficulties people faced to get to clinics and the need for the Council to get behind community transport. Councillor I Devonshire said that it was not just about transport in rural areas in the daytime, as it was needed in the evening.

Councillor G Cutting applauded the approach adding that high car ownership in an area did not necessarily reflect high incomes but could be out of necessity, as family members might work out of the district or work difficult shift patterns. Councillor N Symonds concurred with this viewpoint. She said that Silverleys Ward had the highest car ownership in Bishop's Stortford.

Councillor M Stevenson and the Committee Chairman sought and were provided with clarification in relation to a query about funding the initiative from the viewpoint of start-up funding and over time. Councillor M Casey felt that the budget figures needed more detail, especially in relation to service costs and users.

The Head of Housing and Health explained that what was before Members was an action plan and accepted that it needed more detail. He explained that, initially, the initiative would be funded from capital, some schemes might qualify for match funding and the possibility of using some Section 106 monies.

Councillor H Drake referred to the social isolation people suffered, particularly young people in villages who might not have parents to take them places. The Head of Housing and Health explained that the strategy aimed to enable partners to come forward with ideas which could work in the locality including town and parishes.

Councillor S Bull sought and was provided with clarification on how the strategy would be disseminated to communities.

Councillor K Warnell suggested that more work should be done with schools and the congestion caused by school runs. The Head of Housing and Health confirmed that there were ongoing discussions with the County Council regarding school transport.

The Head of Housing and Health confirmed that the proposal could be managed from existing staff resources.

The Committee Chairman thanked Officers for their summary.

It was moved by Councillor M Allen and seconded by Councillor J Jones that that the recommendations as detailed, be supported. After being put the meeting and a vote taken, the recommendations were declared CARRIED.

RESOLVED – that (A) the contents of the draft Community Transport Strategy be supported and Members' provide comments to the Head of Housing and Health; and

(B) the draft Community Transport Strategy be recommended to Council for approval and adoption.

198 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT VISION: UPDATE 2016/17 TO 2019/21

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The Executive Member for Economic Development submitted a report on the progress made in supporting the Council's economic vision. The Head of Communications, Strategy and Policy provided an overview of the themes

and actions to be progressed. He explained the impact of Brexit and the unknown challenges to be faced in supporting businesses, the need to diversity and expand on progress so far.

The Head of Communications, Strategy and Policy provided an overview of the success of "Launch Pad" and plans to expand the initiative into Hertford and Ware areas and the challenges in finding suitable accommodation.

The Business Engagement Manager acknowledged that ongoing use of Charrington's House would eventually be affected by other local development projects (such as Old River Lane) and that Officers were actively looking more for commercial space in Bishop's Stortford. The Head of Communications, Strategy and Policy referred to the increasing loss of commercial space to residential and how this was being achieved.

Councillor N Symonds sought and was provided with clarification on the criteria and application process for those seeking a place at Launch Pad.

Members acknowledged the success of Launch Pad and supported its vision to expand and search for alternative premises in other towns in the District.

Councillor B Deering supported Officers' attempts to maintain employment space. He referred to the fact that as the Council did not have to pay rent, Launch Pad effectively created a value from "dead" rental space. He endorsed the approach to find suitable premises to expand in Hertford and Ware and urged Officers to work with planning colleagues.

In response to a query from Councillor M Stevenson and widening types of business supported, the Business Engagement Manager explained that the space was designed to support a range of people.

Councillor H Drake supported the view that the scope should be widened and referred to the numbers commuting from Bishop's Stortford and the need to challenge developers when they sought a change of use from commercial to residential on the basis of "no demand".

The possibility of using Northgate End and Old River Lane proposals in Bishop's Stortford as part of the Launch Pad expansion was debated.

Councillor S Bell referred to multi-national companies moving out from London to Cambridge and Stansted Airport and queried the possibility of "piggy-backing" onto these expansion ideas along the M11 corridor. The Head of Communications, Strategy and Policy acknowledged this and said that Officers needed to investigate this further.

Councillor K Warnell commented that 4.5m people commuted from Bishop's Stortford station a year and spoke of the need to try and capture and accommodate some of these commuters.

The Committee Chairman queried whether it was possible to trademark the name "Launch Pad". He thanked Officers for the work done in relation to:

- the Eastern Plateau Rural Development Programme (RDP) and the success in being allocated an additional grant;

- Digital innovation and investment in broadband for rural areas;
- supporting Business Improvement in Bishop's Stortford; and
- Hertfordshire's Visitor economy success.

The Head of Communications, Strategy and Policy referred to the challenges of broadband provision in rural areas and the fact that some areas were not viable to operators. He referred to the fact that Officers were in the process of considering a bid to be a test case for 5G provision alongside others in the Digital Innovation Zone.

It was moved by Councillor M Allen and seconded by Councillor B Deering that the progress made in terms of the Council's Economic Development Vision be supported. After being put to the meeting and a vote taken, the recommendation was declared CARRIED.

RESOLVED – that the progress made in terms of the Council's Economic Development Vision be supported.

## 199 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

The Chairman of Overview and Scrutiny Committee submitted a report setting out the draft Work Programme. The Democratic Services Officer explained that the programme had been amended in the light of suggestions made at the last meeting.,

It was moved by Councillor Mrs D Hollebon and seconded by Councillor D Abbott that the recommendation, as detailed, be supported. After being put to the meeting and a vote taken, the recommendation was declared CARRIED.

RESOLVED - that the work programme be approved.

The meeting closed at 8.50 pm

Chairman .....
Date .....



EAST HERTS COUNCIL

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 6 NOVEMBER 2018

REPORT BY HEAD OF STRATEGIC FINANCE AND PROPERTY AND HEAD  
OF SHARED SERVICE

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REVIEW OF REVENUES AND BENEFITS SHARED SERVICE

WARD(S) AFFECTED: ALL

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## **Purpose/Summary of Report**

To answer the following questions put by Overview and Scrutiny Committee, insofar as they relate to the Shared Revenues and Benefits Service:

1. Are the shared services continuing to ensure consistent & beneficial outcome for East Herts residents?
2. Are the various shared services providing East Herts Council with an on-going financial benefit?
3. For existing shared services, have the financial benefits met?

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR OVERVIEW and SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**That:**

<b>(A)</b>	<b>The value for money assessment of the Shared Revenue and Benefits Service be noted, and</b>
<b>(B)</b>	<b>The Annual report within Essential Reference Paper B on the service be noted and any comments be forwarded to the Head of Strategic Finance and the Head of Shared Services.</b>

## 1.0 Background

- 1.1 East Herts and Stevenage Councils have operated shared Revenues and Benefits Service since 2011, which has successfully delivered both revenue savings and service improvements to the benefit of both authorities.
- 1.2 The original business case for the shared Revenues and Benefits Service was developed around three main objectives:
- Delivery of revenue savings in a full operating year, shared equally between both Councils
  - Strengthen resilience through a larger team
  - Increase capacity to support ongoing service development
- 1.3 The third of these objectives recognised that both Councils shared a requirement to invest in and improve their Revenues and Benefits Services for the future. Agreeing to do this in partnership provided an opportunity to achieve better value for money than undertaking these improvements independently.
- 1.4 Implementation involved the establishment of a primary service location in Hertford, which included transfer of Stevenage staff to East Herts Council and creation of a shared delivery model.
- 1.5 Since its creation the shared Revenues and Benefits Service has delivered a high achieving service that respond and delivers to customers in a timely and positive way. This is evidenced by the annual Shared Service report agreed at the board meeting earlier in the year **Essential Reference Paper B**.
- 1.6 The single service model has increased resilience for both councils in addition to the extra levels of technical capability that can be afforded through the collaboration. Sharing has

also enabled greater economies of scale.

- 1.8 The Shared Revenues and Benefits Service is also continuing to provide an indirect beneficial outcome for East Herts residents. By keeping the cost of providing and developing the service at a level which is affordable, the Council in turn is able to keep down Council Tax increases.

## **2.0 Budget Overview**

- 2.1 The Revenue and Benefits Shared Service between EHDC and Stevenage Borough Council commenced in financial year 2011/12 with EHDC acting as Host Authority. A shared budget was agreed for 2011/12 (based on EHDC and SBC's 2011/12 Revs & Bens budgets)
- 2.2 For 2012/13, and each year thereafter, it was agreed that the shared service would produce an indicative total shared budget for the year. It was agreed that both EHDC and SBC would contribute to the indicative total shared budget in the same proportion as they had contributed to the base budget. It was also agreed that the indicative budget would be further determined by indexation of the costs included in the total shared base budget to reflect growth using indexation formulas set out in the shared service contract document. Historically, there have also been a number of adjustments made to each authority's contribution to the indicative total to then arrive at the Total Budget for the year.
- 2.3 More recently the two councils have been working together to embed a budget based on cost drivers and the actual costs incurred by the service as a whole. Whilst there is currently no reportable outcomes from this piece of work, both Chief Finance officers have committed to a fair and equitable charging basis for the 2019/20 budget.
- 2.4 Initial work has highlighted that the resource share could possibly shift in favour of East Herts budgets.

2.5 It is therefore considered that the Shared Revenues and Benefits Service will continue to provide value for money for both councils in the coming years.

### **3.0 Governance and Control**

3.1 During 2011 a contract was signed for a shared service to be provided for East Herts and Stevenage Borough Council. The initial agreement was based on a 50/50 ownership of the service and a 50/50 split of all the savings realised through the joint working. The Service managed by Head of Revenues and Benefits and included staff members from both councils. The staffing costs and all other delivery costs sit within the East Herts budgets and are split in agreement with both parties.

3.2 The Revs and Bens Shared service is managed through a regular board meeting attended by the respective Chief Finance Officers for each authority and the Head of the Revenues and Benefits service. On an annual basis, this board reports to the member-led Joint Revenues and Benefits Committee

### **4.0 Implications/Consultations**

4.1 Information on any corporate issues and consultation associated with this report can be found within **Essential Reference Paper 'A'**.

Background Papers - none

Contact Member: Geoff Williamson - Executive member  
[Geoff.williamson@eastherts.gov.uk](mailto:Geoff.williamson@eastherts.gov.uk)

Contact Officer: Isabel Brittain – Head of Strategic Finance and Property  
Contact Tel No – 01279 702050  
[isabel.brittain@eastherts.gov.uk](mailto:isabel.brittain@eastherts.gov.uk)

Contact Officer: Su Tarran – Head of Shared Service  
[su.tarran@hertspartnership-ala.gov.uk](mailto:su.tarran@hertspartnership-ala.gov.uk)

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## ESSENTIAL REFERENCE PAPER 'A'

### IMPLICATIONS/CONSULTATIONS

Contribution to the Council's Corporate Priorities/ Objectives <i>(delete as appropriate)</i> :	<p>Priority 1 – Improve the health and wellbeing of our communities</p> <p>Priority 2 – Enhance the quality of people's lives</p> <p>Priority 3 – Enable a flourishing local economy</p>
Consultation:	<i>Consultation not required</i>
Legal:	<i>None</i>
Financial:	<i>All known financial risks have been included in the body of the report</i>
Human Resource:	<i>None</i>
Risk Management:	All risks are included in the body of the report
Health and wellbeing – issues and impacts:	<i>None</i>
Equality Impact Assessment required:	<i>No</i>

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Part I – Release to Press



Agenda item: ###

**Meeting** East Herts Council and Stevenage Borough Council Joint Revenues and Benefits Committee

**Portfolio Area** All

**Date** 25 June 2018



## ANNUAL UPDATE

### NON KEY DECISION

#### 1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 To report to committee the position in the following areas.
- Performance reporting
  - Other challenges
  - Budget outturn

#### 2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 **The report be noted.**

#### 3 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 This report includes an overview of performance in 2017/18 of the Revenues & benefits shared service and details future objectives and challenges.

#### 4. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDED COURSE OF ACTION AND OTHER OPTIONS

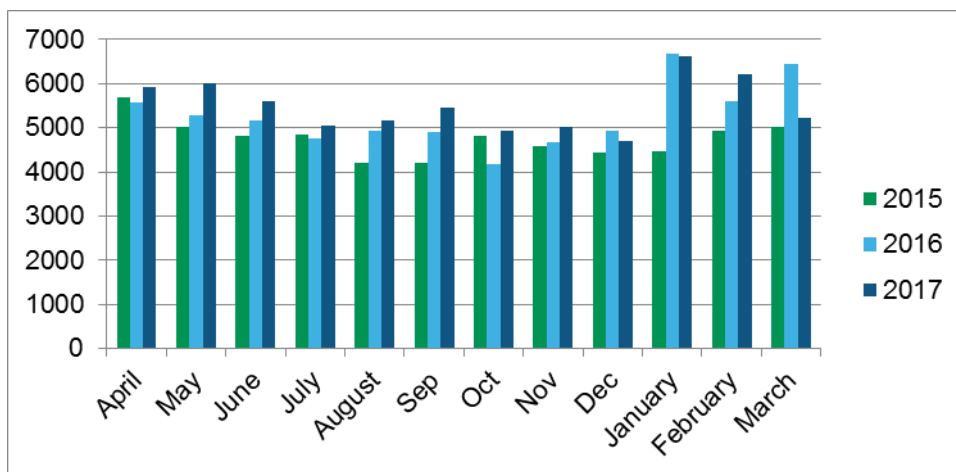
##### 4.1 Housing Benefit

4.1.1 **Housing Benefit processing. (N181)**-This performance indicator measures the average processing time for new claims and changes in circumstances.

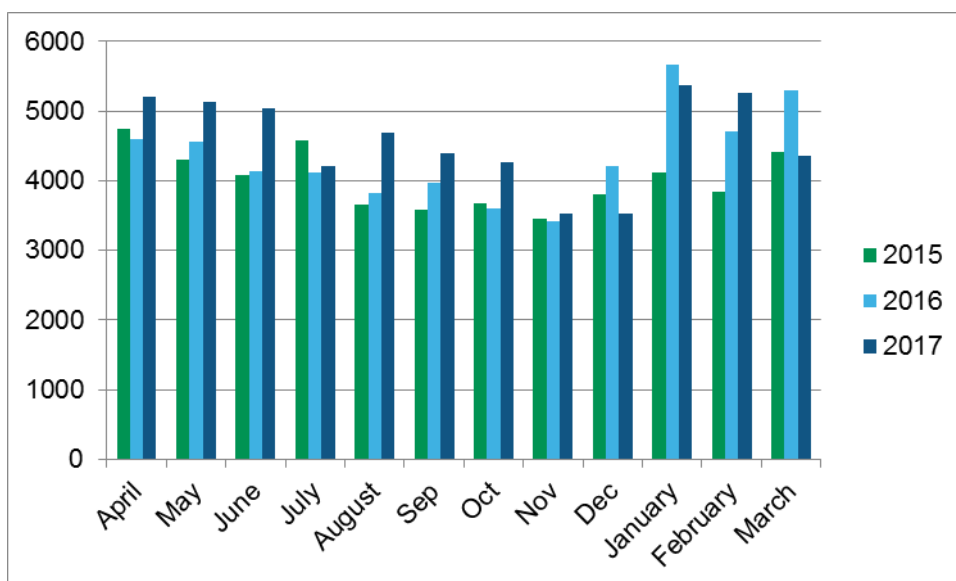
4.1.2 Stevenage N181 was 7.16 days the best result since at least 2009/10. With East Herts N181 of 7.63 days slightly higher than last years at 7.05 days which was the best result since 2008/9. These results demonstrate a harmonising of performance across the two Councils.

4.1.3 This core indicator represent a significant achievement for the shared service in the face of the welfare reforms. The level of work received by the Housing Benefit team increased in 2017/18 despite a reducing caseload. The overall level of HB post received in 2017/18 increased by 5744 items compared to 2016/17, an increase of 4.99%. The following graphs demonstrate the changes.

**Table 1: SBC Housing Benefit work received.**



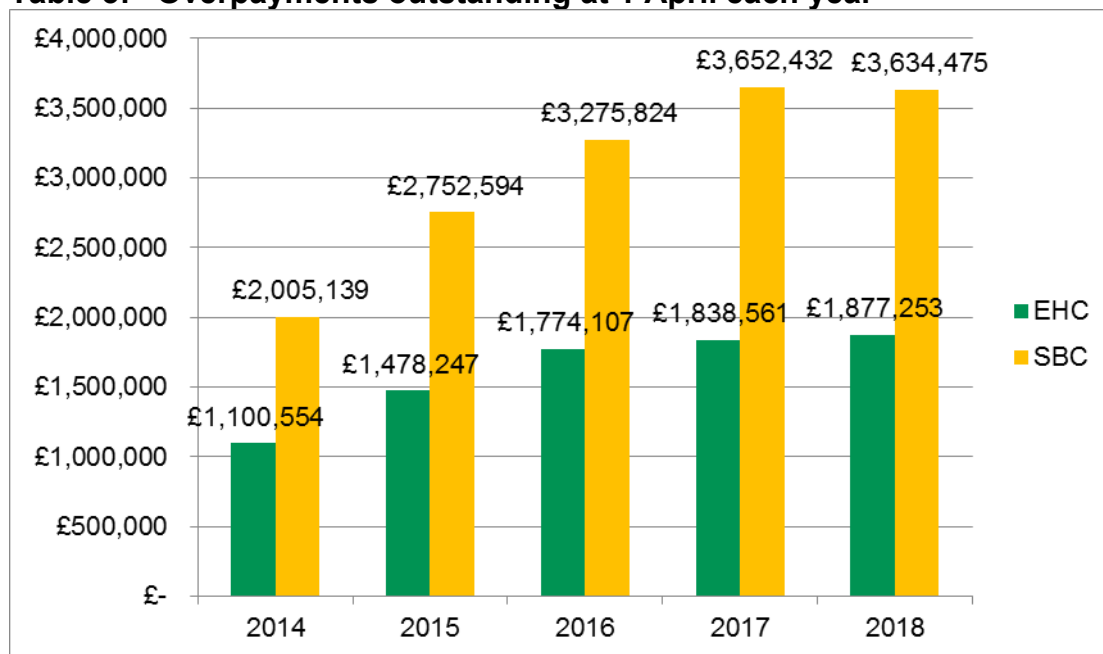
**Table 2: EHC Housing Benefit work received.**



4.1.4 **Housing Benefit subsidy-** The level of Housing Benefit claimed in subsidy reached £65.8m in 2017/18 (subject to audit), less than in 2016/17 (£ 67.6m) and reflecting both the lower caseload and the restrictions on benefit entitlements. (2016/17 £31.7m SBC, and £34.1m for EHC).

4.1.5 **HB Overpayments-**With the level of awards outlined above the value/level of overpayments is a constant pressure.

**Table 3: Overpayments outstanding at 1 April each year**



4.1.6 Whilst the majority of overpayments attract 40% subsidy, there is an increasing burden on the Councils to collect the increasing level of debts. The rates of recovery for those who remain in receipt of Housing Benefit are capped and accordingly many debts will not be repaid for significant periods.

4.1.7 A review of the overpayment collection processes was carried out in 2017/18 and has improved working procedures. This has included the use of enhanced data extract programmes, enabling targeted activity.

**Table 4: Overview of debt status at 31 March 2018**

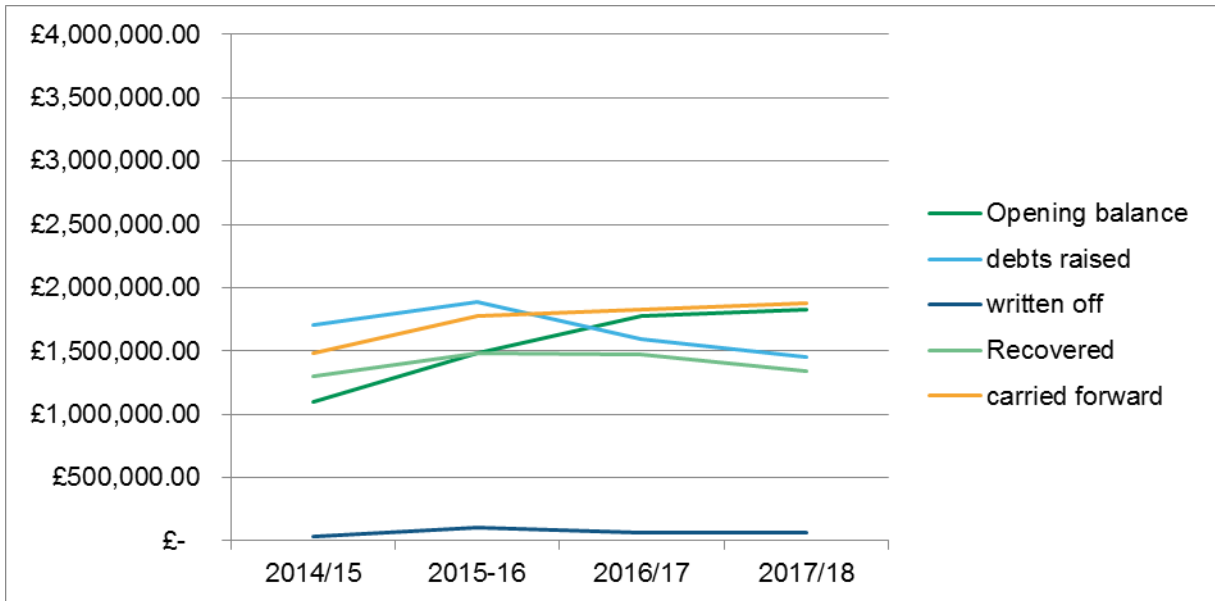
	Stevenage			East Herts	
ALL at 31.3.18	Number	Value		Number	Value
Total	4605	£ 3,633,481		2178	£ 1,877,258
LIVE	1326	£ 1,067,033		802	£ 620,598
DORMANT	3279	£ 2,566,448		1376	£ 1,256,660
LIVE AND CT	757	£ 634,296			

	Stevenage		East Herts	
<b>ALL at 31.3.18</b>	Number	Value	Number	Value
LIVE & PT	569	£ 432,737		
<b>LIVE &amp; FRAUD</b>	52	£ 155,597	51	£ 128,396
LIVE/FRAUD CT	34	£ 111,710		
LIVE /FRAUD PT	18	£ 43,887		
DORMANT CT	1667	£ 1,117,921		
DORMANT PT	1612	£ 1,448,527		
<b>DORMANT FRAUD</b>	196	£ 555,469	147	£ 325,261
DORMANT/FRAUD CT	96	£ 243,833		
DORMANT FRAUD PT	100	£ 311,636		
DORMANT/FRAUD CT	90	£ 268,549		
DORMANT FRAUD PT	108	£ 310,504		

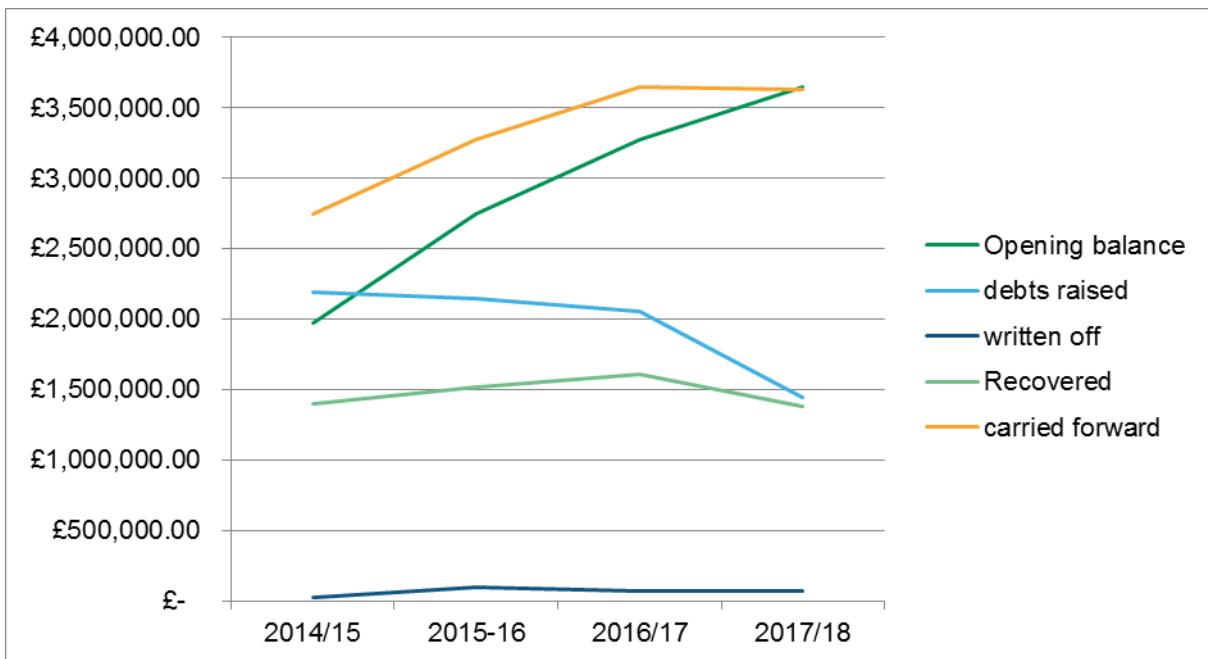
*Note: Dormant means that the debtor is currently not in receipt of Housing Benefit  
CT = Council Tenant, PT = Private tenant*

- 4.1.8 The maximum rates of recovery are often reduced following negotiations with customers and their representatives where there are hardship issues.
- 4.1.9 There are a number of significant risks in relation to the collectability of these overpayments and they include;
- The majority are not in receipt of Housing Benefit following the overpayment being accrued, and recovery is therefore more complex.
  - The transfer of working age claims to Universal Credit will reduce further the shared service's ability to recover from ongoing benefit deduction, as this form of recovery will no longer be available to the service.

**Table 5: Overpayments trends EHC**



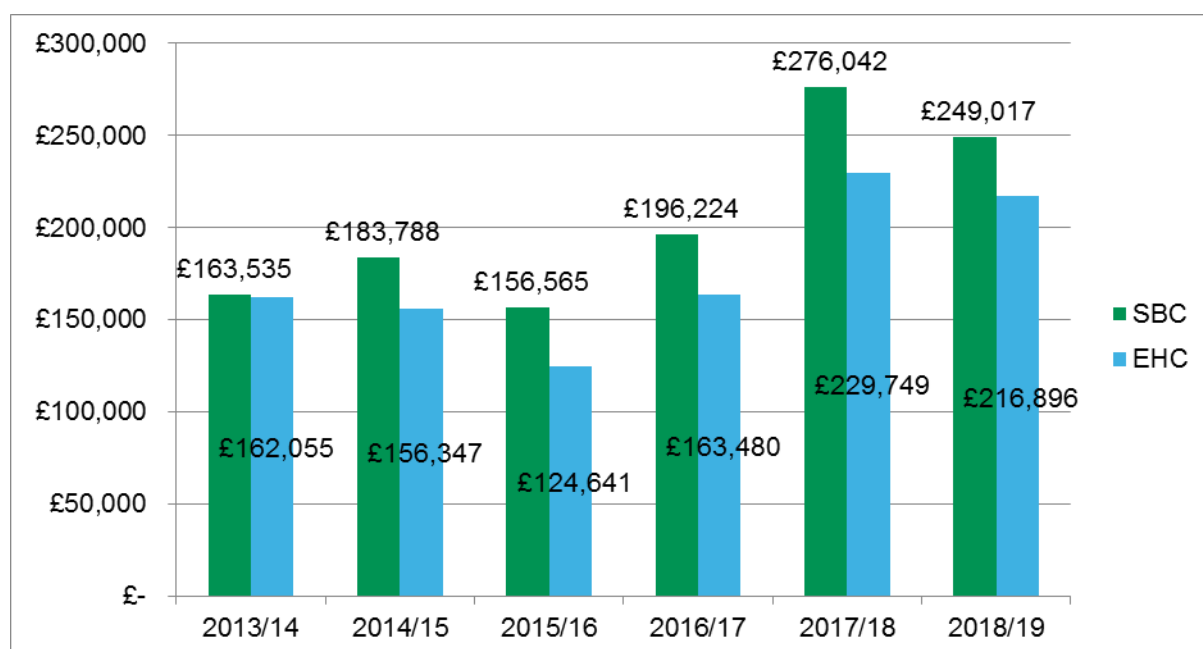
**Table 6: Overpayment trends SBC**



4.1.10 LA's have to suffer the cost of paying out Housing Benefit on which only 40% subsidy is received, as well as the cost of making bad debt provisions against non recovery, in addition to the costs associated with recovery. However bad debt provisions are made on the balances outstanding and these represent 85% at Stevenage and 43% at East Herts.

- 4.1.11 The Government has recognised that its focus in recent years on data matching to identify fraud and error is increasing the level of overpayments that local authorities are carrying. To support recovery of these debts they have just launched a new facility for LA's to access HMRC data to enable recovery by attachment to earnings.
- 4.1.12 Additional short term resources are being employed to support this work which will enable recovery of debts previously considered as potential write offs. Once the current stock of debts has been worked through and recovery established resource needs will be reviewed.
- 4.1.13 **DHP-** The amount of Discretionary Housing Payments grant from the DWP received each year changes, reflecting the priorities that it considers need supporting. This has for the first time been reduced for 2018/19, in contrast to 2017/18 which saw an increase of c40%. Whilst enabling more transitional support to be offered to customers this also puts additional administrative pressure on the officers processing these awards.

**Table 7 Changes in levels of DHP grants from Government**



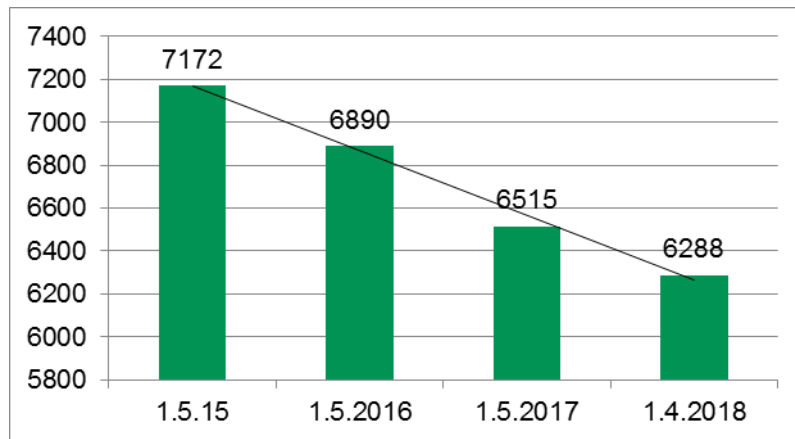
- 4.1.14 The majority of successful awards in 2017/18 reflected pressure on households affected by the spare room subsidy restriction & Benefit Cap. A similar pattern is expected in 2018/19 with additional claims expected for customers on universal credit.

**Table 8: DHP applications**

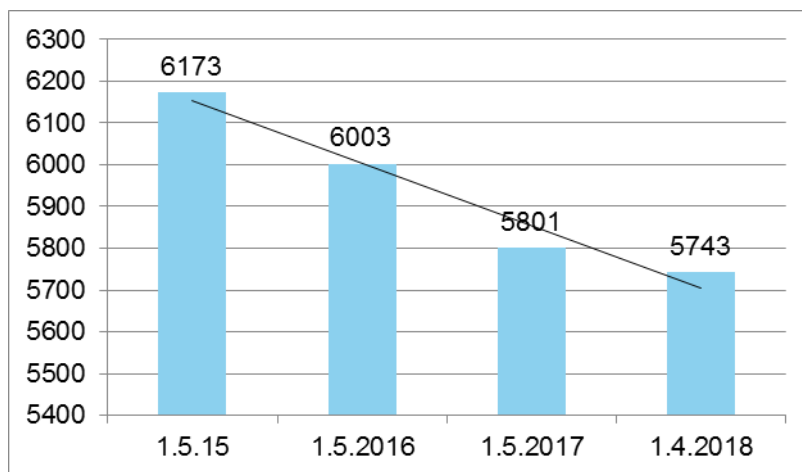
2017/18	SBC	EHC
<b>Received</b>	<b>582</b>	<b>438</b>
<b>Rejected</b>	<b>172</b>	<b>171</b>
<b>Benefit Cap</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>62</b>
<b>Under occupation</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>102</b>

4.1.15 **Housing Benefit caseload**-The following tables demonstrate the changes in Housing Benefit caseload. The number of claimants varies daily with changes in customers employment status. These demonstrate a reduction in 2017/18 of 3.48% (SBC) and 1% (EHC) respectively.

**Table 9 : SBC Housing Benefit caseload movements in 2017/18**



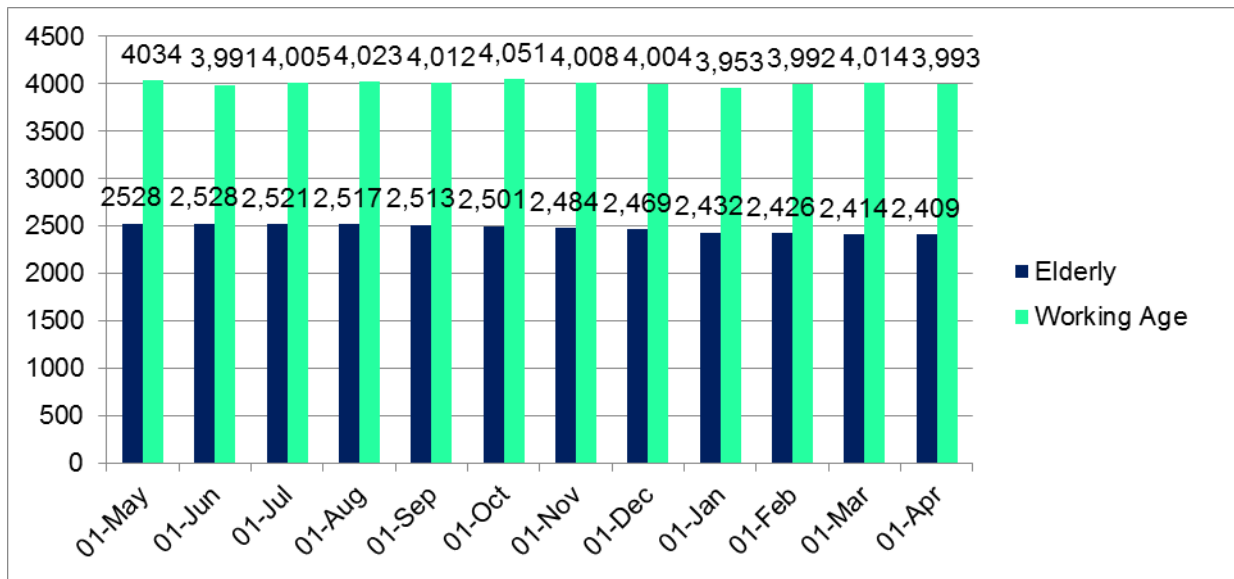
**Table 10 : EHC Housing Benefit caseload movements in 2017/18**



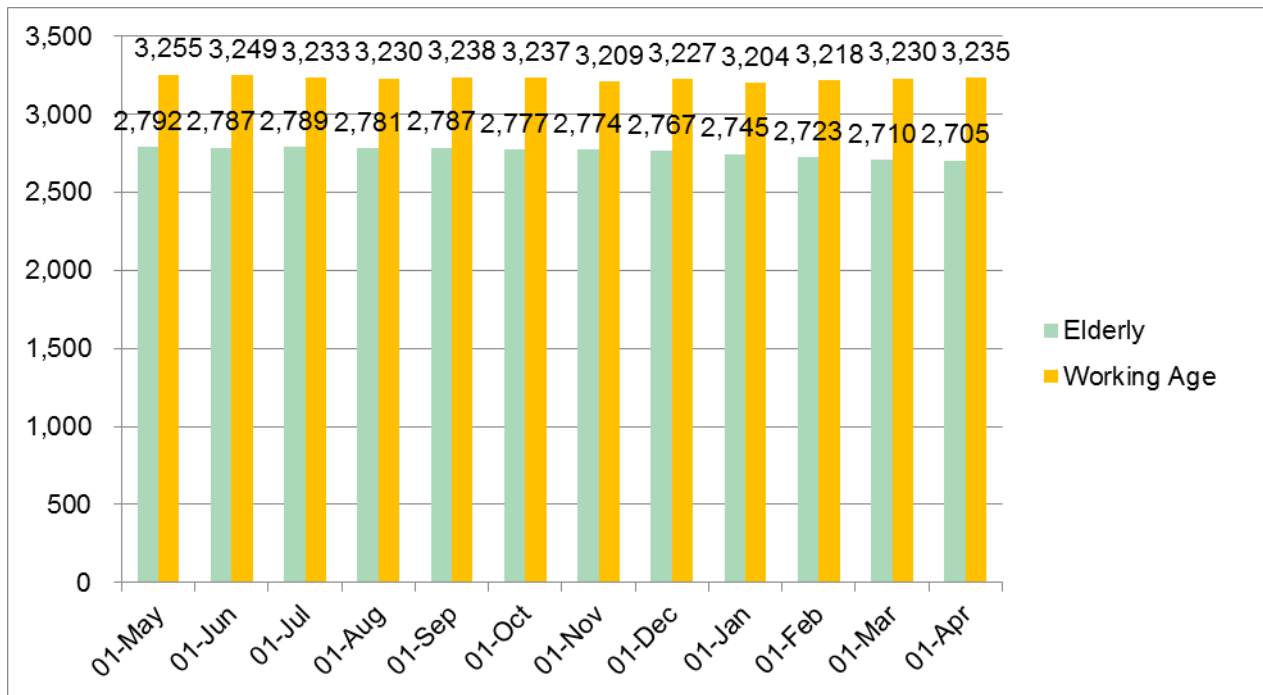
## 4.2 Council Tax Support

4.2.1 Reductions in caseload have been experienced in CTS, although there are variations as more obviously demonstrated on the table for EHC.

**Table 11: SBC CTS Caseload**



**Table 12: EHC CTS Caseload**



4.2.2 CTS cases are far more complex to collect, as variations in awards generate new bills and revise collection arrangements.

4.2.3 Collection rates for CTS are calculated on live claims only, and accordingly are indicative of the overall position. The in-year collection



rates for working age live CTS claims are shown below, compared with the overall collection rate and comparative position at 31.3.2016, 2017 and 2018.

- 4.2.4 All WA CTS reflects the overall working age CTS collection rate for live CTS claims, and MAX WA CTS, reflects the collection rate for that subgroup who only pay the 8.5% liability.

**Table 13: Working Age CTS collection rates**

<b>EHC</b>		All WA CTS	Max WA CTS	General
2015/16		80.00%	71.40%	98.40%
2016/17		79.95%	73.18%	98.40%
2017/18		78.66%	70.49%	98.30%
<b>SBC</b>		All WA CTS	Max WA CTS	General
2015/16		73.13%	67.35%	96.30%
2016/17		76.50%	73.69%	96.60%
2017/18		75.39%	71.27%	96.40%

- 4.2.5 The level of arrears from this group are consequently proportionately higher per household than from those not in receipt of CTS, and accordingly collection is more challenging.
- 4.2.6 Officers are currently testing an alternative CTS scheme for working age claimants for 2019/20 in response to the roll out of universal credit and its impact on council tax collection.
- 4.3 Verification of Earnings and Pensions (VEP)**
- 4.3.1 The government’s anti-fraud agenda continues to impact on the workload of the service. Data matching is received in various forms, including the National Fraud initiative, and the DWP’s Real Time data Information scheme (RTI).
- 4.3.2 The newest iteration, following on from FERIS (Fraud and Error Reduction Incentive Scheme) and RTI (Real Time information) and WURTI (Wider use of real time information) is called VEP.
- 4.3.4 VEP will provide the service with access to earnings and pensions details on line and enable verification. This latest initiative is developing so that every time a customer has a change in earnings etc we will receive an ‘alert’ and be required to amend the customers claim.
- 4.3.5 Once again funding has been received to support LA’s in obtaining resources to carry out RTI & VEP work.

4.3.6 This activity inevitably identifies overpayments of Housing Benefit and Council Tax support which need to be recovered.

#### **4.4 Universal Credit**

4.4.1 Universal Credit went live in this area in February 2016 for a small group of claimants. ( "*single people with no dependent children, who would otherwise apply for JSA*"). However from October 2018 Stevenage and East Herts residents will be in a 'full service' area. This means that with only a few exceptions all new claims for support for working age customers will go to UC, and customers experiencing a relevant change in circumstances will transfer from HB to UC. Bulk transfer of the remaining working age HB cases to UC has not yet been scheduled by the DWP.

4.4.2 The DWP have a partnership agreement with local councils to deliver services in relation to;

- online claiming support, and
- personal budgeting

4.4.3 Funding is limited and for 2018/19 will be paid as a grant based on estimated numbers of customers needing support. If numbers in the second half of the year fluctuate the grant may be amended.

4.4.4 At Stevenage the on line claiming assistance and personal budgeting is provided by the Housing Service, whilst at East Herts the Personal Budgeting is subcontracted to the local Citizens Advice Bureau.

4.4.5 There are still some working age client groups who will not move onto universal credit, including those in temporary accommodation. There remains no indication of any scheme for pensioners who will until further notice remain eligible for Housing Benefit.

#### **4.5 Council Tax.**

4.5.1 The performance measure looks at the proportion of the current years liability collected in that year. For 2017/18 Stevenage collection rate was 96.4%, and East Herts 98.3%. These were marginally lower than 2016/17 and the considerations for this are discussed below. (2016/17 SBC 96.6%, EHC 98.4%)

4.5.2 In 2017/18 the collectable debit for East Herts was £96.3 million, an increase of over £5 million from 2016/17. For Stevenage the collectable debit increased to £43.7 million, increasing by over £2m on the 2016/17 debit.

4.5.3 The number of actual properties in the tax base also increased by 593 between 1.4.2017 and 1.4.18. (524 East Herts and 69 SBC)

4.5.4 Whilst in year collection is the prime performance indicator, considerable work goes into collecting prior year arrears. The table below demonstrates the position for each Council.

**Table 15: Stevenage Council Tax arrears**

SBC	31.3.2018	31.3.2017	prior year change
Pre 2003	£ 2,597	£ 3,686	-£ 1,089
2003-2007	£ 104,791	£ 130,875	-£ 26,084
2008-2012	£ 541,252	£ 699,578	-£ 158,326
2013-2016	£1,667,213	£ 3,007,362	-£ 1,340,149
<b>Pre 1.4.2017</b>	<b>£ 2,315,853</b>	<b>£ 3,841,501</b>	<b>-£ 1,525,649</b>
2017/18	£ 1,380,437		
<b>at 31.3.2017</b>	<b>£ 3,696,290</b>	<b>£ 3,841,501</b>	<b>-£ 145,212</b>

**Table 16: East Herts Council Tax arrears**

EHC	31.3.2018	31.3.2017	prior year change
Pre 2003	£ 7,000	£ 25,847	-£ 18,847
2003-2007	£ 148,013	£ 187,057	-£ 39,044
2008-2012	£ 456,322	£ 588,597	-£ 132,275
2013-2016	£ 1,498,386	£ 2,794,249	-£ 1,295,863
<b>Total Pre 1.4.2017</b>	<b>£ 2,109,722</b>	<b>£ 3,595,751</b>	<b>-£ 1,486,029</b>
2017/18	£ 1,638,651		
<b>at 31.3.2017</b>	<b>£ 3,748,372</b>	<b>£ 3,595,751</b>	<b>£ 152,622</b>

- 4.5.5 The tables demonstrate that significant inroads into prior year arrears were achieved in 2017/18, and whilst some of these were deemed non recoverable and written off, the overall level of pre 2017/18 debt was less than at 31.3.17.
- 4.5.6 The taxbases for each council also produced surpluses for each preceptor as the spend on Council Tax Support was less than expected and a successful review of single person discounts reduce the cost of this mandatory relief.
- 4.5.7 Both Councils have now removed the relief given for properties left empty and substantially unfurnished, and those properties empty and

uninhabitable. Both Councils also apply the 50% premium to properties which have been empty for more than two years. The Government have proposed increasing the premium to 100% but have yet to lay the required legislation.

- 4.5.8 These removed discounts increase the revenue collectable from the taxbase.
- 4.5.9 The service also carried out an in-house review of empty homes, identifying 104 (SBC 21, 83 EHC) which were in fact occupied. The review was carried out in house and a share of the costs, in proportion to the New Homes Bonus award was recharged to Herts County Council (20%). The review also increased the number of properties on which New Homes Bonus could be claimed.
- 4.5.10 The service also carried out a 100% review of all recipients of Single person discounts. Almost 30,000 properties were contacted to confirm entitlement. (EHC 17.6k, SBC 12.3k)
- 4.5.11 As at 31.3.2018, 1,093 properties have had their discount removed and 1,417 penalties have been levied for failing to respond to the review and reminder.

**Table 17: SPD removals and penalties**

SPD	Stevenage	East Herts
Removed	488	605
Penalties £	£ 54,810	£44,380
Penalties - No.	783	634

#### **4.6 Business Rates**

- 4.6.1 The performance measure looks at the proportion of the current years liability collected in that year. Stevenage collection rate was 98.57%, an improvement on 2016/17 (98.07%), and the highest since before 2010/11, and East Herts 98.39, also an improvement on 2016/17 (97.76).
- 4.6.2 The tables below shows some of the headline values at 31.3.2018

**Table 18: Business Rates liabilities and reliefs**

	SBC	EHC
<b>Gross rates</b>	49.4m	54.6m
<b>Transitional reliefs</b>	3m	270k
<b>Mandatory relief</b>	4.8m	9.9m
<b>Discretionary relief</b>	168k	247k
<b>Government funded</b>	23k	285k

<b>specific relief</b>		
<b>Net yield to collect</b>	47.4m	44.4m

**Table 19: Mandatory reliefs granted**

Mandatory Relief	Explanation	SBC 2017/18	EHC 2017/18
Empty (sec 45)	A Mandatory Relief applied to properties which are empty – 3 months for Shop & Offices etc and 6 months for Industrial type properties	£ 1,626,942	£ 1,231,927
Small Business Additional yield	The additional amount paid by any business not eligible for Small Business Rate Relief (i.e. they pay the higher multiplier)	-£ 1,127,968	-£ 936,910
Small Business rates relief	A Mandatory Relief for Small Businesses under £12,000 rateable value	£ 1,774,561	£ 4,997,192
Charitable (Sec 43(5))	A Mandatory Relief where the organisation is a charity or would be considered to be a charity	£2,492,838	£ 4,490,145
Sports Clubs (sec 43(5))	A Mandatory Relief (43(5)) for registered Community Amateur Sport Clubs		£ 71,703
Village Shops	A Mandatory relief to a Post Office or the only General Store, Pub or Petrol Station in a Rural Settlement with a population not exceeding 3,000		£ 45,506

4.6.3 In addition to the collection of current year liabilities the Business rates team continue to focus on old year debts. Many of these accrued prior to the localisation of business rates when the impact of non-collection was less significant than currently.

4.6.4 The focus on this area has produced significant results over the last three years, as demonstrated below.

**Table 20 Reduction in prior year arrears.**

Opening balance of all - year arrears	East Herts	Stevenage	Total	Reduction
1.4.2015	£1,872,516	£ 2,928,693	£ 4,801,210	
1.4.2016	£ 1,919,025	£ 1,736,090	£ 3,655,115	£1,146,095
1.4.2017	£ 1,788,800	£ 1,178,938	£ 2,967,738	£ 687,377
1.4.2018	£1,364,742	£871,897	£ 2,236,639	£ 731,099

Arrears at 1.4.2018	East Herts	Stevenage	Total
pre 1.4.2017	£ 708,290	£ 356,018	£ 1,064,308
in year 2017-18	£ 656,452	£ 515,879	£ 1,172,331
Total	£ 1,364,742	£ 871,897	£ 2,236,639

- 4.6.5 A project to review charitable reliefs was carried out in conjunction with Shared Anti Fraud service (SAFS), which confirmed that the Shared Service records were up to date.
- 4.6.6 The Service is to start a further review of small business rates relief with SAFS to ensure that these are claimed correctly in relation to market information available.
- 4.7 **Discretionary Rate relief**
- 4.7.1 Reviews were carried out on existing recipients to ensure compliance with the new policies. This has now been completed.
- 4.7.2 The Government announced in the March 2017 budget, three new schemes to support business as a result of the 2017 revaluation. These are all administered by local authorities using our discretionary relief powers, but are fully funded by central government. These were carried out and rolled into year two.
- 4.7.3 We are pursuing companies that failed to apply for support but whom we believe should be eligible.
- 4.8 **RV Finder**

- 4.8.1 The importance of identifying the correct rateable values (RV) to maximise the revenue streams to the councils is taken very seriously, and will continue to be a focus as the reliance on this income grows.
- 4.8.2 The Service is currently under contract with a company who use national data sources to identify changes and potential changes in rateable value in the area. Herts County Council contribute to the cost of both the core information system and towards each rateable value identified.
- 4.8.3 In 2017/18, the external company found £116.6k new RV for Stevenage and £151k RV for East Herts. This compares to the in-house team who also identified a further £1,989k new RV for Stevenage and £346.5k for East Herts.

**Table 21: Rateable Value identified during 2017/18**

	<b>East Herts</b>	<b>Stevenage</b>	<b>Total</b>
INFORM	£ 150,900	£ 116,600	£ 267,500
Our Officers	£ 346,570	£ 1,989,275	£ 2,335,845
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>£ 497,470</b>	<b>£2,105,875</b>	<b>£ 2,603,345</b>

- 4.8.4 However there are increasing pressures on the RV across the country. The NHS trusts are still attempting to claim relief on hospitals, and more schools are becoming academies and therefore exempt from business rates.
- 4.8.5 Issues with avoidance and evasion continue, and the shared anti-fraud service still plan to carry out data matching on both LA's data, which may identify useful leads.
- 4.8.6 The service continues to give advice and support to other initiatives, including the potential BID for Bishop's Stortford.
- 4.9 Digital**
- 4.9.1 The service is focused on responding to the need to offer digital solutions for customers engaging with the service. This provides opportunities for 24/7 service delivery and efficiencies.
- 4.9.2 Currently East Herts and Stevenage customers can self-serve a range of services for Housing Benefit, Council Tax and Business rates, these include;
- On line claim for Housing Benefit and Council Tax support
  - E- billing Council Tax
  - E-billing Business Rates
  - Change of address
- 4.9.3 During the coming year, the service intends to expand this on-line service to all customers to include;

- Arrangement Manager- *This module provides recovery staff with the tools to create special payment arrangements quickly and easily in line with our local policies and procedures, Customers can set up arrangements to pay (within parameters)24/7*
- Arrangements e-notifications -*A taxpayer or ratepayer entering into a special payment arrangement can be offered the option of receiving all associated documentation electronically.*
- Digital Discounts and Exemptions-*This module allows us to replace all of our Council Tax forms and dramatically reduce manual updates and customer queries with a single integrated application*

4.9.4 In addition to these modules, a number of other on-line forms have been e-enabled to assist customers. Back office integration with these forms will be a further project.

4.9.5 The take up of self service options is slow, and accordingly both Councils are working together to devise a strategy to increase use of these services. Channel shift from traditional service options to digital routes will be necessary to ensure that these new ways of working become the default. The table below demonstrates some of the movement in take up between July 2017 and March 2018.

**Table 22: Take up of digital options**

	EHC	EHC	SBC	SBC
	Jul-17	Mar-18	Jul-17	Mar-18
<b>Registered accounts</b>	3100	5586	164	1226
<b>Council Tax ;</b>				
<b>Online Direct Debit set up</b>	351	2384	60	726
<b>Online Change of address notification</b>	454	2695	76	492
<b>E Billing</b>	378	726	8	116
<b>Benefits :</b>	112	185	4	43
<b>Landlords</b>	25	34	1	4

4.9.6 Good clear communication with our customers is essential to both encourage and support them through the transition to greater digital interaction. A range of activities have commenced including both Councils communications teams working together on a series of promotional material, raising awareness of what is available and what is 'coming soon'.

4.9.7 All front line staff have to be committed to channel shift and to engage customers at first point of contact to move to digital services where they are able to. Delays have been experienced as this approach requires new ways of working and corporate support is required to engage other service areas in this objective. The objective is to be *digital by default* and



accordingly considerable efforts will be made to engage both staff and customers in the coming year.

#### **4.10 Single Fraud Investigation Service (SFIS)**

- 4.10.1 The DWP's single fraud investigation service subsumed the Benefits fraud team from the 1 May 2015 for both Stevenage and East Herts.
- 4.10.2 New procedures for referring cases to the DWP are in place, but we remain responsible for providing relevant information, carrying out adjudications and the collection of any overpayments generated.
- 4.10.3 The DWP appear to be improving in some areas, and are now carrying out prosecutions in high value cases. Administrative penalties of 50% can be applied to lower value cases, but this is an addition to the value of any overpayment that is to be recovered. This increases the debt that the Council has to recover.
- 4.10.4 East Herts, Stevenage and North Herts, in conjunction with the shared anti-fraud service (SAFS) are part of a national pilot for joint working with the DWP, for the joint investigation of Housing Benefit fraud where there is also a claim for Council Tax support. This places all three LAs in a greatly improved position in relation to HB fraud over the majority of LA's administering HB, and will allow SAFS to access DWP data on housing & tenancy matters (including homelessness/housing applications) where there is suspicion of fraud.

#### **4.11 Service plan objectives 2018/19**

- 4.11.1 The agreed service plan focuses on collection rates and performance in processing Benefit claims, whilst reviewing the access and support offered to customers as discussed above.

#### **4.12 Print & post contract**

- 4.12.1 Following some delays a joint (between both Councils) print & post tender is currently being prepared which will offer options to carry out daily printing and postage off site. Where these options can be taken up savings will be delivered to the shared service.

#### **4.13 Enforcement framework**

- 4.13.1 The service is exploring with other Councils the scope to set up an Enforcement partnership. This is in the early days of discussion and accordingly is yet to be evaluated.

#### **4.14 Supporting customers**

- 4.14.1 The service continues to exploring support for customers in financial difficulty, with a view to early intervention preventing the additional costs of enforcement action being necessary.

#### **4.15 Challenges- Reduction in staff**

- 4.15.1 The business case to resize the service to reflect workloads and pressures from welfare reforms was agreed in 2014. This report supported the

recruitment of a number of staff in both Revenues and Benefits. It also included a proposal to reduce the staff numbers by 4 posts from 31.3.2017. Accordingly these posts have now been deleted. The Revenues team have struggled with the reduced staff numbers (two) and this is reflected in the lower in year collection rate. The number of properties in both areas is increasing and accordingly we continue to seek other efficiencies to maintain capacity.

4.15.2 Whilst there has been some reduction in Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support caseloads the pressure from welfare reforms continues and the increasing importance of Business Rates and Council Tax as income streams has not diminished.

4.15.3 There remains the risk, that with the reduction of staff in these areas that the ability to perform at the levels demonstrated by this report will be severely diminished.

#### 4.16 Freedom of information requests

4.16.1. The service continues to be a focus for many FOI requests, These are time consuming and expensive to respond to. Interestingly at East Herts, the service receives approximately 14% of all FOI's submitted to the Council. Many of these are Business Rates related, where private companies seek information for their business activities.

**Table 23:** Freedom of information requests

	EHC	SBC
2016/17	102	85*
2017/18	82	74*

- SBC have changed recording systems from April 2018 and these are best estimates of prior year enquires.

#### 4.17 Outturn budget for 2017/18

4.17.1 The table below shows the outturn for both 2016/17 and 2017/18, and the initial budget for 2018/19.

**Table 24:** Shared service budgets

	2016/17 OUTTURN	2017/18 OUTTURN	ORIGINAL BUDGET 2018/19
<b>REVENUES &amp; HOUSING BENEFITS</b>	£	£	£
<b>- SHARED SERVICE</b>			
<b>EXPENDITURE</b>			
<b>Employees</b>	3,207,601	3,043,113.37	3,076,000
<b>Transport Related Expenses</b>	16,838	16,015.04	16,350
<b>Supplies &amp; Services</b>	249,899	213,647	242,950
<b>Support Services &amp; Divisional Costs</b>	1,141,730	950,493	1,168,060

<b>Expenditure Total</b>	<b>4,616,068</b>	<b>4,223,268</b>	<b>4,503,360</b>
<b>Income From Other Authorities</b>	1,584,779	1,557,530.15	1,648,500
<b>Section Recharge</b>	3,031,289	2,665,738.00	2,854,860
<b>Income Total</b>	<b>4,616,068</b>	<b>4,223,268</b>	<b>4,503,360</b>

4.17.2 The following table demonstrates the distribution of the underspend between each Council. In addition to these underspend each Council received new burdens funding that was not pulled in to the shared service during the year and accordingly increased the value of the underspends.

**Table 25: Distribution of underspends.**

<b>2017/18</b>	<b>Budget 2017/18</b>	<b>Outturn 17/18</b>	<b>In year underspend (overspend)</b>
<b>SBC contribution</b>	1,594,900	1,525,318	69,582
<b>EHC contribution</b>	2,767,531	2,697,950	69,582
<b>Total</b>	4,362,432	4,223,268	139,164

## **5 IMPLICATIONS**

### **Financial Implications**

5.1 As detailed in the report

### **Legal Implications**

5.2 None

### **Risk Implications**

5.3 None

6. Background Papers None

Contact Members:        *Joan Lloyd, Executive Member for Resources, Stevenage Borough Council.*

*Geoffrey Williamson, Executive Member for Finance and support services, East Herts Council.*

Contact Officer:        *Su Tarran, Head of Revenues & Benefits Shared service  
Contact Tel No 01279 502075*

EAST HERTS COUNCIL

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY – 6 NOVEMBER 2018

REPORT BY EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR HOUSING

THE EAST HERTS HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY 2019-2024

WARD(S) AFFECTED:        ALL

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## **Purpose/Summary of Report**

- **To present to Overview and Scrutiny for consideration and comment, a draft of the Council’s new Homelessness Strategy 2019-24 and to seek members’ endorsement to consult partners on this.**

<b><u>RECOMMENDATIONS FOR OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY:</u> That:</b>	
<b>(A)</b>	<b>Members consider and comment on the draft Homelessness Strategy 2019-2024</b>
<b>(B)</b>	<b>Members endorse consultation on the draft Strategy with external partners and stakeholders prior to seeking approval of its adoption from Council.</b>

### 1.0 Background

1.1 Under the Homelessness Act 2002 all local authorities are required to carry out a homeless review and to develop and publish a strategy based on the review every five years. East Herts published its first Homelessness Strategy in July 2003.

This is the fourth Strategy and is due to run from April 2019 to March 2024.

## 2.0 Report

- 2.1 The Homelessness Act 2002 placed enhanced duties on local authorities to assist homeless and potentially homeless people. One of the key aims of the Act was to ensure that housing authorities take a comprehensive and strategic approach to managing and preventing homelessness in their districts.
- 2.2 The Council's last Homelessness Strategy was adopted and published in July 2013 and the Council and its partners have made significant progress on providing and improving services to those people that are homeless or potentially homeless. The Strategy includes a section on the achievements, by the Council and its partners to improve the Homeless Services provided, since the last Strategy was adopted.
- 2.3 A lot has changed both locally and nationally since the last Homelessness Strategy was adopted. The most significant recent changes that have an impact on the Council's work regarding homelessness have been the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 that came into force in April 2018 the Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016 primarily impacting on benefit eligibility. The Strategy provides more detail on the actual changes resulting from these two pieces of legislation which are likely to have a direct and indirect effect on homelessness.
- 2.4 A draft Strategy has been developed which is included at **Essential Reference Paper "B"**. The Strategy has four objectives around which the Delivery Plan will be developed with our partners. The Delivery Plan will shape the emphasis of the Housing Options Team's work for the next five years. These are:

- Objective 1 - Strong and effective partnership working;
- Objective 2 - Early targeted intervention and advice to prevent the loss of accommodation;
- Objective 3 - Effective action to relieve homelessness and sustain tenancies to prevent repeat homelessness;
- Objective 4 - Protect and increase the local housing options.

2.5 This draft Strategy, including any amendments sought by this Committee, will then be published for consultation for four weeks on the council's website. The document will be sent to our close partners, for example Registered Providers and CAB, requesting comment.

2.6 Following the consultation the Strategy will be amended to take into account the responses from our partners and a finalised draft of the Homelessness Strategy 2019-2024 will be produced.

2.7 A report is then due to be brought to Executive on 12 February 2019 for recommendation that the Homelessness Strategy 2019-24 be adopted by Council at its meeting on 5<sup>th</sup> March 2019.

2.8 A Delivery Plan will then be developed that will be included with the Homelessness Strategy. The Delivery Plan will be monitored by the Homelessness Strategy Group due to be set-up, consisting of internal and external partners impacted by homelessness in East herts and also by way of an annual report to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

### 3.0 Implications/Consultations

3.1 Information on any corporate issues and consultation associated with this report can be found within **Essential Reference Paper 'A'**.

Background Papers

None

Contact Member: Councillor Jan Goodeve, Executive Member for Housing  
Jan.goodeve@eastherts.gov.uk

Contact Officer: Jonathan Geall, Head of Housing and Health  
Neighbourhood Services - Ext No 1594  
[Jonathan.geall@eastherts.gov.uk](mailto:Jonathan.geall@eastherts.gov.uk)

Claire Bennett, Service Manager – Housing  
Services – Ext No 1603  
[Claire.bennett@eastherts.gov.uk](mailto:Claire.bennett@eastherts.gov.uk)

Report Author: Claire Bennett, Service Manager – Housing  
Services – Ext No 1603  
[Claire.bennett@eastherts.gov.uk](mailto:Claire.bennett@eastherts.gov.uk)



## ESSENTIAL REFERENCE PAPER 'A'

### IMPLICATIONS/CONSULTATIONS

Contribution to the Council's Corporate Priorities/ Objectives (delete as appropriate):	Priority 1 – Improve the health and wellbeing of our communities  Priority 2 – Enhance the quality of people's lives
Consultation:	A review of homelessness in East Herts was presented to the Council's quarterly Housing Forum, Chaired by Cllr Goodeve, and attended by internal and external stakeholders. The draft Strategy is to be consulted on for 4 weeks once comments from Community Scrutiny are incorporated into the document.
Legal:	Under the Homelessness Act 2002, there is a legal duty on every local authority to publish a Homelessness Review and Strategy every 5 years. The current Homelessness Strategy runs from 2013 to 2018 .
Financial:	There are no direct financial implications resulting from this Strategy. Any financial implications from the Delivery Plan will be considered either during the council's normal medium term financial planning processes or will be funded from the Homelessness Prevention Grant funds provided by the Ministry for Housing, Community and Local Government.
Human Resource:	None
Risk Management:	The council has a legal duty to ensure it has a Homelessness Strategy in place.
Health and wellbeing – issues and	Homelessness and poor housing conditions have a negative impact on the health of those resident impacted.

impacts:	
Equality Impact Assessment required:	Yes : This will be completed following the consultation exercise and attached to the report to the Executive on 12 February 2019 and Council on 5 <sup>th</sup> March 2019.

# Preventing Homelessness Strategy

2019 - 2024

## **Forward by Housing Portfolio Holder**

Welcome to the Council 's new Preventing Homelessness Strategy for 2019-2024.

This is East Herts' fourth Homelessness Strategy and sets out our approach for tackling homelessness in the District

The Strategy aims to prevent homelessness and ensure that accommodation and support is available for people who become homeless within the District.

Homelessness and poor housing conditions blight lives, damages health and reduce opportunities. They negatively impact communities in significant ways. That is why preventing homelessness is a priority for this Council . We are committed to ongoing investment that delivers tangible benefits to the people we serve.

I believe this Strategy sets out key objectives and provides the framework to enable us to deal with homelessness, clearly setting out the Council 's approach and commitment to tackling this issue over the next 5 years.

The Strategy will concentrate on 4 key objectives:

1. Strong and effective partnership working
2. Early targeted intervention and advice to prevent the loss of accommodation
3. Effective action to relieve homelessness and sustain tenancies to prevent repeat homelessness
4. Protect and increase local housing options

I would like to extend my thanks on behalf of the Council to everyone who has been involved in developing this Strategy.

**Councillor Jan Goodeve**  
**Housing Portfolio Holder**

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## **1.0 Introduction**

The Homelessness Act 2002 introduced a requirement for local authorities to undertake a review of homelessness, including consultation, and to use the results of the review to inform a homelessness strategy.

The Preventing Homelessness Strategy for 2019-2024 (the Strategy) sets out how the Council aims to prevent homelessness and ensure that accommodation and support is available for people who become homeless within the District.

The Strategy is consistent with the Council's current over-arching Housing and Health Strategy 2016-2021 that seeks to improve the availability of suitable housing for local residents, including affordable rented housing that meets a range of locally identified needs.

The Strategy also contributes to the Council's Corporate Strategic Plan 2016-2020 and achievement of the Council's 3 Corporate Priorities of:

1. Improve the health and wellbeing of our communities;
2. Enhance the quality of people's lives;
3. Enable a flourishing local economy.

The Strategy has been developed in consultation with key partners following a review of homelessness in East Herts and takes into account recent developments in housing legislation.

## **2.0 Successes 2013-2018**

Through the previous Homelessness Strategy and Action Plan 2013-2018 the Council and its partners have achieved a number of successful outcomes and improvements to services for homeless persons in East Herts.

### **Housing Options Team**

In January 2018, in anticipation of the implementation Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 in April 2018, the Council re-structured the Housing Options Team to provide additional resources into the prevention and relief work of the team. In addition we used the 'New Burdens' grant from Government to fund an additional Senior Housing Options Officers for a period of two years to ensure there were sufficient resources to deal with the anticipated increase in caseloads and to monitor the work load of the prevention and relief officers.

### **Debt and Money Advice**

The Council funded and continues to provide funding to the East Herts Citizens Advice Bureau for the provision of specialist Debt Advice from within the Housing Options Service through a three year Service Level Agreement. The provision is for two days a week in Hertford and Bishop's Stortford.

### **Homeless Prevention**

Overall the Council prevented 263 households from becoming homeless in 2017/18 and 291 households in 2016/17.

The Council uses the Government's Homeless Prevention Grant flexibly to help prevent homelessness e.g. spend to save payments, paying rent in advance, payments for landlord fees, providing loans to pay off small arrears. In 2017 twenty seven households (14% of the total preventions) had their homelessness prevented as a result of obtaining private sector rented accommodation with assistance from the Council with their deposit and rent in advance. In 2016 the figure was 42 (15% of the total prevention) households. This reduction reflects the increased difficulty in accessing the private rented sector for households on a low income.

The Council also has an agreed Service Level Agreement with Herts Credit Union to provide interest free loans to applicants requiring rent in advance. Part of the agreement is that the Council also pays for the applicant to become of member of Herts Credit Union.

The Council funds, £5,000 each year, to the Schools Intervention Project run by Herts Homeless Group. The project provides lessons through the Personal,

Social and Health curriculum to 14 to 15 years olds on the realities of homelessness and is very well received by the schools that make repeat bookings each school year.

### **Supported Accommodation**

The Council supported, by the provision of land, the building of a new young persons supported accommodation scheme in Hertford by Aldwyck Housing Association. The scheme provides onsite 24 hour supported accommodation for 28 young persons aged 16- 24 in fourteen flats and was completed in October 2012. The Council and Herts County Council work closely together on the referral of young vulnerable people into the accommodation.

### **New Homes**

The Council places a high priority on supporting and enabling the development of new additional affordable and supported housing by housing associations. In 2017/18 there were 162 new affordable homes completed in the District (200 in 2016/17) and the estimate is for over 200 new affordable homes to be completed in 2018/19.

### **Best Use of existing Homes**

In 2017 the Council carried out a piece of work to identify under occupation in both the social and private housing markets. We worked with our local housing associations to identify the level of under occupation in their homes and review the strategies and policies to address under occupation to make the best use of the homes available. The aim is to ensure current tenants are in the homes that best suit their household, make larger homes available to overcrowded households and where a household is affected by welfare reform make their home more affordable to them. Following on from the review two new housing schemes have been developed that have been targeted at older under – occupying households.

### **Joint working**

A Joint Housing Protocol for homeless 16/17 year olds and care leavers was drafted and agreed between all 10 Hertfordshire Districts and Boroughs housing services and Herts County Council . Countywide training joint training was carried out and updates continue to be incorporated as additional legislation becomes operational.

A Joint Housing Protocol for Intentionally Homeless families has also been drafted and agreed between all 10 Districts and Boroughs housing services and the County Council .



### **3.0 National context**

Since the implementation of the previous Homelessness Strategy, there have been significant changes in Housing Policy at a national level.

#### **Legal Framework for Homelessness**

Within a complex legal framework the Council delivers services to people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness. This framework sets out duties it must perform and powers it can exercise with discretion.

The Housing Act 1996, Part 7 has been amended over the years, but remains the primary legislation prescribing how local authorities should deliver services, and what duties they must owe to homeless persons.

The Housing Act 1996, Part 7 has recently been amended by the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. This new Act represents fundamental amendments to the existing homelessness legislation. It introduces new requirements to “prevent” and “relieve” homelessness and in that context, sets out a range of new duties. It was introduced to strengthen and increase the duties owed to all eligible homeless applicants, including those who do not have a priority need for accommodation or who may be intentionally homeless.

The following new duties have been introduced under the Act:

- Duty to assess the housing circumstances, housing needs and support needs of all eligible applicants who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless within 56 days and agree the steps that need to be taken by the applicant or the authority to ensure that they can remain in their current accommodation or can secure and sustain suitable alternative accommodation;
- Duty to assist all eligible applicants who are at risk of becoming homeless within the next 56 days to remain in their current accommodation or secure and sustain suitable alternative accommodation for a period of at least 6 months;
- Duty to assist all eligible homeless persons to secure and sustain suitable accommodation for a period of at least 6 months ;
- Duty on specified public bodies to refer households who are homeless or threatened with homelessness to a housing authority.

The Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016: The Government has introduced a range of welfare reforms as part of its austerity plan. This Act introduces measures that are likely to have an impact upon low income households:

- The maximum amount that a non-working, non-disabled household can receive in state benefits has reduced to £20,000 a year (£13,400 a year for a single adult) outside London;
- A reduction in social housing rents of 1% per year over four years from April 2016.

The Deregulation Act 2015: Some of the measures introduced under the Deregulation Act 2015 were designed to increase the rights of Council and Private Tenants:

- Reduction in the minimum length of time before a Council Tenant acquires the Right to Buy their home from 5 to 3 years;
- Requirement for Private Sector Landlords to provide all new tenants with prescribed information about their rights and responsibilities, Energy Performance and Gas Safety certificates and requirement to protect all tenancy deposits in a Government approved redress scheme ;
- Banning of retaliatory evictions by Private Sector Landlords, meaning that a Section 21 notice cannot be served in response to complaints made by a tenant about disrepair, health and safety or energy performance in a property .

## 4.0 Local context

A review of homelessness within East Herts was carried out to help inform this Strategy.

### Homelessness

Total numbers of statutory homeless acceptances since 2015 are shown below.

	2015	2016	2017
Homeless applications	111	110	92
Homeless Acceptances	70	48	54
Percentage of acceptances against applications	63%	44%	59%

Source: Housing Options Service

The Council accepted as homeless and owed a rehousing duty to 54 households in 2017. 70% of the accepted homeless applications in 2017 were from households containing dependent children or pregnant women and 50% were female lone parent families. There were almost twice as many single male applicants (17%) as single female applicants (9%). 52% of accepted applicants were aged between 25 and 44 years of age, 20% between 16 and 24 and 19% between 45 and 49.

The most common priority need categories amongst the accepted homeless applicants in 2017 were households containing dependent children or pregnant women (61%), vulnerability as a result of mental health problems (11%) and vulnerability as a result of physical disability (17%).

The most frequent causes of homelessness for the accepted homeless applicants in 2017/18 were the loss of assured shorthold tenancy (48%), breakdown of relationship with parents, relatives or friends (21%) and domestic violence (11%).

<b>Causes of homelessness</b>	<b>Number 2017</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Termination of assured shorthold tenancy	24	44%
Parents/friends no longer willing or able to accommodate	11	20%
Non-violent relationship breakdown	4	7%
Domestic violence	4	7%
Other reasons	11	20%

Source: Housing Options Service

One of the ways that central government measures homelessness levels is looking at homeless acceptances per 1,000 head of population. The figure for Hertfordshire for 2012/13 was 2.40 acceptances per thousand population. Data for East Herts shows:

<b>Year</b>	<b>Per 1,000 head of population</b>		
	<b>East Herts</b>	<b>Hertfordshire</b>	<b>England</b>
2016	0.67	2.57	2.54
2017	0.87	2.50	2.41

Source: MHCLG

East Herts has the lowest rate per 1,000 households out of the 10 local authorities in Hertfordshire but the rate for East Herts is increasing.

This homeless assessment is based on data captured under the current statutory framework, before the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 commenced.

### **Temporary accommodation**

The main source of temporary accommodation available to the Housing Service is the Council's Hostel accommodation which has 12 units of self-contained accommodation. It also has some accommodation that it can use for people with mental health issues that is managed by Genesis Housing. In emergency, when there is no other accommodation options available the Council places households into Bed and Breakfast accommodation. In 2017 43 households spent a total of 782 nights in Bed and breakfast accommodation an average of 18 nights per household. The majority of these households were single people.

The total number of homeless household who were residing in temporary accommodation on 31st March 2018 was 25; this is higher than the figure on 31st March 2017 of 14 households. Ten of these applicants were residing within the Council 's homeless hostel and eight were in Bed and Breakfast.

### **Affordability**

East Herts is a very expensive housing market area. House prices are much higher than neighbouring areas and have significantly increased in recent years. The rental market reflects the same trends in terms of increasing cost across both private and affordable rented sectors.

Just over half of the households registered on the Council 's Housing Register are in employment (51%), of which 45% do not receive any welfare benefits.

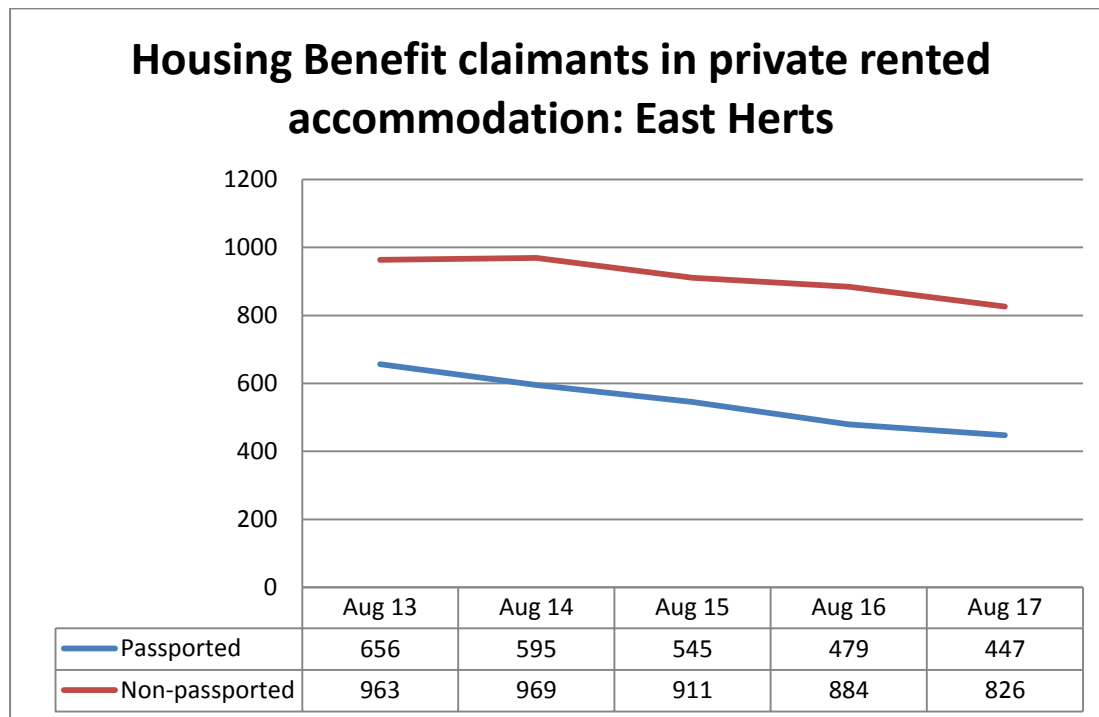
It has become increasingly challenging for residents to secure homes that are affordable for them at open market value. The private rented market has rapidly expanded in East Herts with increased demand from households that are unable to afford to buy property in the district. There has also been a corresponding increase in households homeless as a result of loss of an assured shorthold tenancy (AST). In 2010 eight households were homeless as a result of the termination of their AST by their landlord. In 2017 the number had increased to 24 households.

This increased demand has led to rents increasing faster than pay. Shelter analysed official data from the Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings and the Index of Private Housing Rental Prices. They found that private rents in England have risen by 16% since 2011, outpacing average wages which have only risen by 10% over that period. In East Herts the lag between wages and rents is significantly greater. While rents have gone up by 29%, wages have risen by only 4% (based on two person household with one full time and one part time worker).

Analysis of the LHA freeze carried out by Shelter, puts East Herts 9<sup>th</sup> in the top 10 local authorities outside London with the biggest shortfall between LHA and rent for both families in two bedroom homes, who face a monthly shortfall of £218.66 and single people and couples in one bedroom homes with a monthly shortfall of £172.26.

Demand from households unable to buy, landlords' reluctance to let to HB tenants and the increasing gap between the Local Housing Allowance rate and rents have contributed to a significant drop in the proportion of private rented sector tenants that are in receipt of Housing Benefit. Between 2013 and 2017

there was 22% (346 households) reduction in the number of households in receipt of housing benefit in private rented accommodation.



Source:

The Association of Residential Landlord published research they undertook in October 2018 which found that 61% of their landlords that let to tenants on Universal Credit have experienced their UC tenants going into rent arrears in the past 12 months. This is over double from 27% of landlords in 2016, and a significant increase from the previous year where it was 38% of landlords.

They also found that the amount owed by Universal Credit tenants in rent arrears has increased by 49% in comparison to the previous 12 months. This has increased from £1,600.88 in 2017 to £2,390.19. The Association concluded that rent arrears for Universal Credit tenants are likely to be driving homelessness, with 28% of landlords regaining possession of their property from a UC tenant and the primary reason being rent arrears (77% of landlords).

However affordability does not just impact on households within the private rented market. Although most social housing is let at rents at or below the Local Housing Allowance rate, the rent for a number of new build properties is considerably higher.

Most social landlords are performing affordability checks on potential tenants which indicates a recognition that affordability is a significant issue for them.

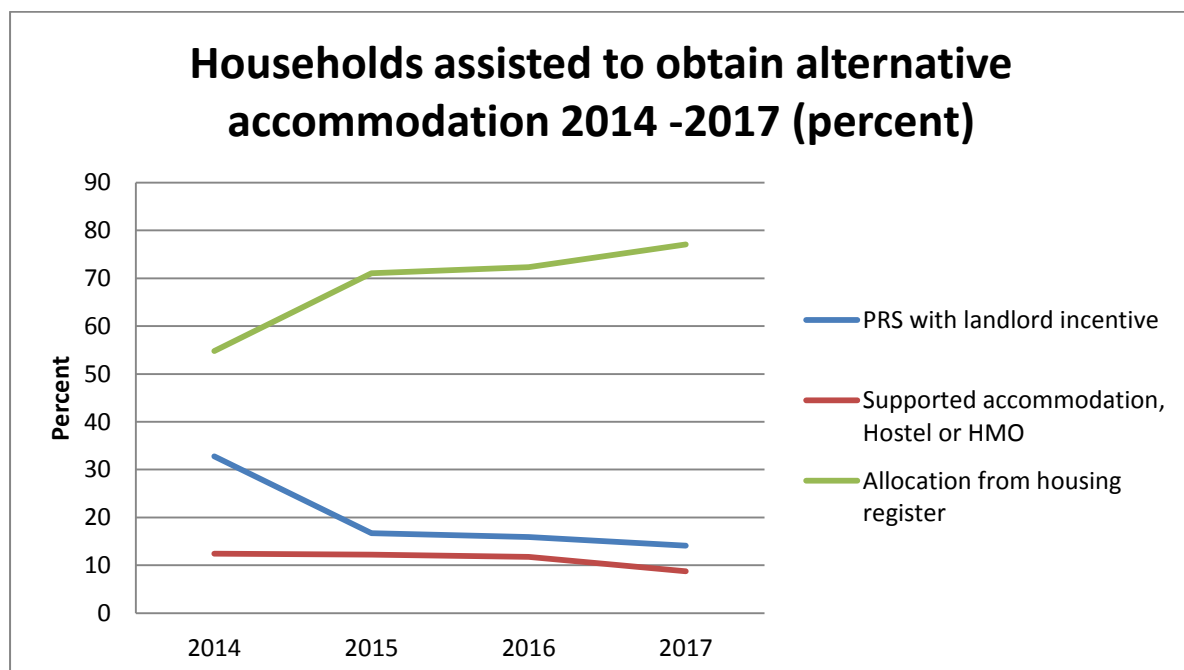
In 2001, 211 of the 348 local authority areas in England and Wales recorded Registered Provider rents at a higher percentage of 10<sup>th</sup> percentile gross salary than East Herts. By 2016 only 13 local authority areas were recorded with RP rents at a higher percentage of 10<sup>th</sup> percentile of gross earnings than East Herts.

Affordability is also becoming increasingly problematic for larger families, with “affordable housing” becoming “unaffordable” for people who need more than 3 bedrooms. This trend is starting to extend to smaller units.

### Social Housing

The inaccessibility of the private rented sector increases the pressure on available alternative, more affordable housing solutions, such as housing association homes let on affordable rents. Demand for Social Housing in East Herts is high, and the number of applicants on the Council’s Housing Register increased from 1,411 on 1st April 2014 to 2,048 on 1st April 2018 (an increase of 45%).

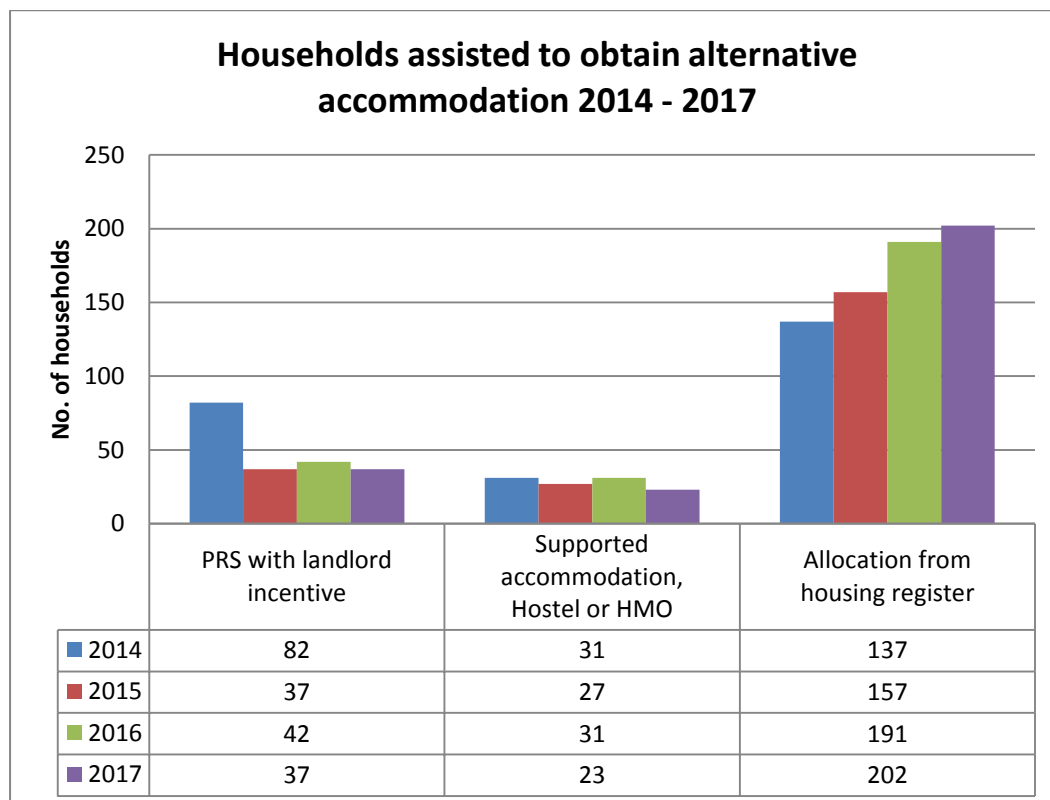
An allocation to social housing is playing an ever increasing role in the prevention of homelessness. While the number of households that have had their homelessness prevented has remained fairly constant, the proportion of households having their homelessness prevented through an allocation to social housing increased from 55% to 77% between 2014 and 2017.



Source: Housing Options Service

## Homeless prevention

There has been a significant decrease in the number of households whose homelessness is prevented through securing a private rented sector tenancy. In 2017, only 14% of preventions were achieved through obtaining a PRS tenancy down from 33% in 2014. At the same time allocations from the housing register have seen a corresponding increase up from 55% to 77%.



Source: Housing Options Service

78% of the Council's successful homelessness prevention activity in 2017 was the result of securing alternative accommodation for people. The majority of these preventions related to nominations to housing associations accommodation from the Council's housing register.

## Rough Sleeping

East Herts continues to report low levels of rough sleeping. All local authorities have to submit an annual figure to central government indicating the numbers of people sleeping rough in their area on a single 'typical' night.

Rough sleepers are people bedded down in the open air – on the street, in tents, doorways, parks, bus shelters or encampments. It also covers people in buildings or other places not designed for habitation - such as stairwells, barns, sheds, car parks, and cars.



Local authorities can decide whether to submit an estimate or carry out a count. Due to the district's rural nature and geographical size East Herts submit an estimate. In November 2017 our estimate was three.

The Holy Trinity Church in Bishop's Stortford has provided a winter shelter for rough sleepers since 2015-2016 in which they have accommodated at least 10 (a number of which were from outside of East Herts) individuals in each of the last 3 years. The Housing Options Service works closely with the Shelter to identify alternative accommodation options for the residents each year. However, rough sleepers often present with complex needs and will need considerable support to secure and sustain settled accommodation.

### **Support Services**

There are risks to wider services associated with reductions in public spending, and the identifiable pressures that exist in other parts of the system. It is reasonable to anticipate these factors will ultimately result in a reduction in spending in services that contribute to the existing safety net, and increasing pressure on the Council's services and those of other partners locally to fill emerging gaps. This reduction in support services ultimately impacts on an individual's ability to sustain a tenancy and their homelessness or repeat homelessness.

## **5.0 Strategic objectives**

East Herts' "Housing Options" approach has been successful at preventing and tackling homelessness. But trends in the housing market are making it increasingly difficult for lower income households particularly in the private rented market. We need to work in new ways, to intervene in people's situations to support them to prevent homelessness in East Herts.

Therefore identifying and securing new ways to access alternative housing options that are suitable and affordable will continue to be a high priority. The Council needs to explore new ways of helping residents, to dramatically increase the number of people for whom interventions result in sustainable outcomes, enabling more people to stay in their homes or to manage in the housing market without requiring ongoing or repeat intervention from public services.

The strategy recognises that it cannot rely on a private rented market that is excluding increasing numbers of people and which is the biggest contributor to homelessness. In addition if we were to rely on the private rented market then it would increase the likelihood that the Council will have to 'export' local people to more affordable housing markets in other areas, if it is to fulfil its legal duties under homelessness legislation now and in the future.

The review of homelessness has recognised that people present to Housing Services for advice and assistance for a variety of reasons. Those reasons are rarely directly attributable to "housing". Whilst the housing market itself is a challenge, they are often a result of people's financial capacity, employment, redundancy, ill health, alcohol and/or drugs misuse, relationship breakdown, or other underlying causes.

Frequently, these underlying causes are not being adequately addressed by the Council, or by the wider network of public services; often this is because the person does not meet relevant service thresholds where the right expertise may otherwise be available, or because we can sometimes – even when trying to operate collectively - work in isolation. Sometimes the person we need to help is considered ineligible by agencies, including ourselves, through our eligibility or qualification criterias. This can prevent services or assistance being provided early enough to prevent homelessness.

The Council has therefore developed four main objectives for this Strategy which are:

1. Strong and effective partnership working;
2. Early targeted intervention and advice to prevent the loss of accommodation;
3. Effective action to relieve homelessness and sustain tenancies to prevent repeat homelessness;
4. Protect and increase local housing options.

### **Objective 1 - Strong and effective partnership working**

Partnership working has always been key to the successful prevention of homelessness in East Herts by working with partners to identify people who may be at risk of homelessness at the earliest opportunity. Strong relationships, referral routes and jointly delivered services will continue to lead to better outcomes for the homeless.

The Housing Service continues to play an active key role in many partnership arrangements in East Herts and more widely in Hertfordshire including:

- Community Safety Partnerships including MAPPA (Multi-Agency Protection Panel) and MARAC (Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference);
- Hertfordshire Children's Strategic Accommodation Board;
- Herts Adult Supporting Housing Board and also the Local East Herts Board;
- Herts Heads of Housing and Hertfordshire Homeless Managers Group;
- East Herts Mental Health Group.

These groups are useful for ensuring best practice and ensuring good networking opportunities are maximised to benefit the work that we and our partners all do to prevent homelessness and develop appropriate services for residents.

### **Challenges**

Many services are seeing increases in demand and pressures, coupled with reductions in funding. This often leads to changes in eligibility criteria and increased thresholds for access to services, resulting in some groups of people "falling through the gaps" and being unable to access services.

There are a number of support agencies, some with supported accommodation within East Herts. It can be difficult for vulnerable people (and the agencies who support them) to navigate between these. Strong joint working between partner agencies can significantly improve the outcomes for vulnerable homeless people. Developing referral processes and relationships, with organisations will offer a more consistent and meaningful offer of assistance to individuals.

The public body Duty to Refer obligations that have been introduced under the Homelessness Reduction Act mean that a larger number of agencies, some of whom may have limited knowledge of the issues affecting homeless persons or the nature of available services, will be required to assist homeless households to access advice and assistance.

## **ACTIONS**

- Work with partners to develop and deliver effective advice, prevention and homelessness services within East Herts.
- Work with partner agencies to ensure efficient referral mechanisms are in place for example food banks to assist customers who may benefit from advice/support to assist them to improve their situation where possible ;
- Re- launch the Homelessness Strategy Group with partner organisations in East Herts.
- Improve housing/homelessness knowledge throughout partner agencies which will enable customers to receive the correct advice/information on housing related issues.

## **Objective 2 - Early targeted advice and intervention to enable residents prevent the loss of accommodation.**

Early identification of problems and the provision of high quality advice and assistance will ensure people have the best chance of staying in their home. Some groups are more likely than others to experience homelessness within East Herts so require advice and assistance that is tailored to meet their needs.

### **Challenges**

Lack of awareness of housing advice and prevention services within East Herts can mean that households do not access assistance until after they have lost their home.

Vulnerable groups may have additional needs and require more specialist advice and prevention services, or more support and encouragement to access or engage with services.

Households may have difficulty adjusting to changes to the benefit system, such as direct payments under Universal Credit, and may suffer financial hardship and homelessness as a result.

Loss of rental income has a major impact on both Social and Private Sector Landlords, who will often need to commence possession action in the event of persistent rent arrears.

### **ACTIONS**

- Review and update all internal processes and procedures to ensure they that they are Homelessness Reduction Act compliant.
- Review the homelessness prevention advice available on the Council's web site and ensure that information is available for vulnerable groups.
- To mitigate the impacts of Welfare Reform and Universal Credit work with internal and external partners to ensure sufficient welfare, debt and budgeting advice is available at the earliest opportunity.
- Devise an early intervention protocol with all Registered Providers to address factors such as rent arrears and anti-social behaviour to prevent evictions where possible.
- Identify with key partners relevant data to identify early risk factors for, groups at risk of homelessness and identify opportunities for early intervention.
- Work with Private Sector Landlords and Lettings Agents to develop early signposting protocols for tenants with arrears or other tenancy concerns, to the Housing Options Service, to prevent homelessness.

### **Objective 3 - Effective action to relieve homelessness and sustain tenancies to prevent repeat homelessness**

Strong and effective pathways ensure that suitable accommodation can be secured as soon as possible. Suitable local temporary accommodation can minimise the negative effects of homelessness, before longer term accommodation can be found.

Many homeless applicants need support to sustain independent accommodation in the long-term. Access to supported housing, transitional, longer-term and crisis support services can reduce the risk of repeat homelessness.

### **Challenges**

There are limited temporary accommodation options within East Herts for households who require accommodation in an emergency. As a result households often need to be accommodated within Bed and Breakfasts that are located outside of the East Herts area, away from their existing networks. There is a need for more suitable temporary accommodation options within East Herts.

There is limited tenancy sustainment services available within East Herts. Many agencies have withdrawn these services because of funding concerns. Vulnerable people can experience difficulties at multiple times during an independent tenancy, which can lead to financial difficulties and tenancy failure. Included within this are a small number of households within East Herts who repeatedly experience tenancy failure and homelessness.

Some tenancies fail because vulnerable people have moved into independent accommodation before they have acquired the necessary skills for independent living.

### **ACTIONS**

- Ensure all eligible households who are at risk of homelessness within 56 days are referred to the Council's Housing Options Team to make a homeless application.
- Continue to review the supply of suitable temporary accommodation within East Herts to ensure sufficient supply.
- Work with partner organisations to review and deliver a rough sleeping offer for East Herts.
- Review the availability in the District of support to vulnerable households, who have difficulty sustaining accommodation, including the availability of supported accommodation and move-on to independent accommodation.
- Review the level of repeat homelessness and work with partner agencies to prevent incidents of repeat homelessness within East Herts.

## **Objective 4 - Protect and increase local housing options**

Demand for the limited amounts of social and supported housing within East Herts is high and most low income households have difficulty accessing the private rental sector as they lack funds or references to secure accommodation in the Private Rental Sector.

The Council aims to work with partners to make the best use of existing resources, improve access to available options, increase supply and identify and address gaps in provision.

### **Challenges**

The majority of Private Sector Landlords and lettings agents are reluctant to accept tenants who are on low incomes or who claim welfare benefits particularly those moving to Universal Credit.

With increased private rent levels and the high cost of buying a home, it will be more difficult to meet the housing needs of households who are unable to access home ownership or accommodation in the private rented sector.

There is demand for more supported accommodation within East Herts, particularly for those who have complex support needs.

### **ACTIONS**

- Work with partners to review current and identify new sources of supported accommodation to meet the needs of groups who are particularly at risk of homelessness in East Herts.
- Increase the supply of affordable social housing within East Herts, particularly accommodation that is let at or below Local Housing Allowance rates.
- Continue to manage opportunities to make the best use of existing Registered Provider housing stock within East Herts.
- Promote and improve the Council's Private rented accommodation offer, working with landlords and letting agents.

## **6.0 Resourcing the Strategy**

In common with other local authorities, the Council has been affected by austerity and year on year reductions in central government grant funding. These have required it to transform and constantly review opportunities to become more efficient.

In a 2-tier area, the Council is also vulnerable to funding decisions that are made by Hertfordshire County Council that can have knock on consequences for district level resources.

Despite these pressures, the Council has continued to prioritise its frontline services and has continued to invest in its Housing Services. Homeless Services remain a priority for the Council and it is committed to ongoing work to improve the way we engage and support people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless.

The Council has targeted the use of the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Government "Preventing Homelessness Grant" funding and "Flexible Homelessness Support Grant" on the front line Housing Service by the recruitment of additional members of staff as well procuring specialist services from partners agencies such as the CAB for Debt Advice and Herts Young Homeless for homeless prevention work in schools as well as directly supporting individual homeless applicants to sustain or secure accommodation.

The Council will continue to seek to capitalise on any additional opportunities to draw down funding into the area to support homelessness and related services, including by supporting our voluntary sector partners to seek funding from sources that may be exclusively available to them.



## **7.0 Monitoring the Strategy**

The Homelessness Strategy Objectives and Delivery Plan will be monitored by the multi-agency Homelessness Strategy Group and the Council's Performance, Audit and Governance Scrutiny Committee.

The Delivery Plan will be reviewed and updated every 6 months to ensure it reflects changes or developments in National or Local Policy or service provision.

The previous national homelessness reporting requirements (known as P1E data) were focused on accepted homeless cases and therefore did not give an accurate picture of homelessness within East Herts. From April 2018, all Housing Authorities have been required to collect and submit detailed case-level performance information relating to all homeless applications (known as H-Clic data). The Council will regularly review this performance information to develop a clearer understanding of the local causes of homelessness and to assess the effectiveness of local services and identify any gaps in provision.

### **Five performance indicators will be used to assess the effectiveness of the Homelessness Strategy:**

1. Number of homeless applications where homelessness is successfully prevented
2. Number of homeless applications where homelessness is successfully relieved East Herts
3. Number of homeless applicants to whom the Council accepts the full homeless duty
4. Number of homeless applicants who are placed into temporary accommodation
5. Number of repeat homeless applications (made within 2 years of original application closure date).

## **8.0 The Delivery Plan**

This Preventing Homelessness Strategy is deliberately focused on action and delivery, through the delivery plan which is attached as Appendix B.

The actions within the Delivery Plan have been consulted on and agreed with our partners. However because the Strategy is a five year document the actions will be regularly reviewed, updated and revised by the Homeless Strategy Group to reflect the current homeless situation and priorities.

*This will be developed based on the agreed Actions following completion and adoption of the Strategy.*

Affordable Rent means rented housing let by a Registered Provider of social housing to households who are eligible for Social Rented housing at a rent of no more than 80% of the Local Market Rent, including service charges where applicable, and upon the approved Financial Terms at a fixed term tenancy for a period not less than that recommended by the social housing regulator

Benefit Cap is a maximum allowance on the total amount of benefit a household is entitled to receive. The Benefit Cap will only apply if a household is in receipt of Housing Benefit or Universal Credit. The applicant's benefits will be reduced if they receive more than the limit that applies for their circumstances - this means they will get less Housing Benefit or Universal Credit.

Couples or households with children the benefit cap is £384.62 per week. The limit for single people with no children is £257.69 per week.

Social Rent means housing let at a periodical rent due at intervals of a month or less without any fine deposit or premium which is let at or below Target Rent and is let on the Registered Provider's standard form of letting as an Assured Tenancy and upon the approved Financial Terms

Fixed term tenancies are a new type of tenancy introduced under the Localism Act 2012 available for registered providers to use from the date of inception of the Act that has a specified term of not less than 5 years or 2 years in exceptional circumstances. Fixed term tenancies can be used for Affordable Rent or Social Rent properties.

Local Housing Allowance (LHA) is the maximum amount of Housing Benefit payable by number of bedrooms in a property in a Local Authority Area. It is updated annually and is calculated using the 30th percentile of market rent for each property size in that local authority area.

Mutual Exchange is a facility that enables a tenant to exchange their property and tenancy with another of their own Registered Provider's tenants or with a tenant of a different Registered Provider.

Registered provider is the term used for housing associations or other private sector developers, local Councils etc. who have registered to provide social housing with Homes England.

Universal Credit is a new approach to welfare to be introduced under the Government's welfare reforms in 2013 phased across the Country. It will be an integrated benefit in place of income support, income-based job seekers allowance, income related employment and support allowance, housing benefit, child tax credit and working tax credit. Households in receipt of universal credit and not in receipt of specific exempt benefits will be subject to the benefit cap defined above.



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EAST HERTS COUNCIL

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY: 6 NOVEMBER 2018

REPORT BY CHAIRMAN OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

WARD(S) AFFECTED: *none*

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## **Purpose/Summary of Report**

- To review and determine Overview and Scrutiny (OS) Committee's future work programme

<b><u>RECOMMENDATION FOR DECISION:</u></b>	
<b>(A)</b>	the work programme shown in this report ( <b>Essential Reference Paper B attached</b> ) be agreed.

### 1.0 Background

1.1 Items previously required, identified or suggested for the OS work programme are set out in **Essential Reference Paper 'B'**.

1.2 Scrutiny committees have the power of influence and are entitled to review and scrutinise the functions of the Council and the decisions of the Executive. The Committee serves as a 'critical friend' and is not a decision-making body but can make recommendations to the Executive.

### 2.0 Report

- 2.1 The draft agenda for 2018/19 meetings of OS Committee is shown in **Essential Reference Paper 'B'**. The timing of some items shown may have to change depending on availability of essential data (eg. from central government) and officers.
- 2.2 Members are welcome to submit a scrutiny proposal at any time by completing a Scrutiny Proposal Form (**Essential Reference Paper 'C'**) providing officers with sufficient information to ensure their specific questions are addressed. The Scrutiny Officer will then liaise with officers and the Scrutiny Chairman to consider the best way to address the subject and complete a scoping document.
- 2.3 Members agreed to extend an invitation to an Executive Member to provide an overview on their portfolio, followed by questions from the Committee at each meeting. The Committee is asked to consider which Executive Members to invite to each meeting for 2018/19.
- 2.4 Members are asked whether there is any training relevant to scrutiny or to the function and remit of the OS Committee that they wish to suggest.
- 3.0 Implications/Consultations
- 3.1 Information on any corporate issues and consultation associated with this report can be found within **Essential Reference Paper 'A'**.

Background Papers: none

Contact Member: OS Scrutiny Committee Chairman: Cllr Mike Allen  
[mike.allen@eastherts.gov.uk](mailto:mike.allen@eastherts.gov.uk)

Contact Officer: Alison Stuart, Head of Legal and Democratic Services  
[alison.stuart@eastherts.gov.uk](mailto:alison.stuart@eastherts.gov.uk)



Report Author: Lorraine Blackburn, Democratic Services Officer  
[lorraine.blackburn@eastherts.gov.uk](mailto:lorraine.blackburn@eastherts.gov.uk)

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## ESSENTIAL REFERENCE PAPER 'A'

### IMPLICATIONS/CONSULTATIONS

Contribution to the Council's Corporate Priorities/ Objectives <i>(delete as appropriate):</i>	<p>Priority 1 – Improve the health and wellbeing of our communities</p> <p>Priority 2 – Enhance the quality of people's lives</p> <p>Priority 3 – Enable a flourishing local economy</p> <p>Effective use of the scrutiny process contributes to the Council's ability to meet one or more of its corporate objectives.</p>
Consultation:	<p>Potential topics for scrutiny are always invited from the Executive and all Members and the public are asked through an annual item in the 'council tax' edition of LINK magazine which is delivered to every household. Members of each scrutiny committee are consulted at every meeting as their work programme is a standing item on the agenda.</p>
Legal:	<p>According to the Council's constitution, the scrutiny committees are responsible for the setting of their own work programme in consultation with the Executive and in doing so they shall take into account wishes of members on that committee who are not members of the largest political group on the Council.</p>
Financial:	<p>There are no financial implications arising from this report.</p>
Human Resource:	<p>Any additional meetings and every task and finish group has resource needs linked to officer support activity and time for officers from the services to make the required input.</p>
Risk Management:	<p>Matters which may benefit from scrutiny may be overlooked. The selection of inappropriate topics for</p>

	review would risk inefficient use of resources. Where this involved partners, it could risk damaging the reputation of the council and relations with partners.
Health and wellbeing – issues and impacts:	The broad remit of scrutiny is to review topics which are of concern to the public, many of which have an indirect impact on the general wellbeing of residents of East Herts.
Equality Impact Assessment required:	Not required.

## Overview & Scrutiny (OS) Committee Work Programme 2018/19 – DRAFT

*[Please note: This is a working document and will be subject to regular amendment]*

Meeting Date	Topic	Lead Officer	Notes
<b>18 September 2018</b>  (Deadline for reports 5 September 2018)	Exec Member Update / Presentation	TBC	
	Update on Economic Development Vision and assessment of Launchpad Pilot.	Ben Wood, Head of Communications, Strategy and Policy	Previous Economic Development updates have gone to OS in the past as the topic was requested by Members in 2017/18 and updates requested.
	Community Transport Strategy	Claire Carter, Service Manager, Community Wellbeing Partnerships	
	Work Programme	Scrutiny Officer	
<b>6 November 2018</b>  (Deadline for reports 24 October)	Shared Services: Revenues and Benefits	Isabel Brittain	Pushed back from September work programme at Head of Strategic Finance's request.

Meeting Date	Topic	Lead Officer	Notes
	Homeless Strategy	Jonathan Geall (Claire Bennett)	Head of Service changed date see email 12 October. Report to Executive 12 Feb and Council 5 March 2019.
	Exec Member Update	Jan Goodeve: Executive Member for Housing	
	Work Programme	Michael Edley: Scrutiny Officer	
<b>20th November 2018</b>  (Deadline for reports 7 November 2018)	Update from Portfolio Holder for Finance & Support Services	Cllr Geoff Williamson; Isabel Brittain, Head of Strategic Finance	to link in with budget report and as joint scrutiny meeting gives opportunity for OS members to have Q&A on this portfolio
	Budget report & Medium Term Financial Plan	Isabel Brittain, Head of Strategic Finance	
<b>NB: THIS IS A JOINT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE</b>	2019/20 Corporate Service Plans	Ben Wood, Head of Communications, Strategy and Policy; Nathan Bookbinder,	<b><u>All heads of service to be present</u></b>

Meeting Date	Topic	Lead Officer	Notes
<b>MEETING (Both OS and PAG Members to attend to scrutinise Budget and service plans)</b>		Policy Officer	
	Annual Audit Letter and External Audit Grants Certification Summary	Natalie Clark, Ernst & Young	Email Natalie Clark EY with report deadline details
	Shared Internal Audit Service (SIAS) Update on Audit Plan	Alan Cooper SIAC, HCC	
	Treasury Management Strategy 2018-19	Isabel Brittain, Head of Strategic Finance; External Auditor from Ernst & Young	
	Work Programme	Michael EdleyScrutiny Officer	
<b>18 December 2018</b>  (Deadline for reports 5 December)	Exec Member Update	Graham McAndrew, Executive Member for Environment and Public Open Space	
	IT – Shared Services	Helen Standen, Director Simon Russell, Head of Shared Service	Report back on shared service arrangements, views from the IT Transformation Manager: consider outsourcing or privatising the

Meeting Date	Topic	Lead Officer	Notes
			service and extraction costs. (OS 10 July 2018)
	CCTV – Shared Service Update	Head of Housing and Health, Jonathan Geall	Report back following completion of the Governance Review (OS 10 July 2018)
	Climate change Strategy	David Thorogood, Environmental Strategy and Development Manager	To consider draft Climate Change Strategy Doc (arising from work of the Climate Change T&F Group). Pushed back from November as T&F meet the day after the November meeting.
	Brexit T&F Group: Sign off ToR and initial recommendations	Nathan Bookbinder, Policy Officer	Requested by Ben in conversation
	Work Programme	Michael Edley: Scrutiny Officer	
<b>5 February 2019</b>  (Deadline for	Update from Executive Member Update	Linda Hersay: Leader	



Meeting Date	Topic	Lead Officer	Notes
reports 23 January 2019)	Customer Complaints	Nathan Bookbinder: Policy Officer	Requested by Ben, email 24/10/18
	Brexit T&F Group: recommendations	Nathan Bookbinder: Policy Officer	
	Work Programme	Michael Edley: Scrutiny officer	

## **Task and Finish Groups**

### **Climate Change**

Lead Officer: David Thorogood, Environmental Strategy and Development Manager

Cllrs: Deering (Chair), Freeman, Woodward, Stevenson, Radford, Reed, Pope

Due to meet June/July 2018 – date TBC

### **Grounds Maintenance**

Lead Officer: Ian Sharratt, Environment Manager – Open Spaces

Cllrs: Goodeve (Chair), Cutting, Reed, Alder, Freeman

Work of the task and finish group concluded at its last meeting on 10 May 2018. Final report to be presented to OS Committee on 19 June.

## **Member Scrutiny Proposals - updates**

- **Impact of Manchester Airports Group (MAG) parking policies on parking in Bishop's Stortford**  
As a result of this scrutiny proposal, the Stansted Airport Parking Complaints telephone number is now listed on the East Herts Council website; officers (Head of Communications, Strategy and Policy and Parking Manager) are now included in all circulation of papers for the Stansted Airport Highways Working Group; two Members of the Committee were invited to attend the Stansted Area Transport Forum on 8<sup>th</sup> March 2018. Officers are engaged with the CEO of MAG in relation to the airport's growth plans and a MAG gave a presentation and Q&A session for Members on 19<sup>th</sup> March 2018.

- **Housing and Vulnerability**

This topic has been considered by officers, who are meeting with the relevant Member Champion on a regular basis to ensure she is updated and to allow discussion of any individual issues arising.

**Other items for 2018/19:**

**Shared Services** – a single item meeting of the committee to be added to the OS work programme to enable the committee to consider this item thoroughly, with officers from Stevenage Borough Council to attend.

**Council Tax support Scheme**– date to be confirmed by S Tarran

**Extra Care Housing** – date to be confirmed by J Geall (as agreed at OS Committee 20 February 2018, Corporate Service Plans item)

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## ESSENTIAL REFERENCE PAPER C

### Scrutiny Proposal form

<b>Name of proposer:</b>
<b>What would you like to suggest for investigation / review by scrutiny?</b>
<b>Why would you like this to be reviewed? (Include the main issues / concerns to be considered)</b>
Please continue on a separate sheet if necessary
<b>What would be the likely benefits and outcomes of carrying out this investigation / review?</b>
<b>Estimated resource implications on staff and councillors (e.g. research group, one-off report, dedicated meeting etc) to achieve the likely outcome.</b> The outcome must be proportionate to the cost of carrying out the review.
<b>Suggested witnesses, documentation and consultation required</b>

<b>Will this investigation / review contribute to one or more of the Council's Strategic Priorities? If so, which (please tick)?</b>	
Improve the health and wellbeing of our communities	
Enhance the quality of people's lives	
Enable a flourishing local economy	
<b>Will this investigation / review meet one of the criteria below? If so, which (please tick)?</b>	
<b>Public Interest:</b> The issue has been identified as a concern by local people	
<b>Impact (Value):</b> The issue will make a significant difference to the social, economic and environmental wellbeing of residents, and has the potential for outcomes that could lead to real improvements	
<b>Relevance:</b> The issue is relevant and does not duplicate existing work being undertaken elsewhere	
<b>Partnership working or external scrutiny:</b> The issue involves moving towards collective action and community leadership	

<b>Would you like to be involved in the investigation / review?</b>	
<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
<b>Date of request:</b>	<b>Signed:</b>

Please return this form to: Scrutiny Officer, East Herts Council, Wallfields, Pegs Lane, Hertford, SG13 8EQ Email: [mike.edley@eastherts.gov.uk](mailto:mike.edley@eastherts.gov.uk)

Please attach draft terms of reference if available: These will need to be signed off by the OSC/PAG in due course.