

# Homelessness Strategy

2015-2020



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## 1. FOREWORD

**Councillor Vivienne Michael**

**Executive Member Community Engagement and Resident Services**

*Mole Valley District Council's (MVDC) previous Homelessness Strategy achieved many positive outcomes for the clients that we serve and for the Council. Two shared accommodation hostel units owned by MVDC were sold, ending the use of long-term shared emergency accommodation for homeless households. In addition to this MVDC assisted a great number of people into the private rented sector, whilst successfully encouraging local landlords to rent to clients below the market rent in exchange for a long, sustainable tenancy. For many households MVDC was able to prevent their homelessness through positive interventions.*

*MVDC has supported local housing associations to develop new permanent affordable homes at an average rate of 50 per year. The Council also supported the Leatherhead Night Hostel to become a Place for Change under the Government's programme. The project is now known as Leatherhead Start and helps those who are roofless and in need of support to get back on the housing ladder and, where needed, into work. Furthermore, MVDC has also helped others who have wanted to get back into employment and training through the Employment Training and Housing Options Scheme (ETHOS), and assisted those with benefit and income concerns through the Citizens Advice Bureau and the Surrey County Council funded GetWise project.*

*Like most local authorities, MVDC faces challenges with the economic climate and the growing demand for affordable housing. The biggest of these challenges is the use of bed and breakfast accommodation when households are in a state of crisis and homelessness. A key focus of our strategy for the next five years is to prevent, where possible, the use of bed and breakfast accommodation for households with children, and, where feasible, to offer self-contained accommodation nearer, if not within, the District. Another challenge will be to prevent any household sleeping rough within the District for more than one night under the Government's 'No Second Night Out' agenda.*

*Achieving the National Practitioner Standard for homelessness services is MVDC's other main focus for this strategy. The Standard provides a structured process to benchmark MVDC's homelessness service and practices against other local authorities nationwide. This should ensure that those in our community who are facing homelessness receive a high standard of service.*

*I am confident that MVDC's Housing Team will rise to the challenges set and that MVDC will be proud of what it is able to achieve over the next five years. .*

**Councillor Vivienne Michael**

## **2. INTRODUCTION**

Mole Valley District Council's (MVDC) previous Homelessness Strategy was a five-year strategy written for 2008 to 2013. The action plan, which resulted from that strategy, and the outcomes to date, are detailed in MVDC's Homelessness Review 2014.

Over recent years homelessness figures which have historically been low within the Mole Valley area have started to rise. This is a direct reflection of the wider economic factors, which have and continue to affect the country. This document is the strategy for the next five years and by adopting the measures within the strategy MVDC hopes to manage the growing number of households approaching it in need of housing advice and assistance.

### **3. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The 2008-13 strategy had a truly optimistic and possibly over ambitious list of actions which we hoped to achieve over the period. Many of the actions, such as providing advice and options outreach within local prisons, linking housing with learning and employment opportunities (through ETHOS programme), joint training and induction sessions with our colleagues in adult social care and mental health services; and the refurbishment of Leatherhead Start (the former night shelter) as a Place for Change have been completed. Other actions, however, have not been possible due to the resources which were required to implement them (such as regular housing options surgeries to family centres) or became no longer relevant, superseded by events County-wide, such as services and accommodation provision for homeless young people. Monitoring the progress of the strategy and implementing some of the actions became victim to the requirement to balance an increase in frontline work, as the Council has faced the effects and impacts on households of the double dip recession. This increase and the work involved in 2013/14 to adopt and implement the Council's new Housing Allocations Scheme contributed to the delay in the production of a new Strategy.

The previous Homelessness Strategy was written during a time when prevention had been adopted as the key approach for local authorities dealing with homelessness. This ethos has continued throughout the last seven years in the face of a growing number of households that are facing financial hardship and potential homelessness. House prices within the district have continued to rise. Debt issues have persisted and this has been accompanied by a growth in the number of relationship breakdowns within households presenting to MVDC. Although households have had difficulty in accessing the owner occupied market, there has not been the predicted increase in mortgage repossession cases approaching MVDC for assistance.

The changing housing market has also led to an increase in the number of 'reluctant' landlords who have approached MVDC for assistance with letting their properties. Although this has helped MVDC in preventing homelessness by having an increased portfolio of private landlords to work with, it has been important not to rely on this supply due to the limited nature of its availability. We are constantly aware of the fact that if the housing market were to pick up, these properties would likely be sold leaving the current private rented tenants homeless. These non-portfolio holding landlords have also needed a higher level of assistance with the process of letting their homes than their business based colleagues. This has led to additional pressures to the Housing Team in ensuring that the process of letting their properties for these landlords is as simple and straight forward as possible.

The number of people on the Housing Register has been relatively static at 1,450 households throughout the last five years due to the concerted efforts of housing staff to ensure that potential applicants have their expectations of becoming social housing tenants managed from an early stage. This has now dramatically reduced to 390 applications since the new Housing Allocation Scheme was implemented in September 2014. The new scheme has increased local connection criteria and applicants must have

a housing need to qualify. It is projected that the figure will possible settle at about 600 applicants.

The number of households approaching MVDC to investigate both their housing rights and accommodation options decreased each month in 2012/13 although at the beginning of 2014/15 the numbers have again begun to rise. In contrast to this, the numbers of households approaching MVDC as homeless has increased by 61% over the last seven years, from 46 cases in 2008/9 to 75 cases in 2012/13. This has led to an increase in the need to accommodate these households in emergency accommodation and, where a statutory duty towards these households has been accepted, the subsequent need to house them in temporary accommodation. Over the last seven years move on from our emergency accommodation stock has been slow as many families exercised choice not to accept offers of accommodation made to them within the private rented sector preferring to wait for social housing which was in short supply. The quest to reduce the use of bed and breakfast accommodation for families has therefore been the biggest housing challenge to face the Council over recent years. MVDC has tried to minimise the use of bed and breakfast accommodation, but in the face of increased need has added to its 19 units of emergency accommodation in the last year (2013-14), and invested to increase the stock to 24. It is a key focus of this Strategy to reduce MVDC's reliance on bed and breakfast accommodation, particularly for families with children, who should not remain in such accommodation for more than six weeks. MVDC has rarely needed to resort to using bed and breakfast accommodation for 16 and 17 year olds.

It is MVDC's responsibility to inform people of their housing rights and options and try and prevent homelessness. Despite the increase in homelessness applications MVDC has continued to be successful in preventing homelessness and over the last six years 399 households have been helped to access private rented accommodation between 2008/9 and 2013/14, compared to 136 in the three years previous.

MVDC has continued to adopt a number of prevention techniques, from the highly successful private rented sector deposit bond scheme – HomeChoice Plus, to referrals to single person hostels and negotiating with families, landlords and mortgage companies. The professional expertise within the team has been maintained and the links with our partner agencies have continued to be strong.

Whilst we have been able to maintain a strong private rented sector option for clients, we should not be complacent about this option. MVDC must look at what extra measures can be put in place to both support and enhance the prevention measures that are already being used.

The challenge facing MVDC over the next five years is to both sustain and improve the level of homelessness prevention in the face of wide ranging welfare reform that is having a significant impact on some low income households. The Homelessness Review 2014 has highlighted some areas where these improvements can be made. The findings of the Review are summarised in the Strategy on page 21. These findings have informed the Homelessness Strategy and the Action Plan for the next five years. As well as improving the service to clients MVDC needs to build upon the joint working with partner agencies and improve the information and training that it provides. The newly adopted Enhanced Housing Options Wizard that gives advice to clients without the need for office interviews needs to be promoted further. In this way we can help as many people as

possible with general advice and in turn free up officer time to concentrate on complex cases. This may also give the team the opportunity to revisit the possibility of providing services included in the last strategy action plan that unfortunately could not be resourced.

The main focus of the Homelessness Strategy is MVDC's pledge to meet the Standard for homelessness services that is sponsored by the Department of Communities and Local Government and is practitioner and peer led. It provides a useful list of targets which must be met, and benchmarking with peers to ensure that we are achieving this. Whilst MVDC is achieving some the criteria, others such as No Second Night Out - a commitment to proactively combat rough sleeping within 24 hours of finding a client in this situation - will be harder to achieve, but must be strived for in conjunction with our partner agencies.

This strategy identifies a realistic set of goals that Mole Valley are seeking to achieve over the coming five year period and by doing so will enable to build upon and enhance the service we currently provide to our community.

## **4. VISION**

The vision for MVDC has three separate elements. The first is to ensure that everyone has access to information on their housing rights and the housing options that are open to them and their household. The second is to ensure the provision of good quality services within Mole Valley for those people that experience homelessness. The third is to ensure that a robust service of homeless prevention can be delivered through joint working with MVDC's partner agencies in the public, private and voluntary sector

*Our vision is to ensure that all households within the community have free access to their housing rights and to information on the housing options that are available to them. We will attempt to prevent homelessness occurring and, with the help of our partner agencies from all sectors, work to identify and tackle the root causes of homelessness whilst providing services and improving resources for those affected.*

## **5. STRATEGIC LINKS**

In order to review the Homelessness Strategy and develop a new five year strategy it is necessary to view it in the context of national, regional and local strategic priorities.

### **Local Strategies**

#### **Mole Valley District Council Corporate Plan 2014/15**

The 2014/15 Corporate Plan is based around three themes of Access to Services, Environment and Value for Money and there are 11 corporate priorities. Priorities in the plan include: ensuring that our residents are supported through Welfare Reform and the emerging Health and Wellbeing agenda; and continuing to provide quality services to our residents, by creating additional income through making better use of property assets. A new corporate strategy will be published in April 2015.

#### **East Surrey Housing Strategy**

The last East Surrey Housing Strategy ended in 2013, and we have moved to a joint position statement. The statement covers Mole Valley, Reigate and Banstead and Tandridge Councils and confirms that our housing priorities have remained largely unchanged and are the following:

- maximising supply
- shaping supply
- making best use of existing resources
- preventing homelessness
- supporting vulnerable people

### **Countywide Strategies**

- Surrey Domestic Abuse Strategy 2013-18
- Surrey Prolific Priority Offenders Protocol 2007
- Surrey County Council 'Confident in our Future' Corporate Strategy 2014-19



## **National Priorities and Strategies**

- National Health Services Act 2006 and Delayed discharges directions 2013
- Valuing People Now – Learning Disabilities 2008-2013
- Criminal Justice Act 2003.
- HM Government Care Leavers Strategy 2013
- Working Together to Safeguard Children 2013
- National Reducing Reoffending Delivery Plan – National Offender Management Service – July 2004
- The National Practitioner Standard for Homelessness April 2013

The Surrey Housing Needs Managers work together across the County to: benchmark performance and indicators; to provide joint district and borough services; develop protocols and joint working with other agencies and jointly bid for funding for homelessness initiatives.

## **6. PROGRESS SINCE THE LAST STRATEGY**

There have been a number of changes to the homelessness service we offer since the last Homelessness Strategy. Further detail is explained below and supporting information can be found within the Homelessness Review 2014.

### **6.1 MULTI AGENCY WORKING AND PREVENTION INITIATIVES**

#### **Continued Close Working with Housing Benefit**

A close working relationship between the Housing and Housing Benefit Teams has enabled greater support for clients in receipt of Housing Benefit. This has been especially relevant since Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) applications have been jointly assessed by both teams and a holistic approach taken to proactively resolving housing issues.

The number of DHP claims has dramatically increased during the first six months of 2014/15, as a result of welfare reforms, which limit the amount of Housing Benefit claimants may receive. It is hoped that with further reforms on the horizon that continuation of this proactive approach will help manage the DHP budget whilst providing affordable housing solutions for households.

Looking to the full implementation of Universal Credit by 2018, when MVDC will no longer be responsible for the administration of Housing Benefit, the Housing Team will face challenges to adopt this same close working relationship with our colleagues in the Department of Works and Pensions. This will be to ensure that claimants are supported through the application process and the same quality of service to our private and social rented landlords and tenants is maintained.

## **Assisting the Non-Statutory Homeless**

Since the last strategy, greater assistance has been offered to households who are considered to be non-statutory homeless through the extension of MVDC's rent deposit bond and rent in advance schemes. This has been made possible through greater use by MVDC of discretionary rent deposit bonds given to this client group. We have also seen an increase in private landlords, who have offered us one bedroom and studio properties through our Home Choice Plus Scheme that we have in turn referred clients to.

MVDC has also supported Leatherhead Start (further information below) in a bid to CRISIS for funding for a rent deposit scheme to cover Mole Valley and Epsom and Ewell. The MoVE scheme was launched in 2013, and assists clients who have stayed in the project, as well as offenders and people aged under 35 with accessing appropriate sized accommodation in the private rented sector, which is generally in shared houses and self contained units. In 2013-14 the MoVE scheme helped several Mole Valley clients into shared accommodation.

## **The Surrey Homelessness Alliance**

In 2012/13 the Department of Communities and Local Government gave Surrey a pot of money to enable all districts and boroughs to work together on combatting single homelessness in the County. This pot of money was divided between eight different tasks which were identified as ways of reducing single homelessness. These eight tasks were:

- To launch a countywide branding for homelessness prevention
- To standardise and enhance existing rent deposit scheme operation across Surrey for both priority and non-priority households
- To introduce a surrey-wide rent deposit scheme for non-priority single households and couples
- To introduce a supported accommodation database to improve access pathways to supported and other accommodation for young people and other client groups over time
- To implement No Second Night Out – a scheme to end street sleeping
- To increase the existing supply of shared accommodation in Surrey
- Coordinate and enhance existing provision for rough sleepers
- To develop a web based housing options and advice assessment service

MVDC has been the only district to develop a new property shared house in conjunction with Riverside Housing and Dorking Charitable Housing Association. Our rent deposit bond scheme expanded in May 2014, to provide deposit bonds for all households who we believe have a local connection with Mole Valley and can sustain a tenancy in the private rented sector. Our biggest challenge is to adopt the No Second Night Out agenda with our partner agencies. We have also entered into a joint arrangement with Guildford BC, Epsom and Ewell BC, Tandridge DC, Reigate and Banstead BC; Woking BC and Waverley BC and Abrisitas (software company) to purchase an Enhanced Housing Options software. This will help us to ensure that all households who wish to receive information on their housing options can do so at any time of the day or night through our Abrisitas housing software on the internet. From November 2013 until April 2014, 172 households had used the options wizard to find out what advice and options may be

available to them. This wizard also feeds in to our ETHOS employment and training project, which is mentioned elsewhere in this document.

### **Completion of the Places of Change Programme for Leatherhead Night Hostel (now known as Leatherhead Start)**

In 2008, MVDC was successful in gaining money from the Department of Communities and Local Government under the Places of Change Programme to refurbish the night hostel and provide additional services. The refurbishment was completed in 2012, and created eight single ensuite rooms and one double and one single room which share a bathroom. Leatherhead Start now provides a 24 hour assessment centre with sleeping facilities and ensures residents have their health needs met and move towards becoming independent, which includes starting work. They also help MVDC with accommodation during severe winter weather.

### **Successes in Preventing Homelessness and the Housing Options Approach**

Despite an increase in households approaching MVDC either actually or potentially homeless, the Housing Team has continued to maintain a high level of homelessness prevention. Further detail can be found in figure 1 below. The links with specialist agencies continue to be strong, and this has been assisted by having agencies such as Surrey Alcohol Drug Advisory Service, the cross authority Employment Training and Housing Options Service (ETHOS), Adult Social Care, Neighbourhood Police Team and the South East Surrey Family Support Team either being based, or hot-desking in MVDC's offices. Table 9 within the Homelessness Review 2014 document evidences the continuing high demand for the office based housing options and advice service. In addition to this, within 24 hours of the on-line Enhanced Housing Options Wizard (EHOW) going live on the MVDC's HomeChoice website, over 20 households had used the tool to investigate what housing options were available to them. MVDC was pleased to receive funding for this tool from the Surrey Homelessness Alliance as detailed above. The EHOW has increased our ability to reach a greater number of members of the community who require housing advice and options who may not be able to come to the Council offices during the working day. For clients who have difficulty in attending the offices and do not wish to use the EHOW, or need further more detailed assistance, this can be given over the telephone by one of the Housing Options Officers, or in some cases by visiting them at home or at another mutually convenient location.

Housing Advice prevention reasons

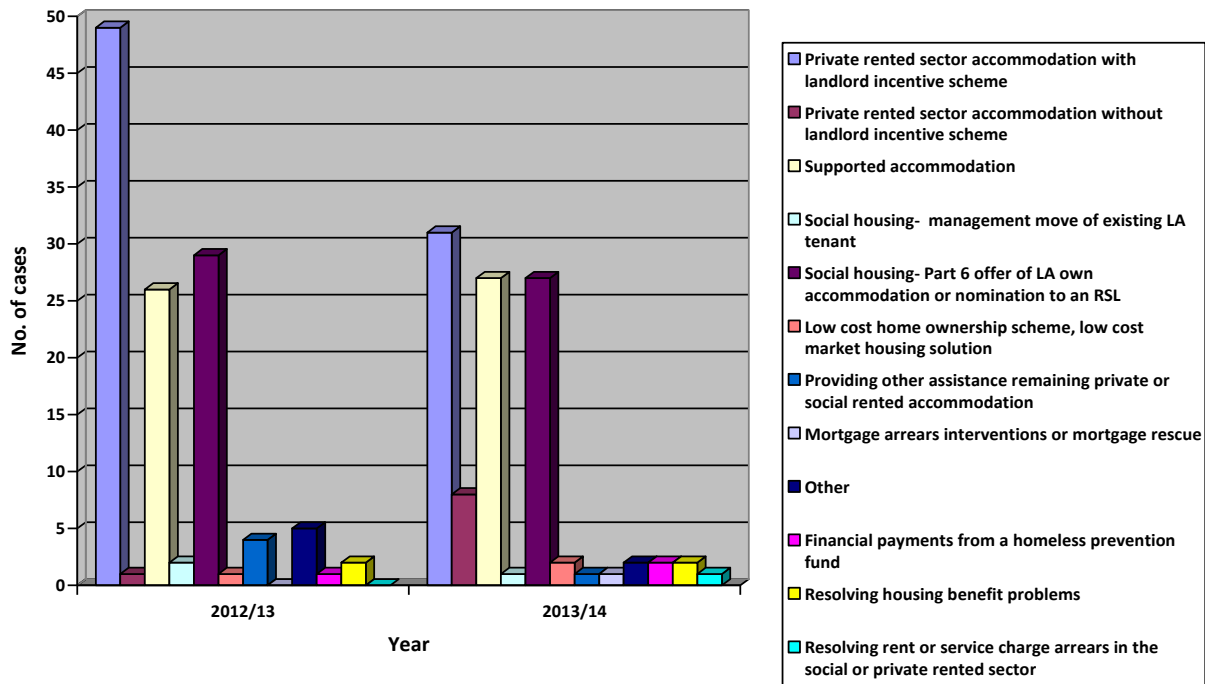


Fig. 1. Housing advice and prevention cases

The full range of options that we are able to assist with are shown in the Homelessness Review in figure 4, and figure 1 above shows how over the last two financial years, homelessness has been prevented. Detailed below are some of the options which continue to be used.

- **Domestic Abuse Sanctuary Scheme** - Through a joint-working arrangement with East Surrey Domestic Outreach Service and Tandridge and Reigate and Banstead Councils, Mole Valley has been able to continue to facilitate a Sanctuary Scheme for survivors of domestic abuse. MVDC annually commits £2000 to support the scheme.
- **Surrey Mobility Scheme** - MVDC remains committed to the joint working arrangement with the other local authorities in Surrey under the Surrey Mobility Scheme, which assists survivors of domestic abuse to move within the county through reciprocal arrangements.
- **Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Committee (MARAC)** - In 2007/8 the nationwide scheme of MARAC's was implemented. A Housing Team representative attends monthly to look at how MVDC can prevent homelessness and assist survivors of domestic abuse with their housing issues.
- **16-17 year olds and care leavers** - Since the last strategy a rapid improvement event was arranged in 2012, by Surrey County Council to address the challenges raised by the G v Southwark 2009 UKHL judgement. The judgement gave clarity on the responsibilities of Children's Services and housing authorities regarding homeless young people. The result of the event was the implementation of a new Youth Support Service for Surrey. The Surrey 16-17 Year Old Young Persons

Protocol, which had been written in 2010, is under review following these structural and procedural changes. It is envisaged that the revised protocol will encompass the already successful Surrey Care Leaver's Protocol 2009. This proactive approach to youth homelessness has ensured a focused service for this client group and anecdotally there have been many successful outcomes of joint working.

- **Prolific and Priority Offenders (PPO) and Neighbourhood Prolific Offenders (NPO)** - In 2007/8, all Surrey local authorities signed up to the Offenders Protocol in conjunction with Probation and the Police. We continue to work closely with the PPO team for South East Surrey. Where a PPO is willing to engage with MVDC, and does not owe MVDC any money through a previous rent deposit bond, MVDC will offer a rent deposit bond and assistance to access private rented accommodation.
- **Homelessness Prevention Fund** - MVDC has continued to adopt a 'spend to save' policy and the homelessness prevention fund is a part of this. This is funding available to assist clients with ad hoc situations that arise, which may be resolved through some small financial input. Where possible any monies spent from the fund are recouped through a repayment scheme with the client.
- **Employment Advice** – MVDC was successful in 2009, with neighbouring authorities Elmbridge, Epsom and Ewell, Reigate and Banstead and Tandridge with a bid to the Department of Communities and Local Government to fund an employment advice scheme for housing options clients. The project is provided by Surrey Life Long Learning and is known as the Employment, Training and Housing Options Service (ETHOS). It is now funded by the majority of the original authorities and three housing associations. The service provides employment advice, CV writing, job clubs and basic numeracy, literacy and digital skills. This is an important service to help people improve their incomes and pay their housing costs.
- **Tenancy Support** - MVDC also refers to generic and specialist tenancy support schemes funded by Surrey County Council to help people maintain their tenancies and prevent homelessness.
- **Supported housing** – Where required MVDC will refer single people to supported housing providers within the district and elsewhere in the country where applicable. The joint working and future housing planning with the agencies is imperative to enable clients to move on when they no longer require this type of accommodation, into either the private rented sector or into social housing. Almost a third of all homelessness prevention cases are resolved in this way.

## 6.2 THE PRIVATE RENTED SECTOR

### Private Renting and Rent Deposit Bonds

This has continued to play a large part in our success in helping to prevent homelessness.

In 2011, MVDC re-launched its rent deposit bond scheme under the banner 'HomeChoice Plus'. Although the original scheme was already successful we were

aware that with a greater reliance on the private rented sector and benefit restrictions, it was necessary to consult with landlords on how the deposit bond scheme could evolve and how we could retain their business. Following extensive consultation the new scheme was launched with two new elements. The original offer of a month deposit bond was still available, however, a further two options were offered, both reliant on the landlord offering a 12 month tenancy. The first option was for the landlord to receive a one off cash incentive to work with MVDC, based on a percentage of market rental value over a 12 month period. The second was to have a six week bond rather than a month long bond.

The relevance of the 12 month tenancy was that under new legislation MVDC could discharge its duty to homeless households with a private rented sector home and this can only be satisfied if the tenancy is a minimum of 12 months in length.

The re-launch of the scheme was held at a local hotel and was well attended. Since the re-launch only one landlord has taken the option of the cash incentive, the majority preferring to have a six week bond (see Fig. 2 below). Interestingly only one of the 16 bond claims from tenancies terminated that have six week bonds have claimed for all six weeks at the end of the tenancy. This small change to the scheme has, therefore, cost MVDC a couple of hundred pounds and at the same time we have maintained a buoyant private rented sector portfolio of landlords.

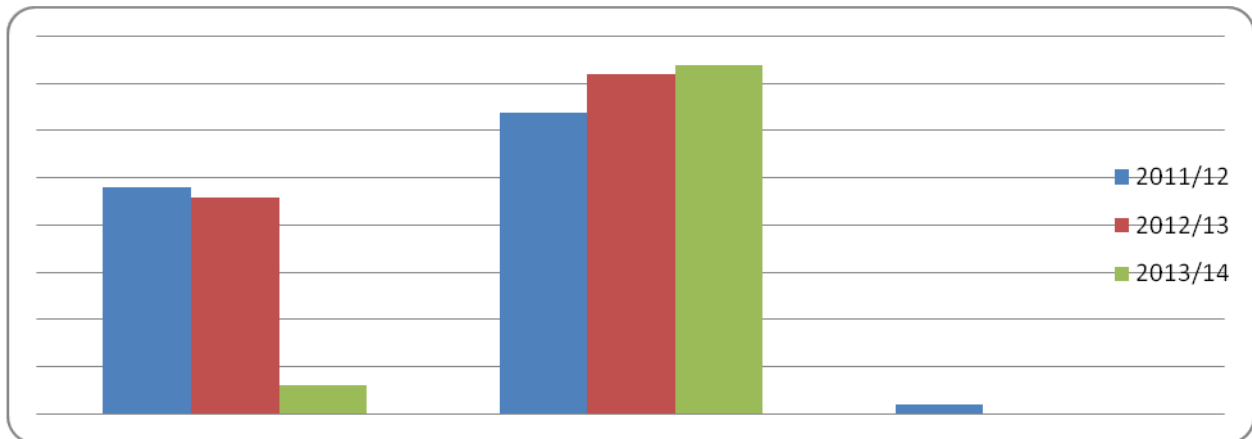
Between 2008/9 and 2013/14 MVDC has assisted 392 households into the private rented sector and avoided the possibility of those households becoming homeless. This in turn has meant less spend required on emergency accommodation for these households or wider costs such as travel costs to school, lost school days and health implications. Of the 158 tenancies which have ended since 2010/11, (some of which dated from the beginning of the scheme in 2005/6), only 81 had a claim made against their bond (25 of which were for less than 50% of the total bond value). This equated to only an 8.7 % spend on the total amount we have committed over the years on bonds. The cost benefits of investing in this scheme are plain to see and this will continue to be the main focus for homelessness prevention over the coming years. We have also in 2014/15 been able to increase the bond offer to eight weeks rather than six to remain competitive in the market place.

The number of deposits given to households to assist them with accessing private rented accommodation is well over a third of those applicants that have submitted homelessness applications and been accepted by MVDC in the previous year.

In May 2014, the scheme was able to widen to assist couples and single people who would not normally be eligible for the scheme. This was as a result of funding from the Government to Surrey which has been distributed through the Surrey Homeless Alliance which is covered in more detail above.

As mentioned above, in 2013, legislation was introduced to enable MVDC to discharge its duty to homeless households into the private rented sector. This move means that households can be offered private rented sector accommodation where they have been accepted as being homeless, and should it be suitable, any duty that MVDC has towards the household will be discharged whether the accommodation is accepted or not by the household. The requirements to satisfy the suitability requirements are more in depth

and far reaching than we have previously required landlords to satisfy such as having carbon monoxide detectors fitted throughout the property. This is a positive move to both ensure that households are moved into suitable accommodation rather than MVDC emergency housing, as well as ensuring that standards within the private sector are met. To date we have discharged two households into the private rented sector, enabling one household to move from bed and breakfast accommodation and the other to move from our own managed emergency accommodation



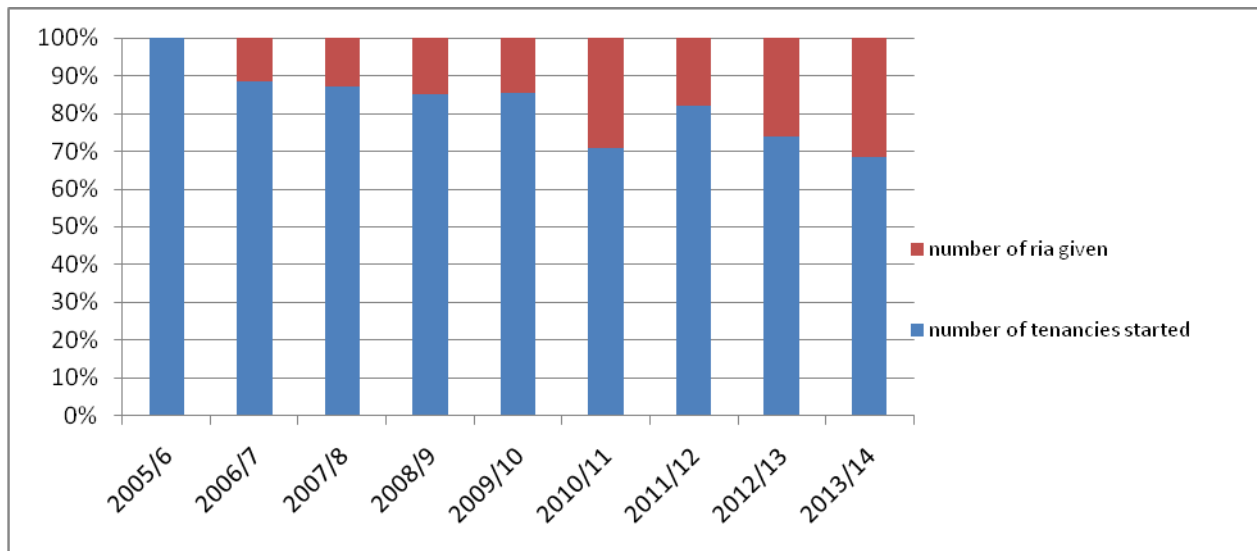
**Fig 2. Graph showing bonds and type given since Home Choice Plus**

### **Rent in Advance Payments**

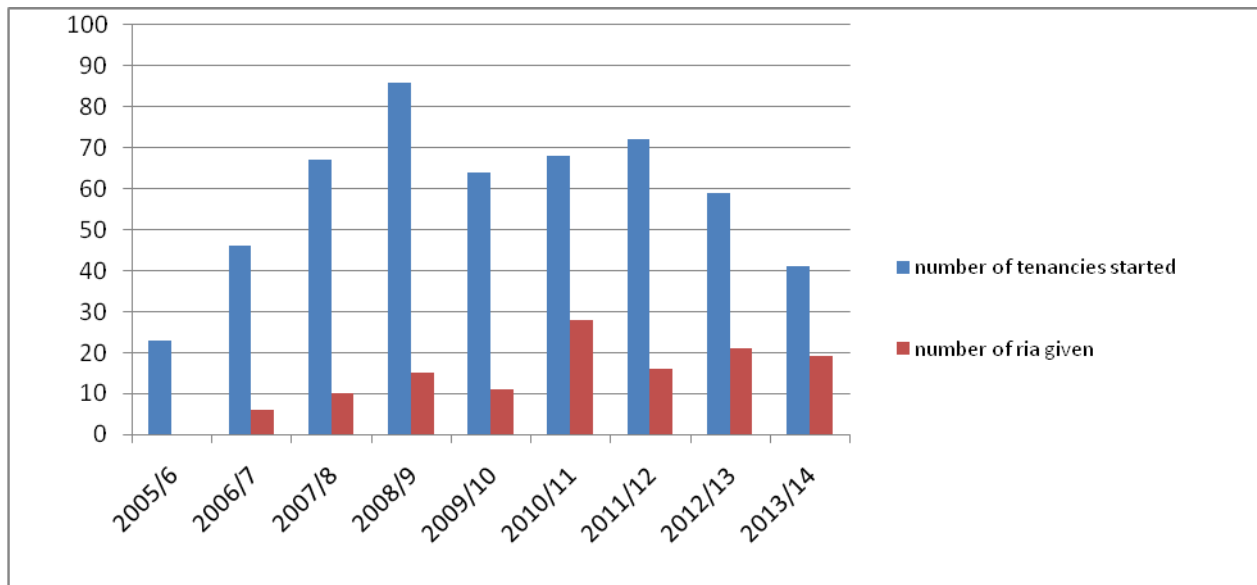
Historically, on limited occasions we assisted clients with rent in advance payments, usually where the client has been unable to request the rent in advance from the Department of Works and Pensions (DWP) through a Crisis Loan. In 2013, the DWP ceased the Crisis Loans arrangement and funding was transferred to Surrey County Council. Their new Local Assistance Scheme provides helpful funding for those in a crisis and setting up home, but does not cover housing payments such as rent in advance. This has led to an increasing demand for rent in advance loans from MVDC that in turn we need to administer and recoup. Where a rent in advance payment has been made, the client must start making regular repayments to MVDC immediately. In some cases MVDC has also been able to assist with letting agent fees. Payments for rent in advance are only made after careful consideration of the individuals' finances and their ability to repay the loan made. In exceptional cases a grant may be awarded.

Fig. 3 and Fig. 4 below highlight the numbers of new deposit bonds that MVDC has provided since the scheme began in 2005/6 and the number of rent in advance payments made.

At the end of 2013/14, MVDC had 168 households in private rented accommodation with both letting agents and landlords direct through our HomeChoice scheme. This compares to the 97 that were in situ when the last strategy was written. Between April 2010 and April 2014, 158 tenancies have ended and claims on the deposit bonds have been made on 81. Of these only 54 had more than 50% of the bond claimed upon. These households are currently repaying all these amounts.



**Fig 3. Percentage of bonds requiring rent in advance**



**Fig. 4. Deposit bonds and rent in advance payments**

MVDC is also a member of the Surrey Rent Deposit Officer’s Forum, which meets on a quarterly basis to look at good practice initiatives and joint working with other Councils. Reading, Hart and Horsham Councils have also now joined this partnership.

### Increased Landlord Liaison

MVDC continues to hold very successful forums with private rented sector landlords. Unfortunately, in 2013 this was only been possible on one occasion although usually it is twice per year. These forums give landlords an opportunity to network as well as be informed on changes within MVDC and nationally in relation to government policy. Guest speakers are also invited to attend. Housing Benefit colleagues are regular attendees.



## **Increased Tenancy Support**

With the growth in the number of clients being assisted into the private rented sector it has been recognised that some of the clients, who would previously have been in our homelessness accommodation, may need support to sustain their tenancies. The re-designated role of Temporary Accommodation and Tenancy Support Officer has therefore been formed to provide this function. All households who have been assisted into the private rented sector with a deposit bond are now visited within the first ten days by them or the Private Rented Officer. They will establish at that meeting how often these sustainment visits will be needed to ensure the smooth running of the tenancy. At any one time MVDC is providing sustainment support to almost 100 clients in the private rented sector.

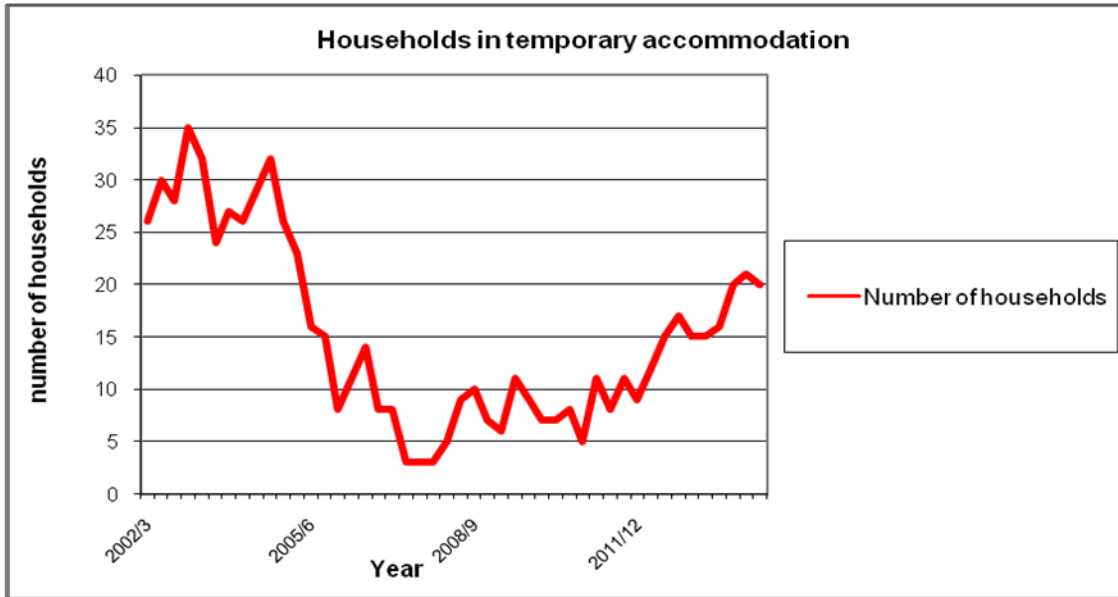
## **6.3 INTERIM AND TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION**

This accommodation is provided to households who have submitted a homelessness application where there is a duty to do so. This means MVDC has a duty to provide them with accommodation pending their application being assessed if they have no alternative accommodation and if their application is subsequently accepted. MVDC now has a stock of 22 soon to be increased to 24 self contained units for this purpose and details can be found in the Homelessness Review 2014.

### **Self-Contained Interim and Temporary Accommodation**

At the beginning of the last strategy, the initial successful reduction in the number of residents in temporary accommodation through homelessness prevention enabled MVDC to reduce the number of units it provided for emergency accommodation. It also gave the opportunity to look at the future and in keeping with best practice MVDC committed to remove from the stock hostels with shared kitchens and bathrooms. In January 2008, the shared facility hostel in Crawley was sold and this was followed by sale of the remaining Dorking hostel in 2011.

In recent years, however, the number of households making homeless applications to MVDC has increased and we committed £1.4m in June 2013, to increasing the number of self contained units to accommodate these households. An additional seven units have been added. Significant investment has also been made in the existing stock to improve health and safety, energy efficiency and overall comfort.



**Fig. 5. Number of households in temporary accommodation**

**An increase in the Use of Bed and Breakfast Accommodation**

Bed and breakfast has remained an accommodation of last resort, being used only in an emergency until alternative interim accommodation is available. The use of bed and breakfast accommodation has increased in the last few years, as the wider economic pressures of the recession has led to more households becoming homeless and approaching MVDC for assistance. The net cost of bed and breakfast in 2011/12 was £61,000 and in 2012/13 was £64,000. In 2013/14 it increased to a net cost of £100,000, which is why MVDC made the investment of £1.4m to acquire new emergency units in 2013.

The Homelessness (Suitability of Accommodation) Order 2003 states that no households with dependent children should be accommodated in bed and breakfast accommodation for more than six weeks. This is a time period that MVDC has had difficulty complying with over the last three years. The Homelessness Review 2014, shows that in 2013/14 over 50% of households with children who were placed in bed and breakfast accommodation and accepted as homeless exceeded the six week limit to some extent. We have tried to encourage applicants to consider nightly stay accommodation, which is self contained, instead of bed and breakfast accommodation, however many households prefer to be accommodated in the former due to its closer proximity to the district. Where this is the case, applicants have been asked to evidence this with a signed document.

In 2014/5 the figure has improved with only 17% of accepted homeless households with dependent children being accommodated in bed and breakfast accommodation over six weeks. MVDC is working hard to reduce its reliance on bed and breakfast. At the end of quarter two 2014/15, only three households with dependent children were accommodated in bed and breakfast accommodation of which none had been there in excess of six weeks.

## **6.4 COST OF PROVIDING THE HOMELESSNESS SERVICE**

The average net cost per annum of MVDC's housing service is £500,000. Many of the roles within the team have an impact on the homelessness and housing advice function of the team, whether it is the direct management of the accommodation or the implementation of the housing register which provides a housing option for some clients who face homelessness. It is therefore difficult to show a true definitive cost of the homelessness service alone

The homelessness grant from the Department of Communities and Local Government of £50,000 is no longer ring fenced, however, it notionally covers expenditure on rent deposit bonds, rent in advance payments and the ETHOS (employment service), as well as sundry other elements which help to prevent homelessness through a spend to save approach.

Some reductions have been made to expenditure from the homelessness grant since 2008. The grant no longer part funds an advocacy worker at Pitstop ( £6000); the court desk at Epsom (£3000) – as there is no longer a court in Epsom; or the private sector leasing scheme (£19000 ) which was ended in 2009, because it was not cost effective. The Sanctuary Scheme funding of £2500, which also used to come from the housing budget is now funded through MVDC's Community Safety budget.

## 7. THE HOMELESSNESS REVIEW 2014

The Homelessness Review has enabled MVDC to consider the current pressures on housing within the district and undertake an audit of services available to homeless people within Mole Valley and in the surrounding areas. These services are not restricted to accommodation, but cover areas such as tenancy support and general advice services.

The Review also looks at trends in homelessness and affordable housing to inform the strategy for the next five years.

The key findings are shown in the Review document, however some points worth highlighting are detailed below.

- There is a shortage of shared accommodation within the private rented sector in the district (page 7).
- The majority of social housing vacancies which occur each year are for bedsit and 1 bedroom properties for people over 55, although the largest group of people approaching MVDC for assistance as homeless are families with a need for 2 or 3 bedroom accommodation (page 7).
- House prices in the district have risen by 38% since 2008 (page 7).
- There have been 365 new affordable housing completions during 2008/09 to 2013/14, compared to 467 during 2003/4 to 2007/08. The average completion rate per year is 60 new affordable homes. The higher figure was achieved in 2005/06 when two large commercial sites in Leatherhead were developed for housing (page 7).
- The private rented sector deposit bond scheme is a cost efficient way of preventing homelessness, although loss of an assured shorthold tenancy remains one of the highest reasons for households becoming homeless in the district (page 17).
- The use of Discretionary Housing Payments in the last financial year has increased by 225% on the previous year from £43896 to £98765 , which is largely as a result of welfare reforms (page 19).
- Services such as Pitstop, the CAB and Leatherhead Start have all seen increase in demand. Most markedly in the CAB who have experienced a 2% increase in footfall overall from 2012/13 to 2013/14 from 2992 households to 3057 households. Within this has been an 115% increase in cases of households threatened with homelessness from 126 to 272 over the same period and a 23% increase in actual homelessness from 68 to 84. The number of households approaching for debt advice however has dropped by 12% from 2798 to 2457. The residual number are clients seeking to access the local assistance scheme (page 29).

- There has been an increase since the last Homelessness Review in 2008, in the use of bed and breakfast accommodation for families and almost double the number of households in temporary accommodation from 2008 and 2013. The length of stay in bed and breakfast accommodation exceeded the government's guidelines in over 50% of those accepted cases in 2013/14 although this has reduced to 17% of accepted cases in 2014/15. At the end of quarter two in 2014/15, there were only three households in bed and breakfast accommodation with children, and none of those had been in the accommodation for more than six weeks (page 32).
- The vast majority of supported accommodation for various client groups has remained largely unchanged since that last Homelessness Review and Strategy in 2008 (page 37).
- There are no units of supported self-contained accommodation for people with a substance misuse issue in Mole Valley, or for those people that are ex-offenders. These groups will however be eligible for a rent deposit bond now if they are able to sustain a tenancy and external support from agencies would need to be considered (page 37).

## **8. THE NEXT FIVE YEARS – 2014/15 to 2018/19**

The basis of the Homelessness Strategy for the next five years will be for MVDC to meet the National Practitioner Standard for Homelessness services. The Standard is a set of 10 challenges that are overseen by a small practitioner task force at Winchester City Council, which is supported by the Department of Communities and Local Government and the National Housing Advice Service. By following the challenges set out in the Standard, MVDC will benchmark itself against other local authorities in Surrey and be part of a peer review, which will highlight any gaps in the service.

The ten individual components, or challenges, are seen to be best practice in a housing options and advice service. Local authorities who choose to aim for the Standard, are partnered in peer groups who will prepare and scrutinise three of the challenges in stages one and two, and the remaining four challenges in stage three. To date, three authorities have completed stage one of the standard.

The 10 local challenges of the Standard are given below with an explanation of how MVDC meets some of the standards and the actions it needs to take to meet the standard. In addition to these targets, the Review has highlighted a number of gaps in current service provision, and a number of external challenges that face MVDC and these are shown at the end of this section. All the resulting actions are summarised in the Action Plan Appendix 1.

### **8.1 The National Practitioner Standard for Homelessness Services (S)**

#### **S1. To adopt a corporate commitment to prevent homelessness, which has buy in across all local authority services**

##### **How MVDC meets this standard**

There is a corporate commitment to enable the development of an average of 50 new affordable homes per year and MVDC recognises the contribution this brings to assisting those in housing need and those who are homeless.

MVDC has invested from its capital programme £1.4m to acquire seven new temporary accommodation units to ensure homeless households are adequately housed and we are not reliant on bed and breakfast accommodation. The number in bed and breakfast is monitored monthly by the Senior Management Team and Scrutiny Committee. The number of families placed in bed and breakfast for more than six weeks will be formally monitored.

The increased partnership working between the Housing Benefit and Housing Team over both Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) and wider welfare reforms has led to a greater commitment across MVDC to the prevention of homelessness. The impending challenge, however, is the future removal of the administration of Housing Benefit when Universal Credit is implemented. Our challenge is to put in place an appropriate local support network for residents who need to apply for welfare benefits.

It is a current corporate priority of MVDC to support households affected by Welfare Reform and such matters are considered at the corporate Health and Welfare Board.

MVDC is committed to the spend to save ethos to make the most cost effective use of resources and the rent deposit bond scheme is an excellent example. Other examples are rent in advance loans for those who are having problems accessing the private rented sector and loans to assist with rent arrears payments that can prevent a household becoming homeless. The latter payments are made where the arrears are not down to the tenant's negligence. Once again achievement on the number of preventions achieved is monitored monthly.

The Housing and Environmental Health Teams work closely together to ensure a robust approach is taken to addressing standards in the social and private rented sector. A licensing or accreditation scheme for local landlords could improve the accommodation within the district and empower tenants to choose landlords who it is known have good quality stock and a professional approach to lettings. This is something to consider for the future.

To assist with the monitoring of the private rented sector properties within our HomeChoice Plus scheme and with any future possible accreditation and development with private landlords MVDC will adopt a new piece of software called Localpad to replace the current bulky and outdated database. This software will provide the MVDC with a more efficient way of monitoring bonds spent and rent in advance payments made, as well as holding a database of health and safety certificates for landlords and an automatic reminder system when renewals of such certificates as gas safety are due. It will also provide landlords with a link to each other so that they can share good practice with each other.

MVDC is currently considering how any involvement with a Surrey Credit Union could work and whether this too would be beneficial to our commitment

### **Action Points**

- **Reinforce the corporate commitment to the Standard across MVDC's services**
- **Ensure that there is a robust plan in place for the implementation of Universal Credit. Many issues need clarity from the DWP, but our plan must cover the following:**
  - **How we support people to apply for benefits**
  - **Arrangements for monitoring Universal Credit payments and the rent contribution**
  - **How to arrange for housing payments to be paid to direct to landlords**
  - **Knowledge on how to help households apply for any range of benefits**
- **Consider licensing or accreditation of private rented sector landlords**

## **S2. To actively work in partnership with the voluntary sector and other local partners to address support, education, employment and training needs**

### **How MVDC meets this standard**

As mentioned above MVDC was successful in 2009, with neighbouring authorities Elmbridge, Epsom and Ewell, Reigate and Banstead and Tandridge with a bid to the Department of Communities and Local Government to fund an employment advice scheme for housing options clients. The project is provided by Surrey Life Long Learning and is known as the Employment, Training and Housing Options Service (ETHOS). It is now funded by the majority of the original authorities and three housing associations. The service provides employment advice, CV writing, job clubs and basic numeracy, literacy and digital skills. This is an important service to help people improve their incomes and pay their housing costs, which in turn prevent them from becoming homeless. ETHOS is co-located with the Housing Teams it works with.

The value of this scheme is not only in its ability to help individuals and households to get back into training and employment, but also it can target those households who are affected by recent welfare reforms and have been affected by the benefits cap. By assisting people to get into work those households become exempt from the benefits cap and, therefore, have a better quality of life as well as enhanced self esteem and self worth. Finally, we are encouraging ETHOS to apply to DWP for a grant that can be used for clients to cover the practical costs of finding work.

Where Housing Benefit is informed by the DWP a household is affected by the benefits cap the Housing Benefit Team share this information and a referral will be made to ETHOS.

The new Enhanced Housing Options Wizard (detailed below) gives the public the ability to request a referral to an ETHOS advisor.

Furthermore a new Surrey benefits advice service called GetWise has been funded by Surrey County Council to assist the most vulnerable households and those who are adversely affected by any of the welfare reforms. The Housing and Housing Benefits Teams both refer households to this service where the household gives consent.

The relatively new Surrey Family Support Programme, also mentioned above, is co-located with the Housing Team. The Support Team work with a range agencies from the voluntary and statutory sector to help their families combat unemployment, poor school attendance and criminality and hopefully break this cycle for future generations. Housing issues often feature when these families are assessed at Team Around the Family meetings.

These priorities have also extended to the supported housing providers who work in the district such as Stonham, Leatherhead Start and Transform Housing who all try and assist their service users into employment or training opportunities. They too access the ETHOS programme as well as, in the case of Leatherhead Start, organizing their own training to assist their service users.



Many service users also have support needs regarding their day to day living. Furniture schemes such as those run by Leatherhead Pitstop, the Surrey Reuse Network and Besom are referred to on a regular basis by the housing team when assisting clients' accommodation. Referrals are also made to the Citizens Advice Bureau for clients who require help from the Local Assistance Scheme with elements including furniture; one off payments to help with emergency travel costs; keeping the family safe and food. The Trussell Trust have set up a foodbank in Epsom which is also accessed by clients of Mole Valley through referrals by a number of partnering agencies including MVDC's Housing Benefit and Housing Options teams. There are plans for a similar scheme to be set up in Dorking. Pitstop also can provide food parcels when required in emergency situations.

As well as these direct practical areas of support, there is a strong network of multi-agency meetings where support for both individuals and the community are coordinated. These include the MARAC meetings for victims of domestic abuse; PPO meetings for priority prolific offenders and the monthly Community Incident Action Group (CIAG) which is chaired by MVDC and has attendance from the Community Mental Health Recovery Service; Adult Social Care; Children's Services; local housing associations; the Youth Support Service; Surrey Alcohol and Drug Advisory Service and the Police. These meetings are well attended and have led to a strong multi-agency approach to resolving issues that have occurred for individuals and the community in a swift, and cost efficient manner whilst ensuring that duplication is limited by following a multi-agency co-ordinated approach to the issues that arisen.

#### **Action Point**

- **Ensure that clients are referred to support services.**

### **S3. To offer housing options prevention service to all clients including written advice**

#### **How MVDC meets this standard**

MVDC already provide clients with letters within seven days of an options interview summarizing the interview and the options advice that has been given. This has, however, always been only following face to face interviews. For those who telephone or email for advice these letters are not written, mainly due to staff levels and time constraints. These clients are also often not added to a database of clients for ongoing case work, as the advice given over the telephone or email may satisfy the clients' needs without any further action being taken. This means that although the figures for the strategy and review are positive for the amount of work that the team is doing, it only shows part of the picture and do not include these non face to face client contacts. It also means that letters summarizing advice and options given are not generated for these 'quick fix' clients.

To meet the Standard it is necessary for all clients to receive written advice. We have adopted the Enhanced Housing Options (EHO) Wizard to provide this written advice to all who may choose to seek out their options both in and outside office hours. As many clients contacting the service for advice are working and unable to contact within office hours, the use of this internet based tool to give basic advice and a written summary is beneficial. The provision of written summary which is automatically generated for clients also frees officer time to enable them to concentrate on detailed casework and advice for those households with more complex issues and those to whom MVDC has a statutory duty. The EHO wizard was introduced in December 2013, and we need to monitor its use and impact on the housing options service and ensure it is promoted.

### **Action Points**

- **To monitor and promote the use of the Housing Options Wizard**
- **Ensure that all clients have a written summary of the advice they are given**

#### **S4. To adopt a No Second Night Out model or an effective local alternative**

##### **How MVDC meets this standard**

The principal of No Second Night Out is to ensure that no one sleeps rough for a second night. This is not an easy commitment for any local authority to make, especially when resources are scarce and priority needs to be given to those households to whom MVDC has a statutory responsibility. MVDC is however committed to try and follow this principle and where possible, help reconnect people to the areas that they have a local connection.

The facilities of Pitstop and Leatherhead Start could be argued to create a 'honeypot' affect for individuals where their originating local authority area does not have such facilities and services. It is important that we help these individuals to relocate back to their originating areas (where safe to do so) where they may be entitled to other support or options with their housing.

The principal of no second night out heavily relies on all local authorities accepting responsibility to help those individuals who have a local connection with their area. A lot of work will therefore be required on a county-wide basis with other local authorities to build up a network of services to prevent people from sleeping rough. This is being pursued through the Surrey Homelessness Alliance.

It should not however be forgotten that some individuals are not ready to address their rough sleeping and their approach to housing and may take some time to wish to consider the options open to them.

We have already made a start towards providing the service as we now have rent deposit schemes for the single non priority homeless funded by CRISIS and the Surrey Homelessness Alliance. Sometimes we can help with a referral to Leatherhead Start and other supported housing providers in the area. When the Severe Weather Emergency Protocol is triggered we always provide rough sleepers with accommodation until the

weather improves. Finally, we have made a successful bid for £157,000 with neighbouring authority partners, based on the strength of our joint work, to the DCLG's Help for Single Homeless Fund 2014, which will fund an outreach service to help to plug the remaining gaps. A similar bid has been successful across four boroughs in the north of Surrey and it is hoped that these two initiatives may over time share best practices and work collaboratively.

#### **Action Point**

- **Seek to adopt a No Second Night Out approach to rough sleepers within Mole Valley by adopting new procedures and implementing reconnection criteria.**
- **To collaborate with the parallel four-borough initiative taking place in east Surrey, to ensure the most effective use of resources and to avoid duplication**

#### **S5. To have housing pathways agreed or in development with each key partner and client group that include appropriate accommodation and support**

##### **How MVDC meets this standard**

This is an area which could be improved upon, although there are already pathways in place in relation to clients that are referred to supported housing schemes by the Council, and those clients who are leaving Care. MVDC has an informal arrangement with all supported housing providers that those clients we refer to them, who then become ready to move on from their accommodation, we will assist with housing either in the private rented sector or through the housing register. As this type of accommodation is often the most appropriate in the first instance for many ex-offenders or rough sleepers to gain the living skills to live independently it is imperative that these pathway plans are formalized and agreed by all involved.

The Surrey Leaving Care Protocol has enabled strong links between MVDC and Surrey County Council's Leaving Care Team. This strength has led to no care leavers reaching the end of their time in foster care and becoming homeless as a result of no housing plan being in place. The success of this protocol depends on continued communication between the Leaving Care Team and Housing Team, which is achieved through quarterly meetings. It is also necessary for those people in the care service to have pathway plans provided to housing to accompany their housing applications.

The newly created Surrey County Council Youth Support Service accommodates 16 and 17 year olds in supported housing in order to prevent homelessness and it is these clients where there is still work to be done to ensure that housing pathways are in place. These individuals will not be subject to a pathway plan or any duty under the Leaving Care Act if they are not accommodated under section 20 of the Children Act. It is hoped that they will be incorporated into the quarterly care leavers meetings to ensure that they too have a housing pathway and adequate support within their accommodation.

Finally, a countywide young persons commissioning project for accommodation and support has been undertaken in consultation with the district and boroughs. There has been some redistribution of accommodation services and the welcome addition of much needed accommodation for chaotic young people in Surrey.

### **Action Points**

- **Ensure all vulnerable clients have a housing pathway**

### **S6. To develop a suitable private rented sector offer for all client groups including advice and support to both client and landlord**

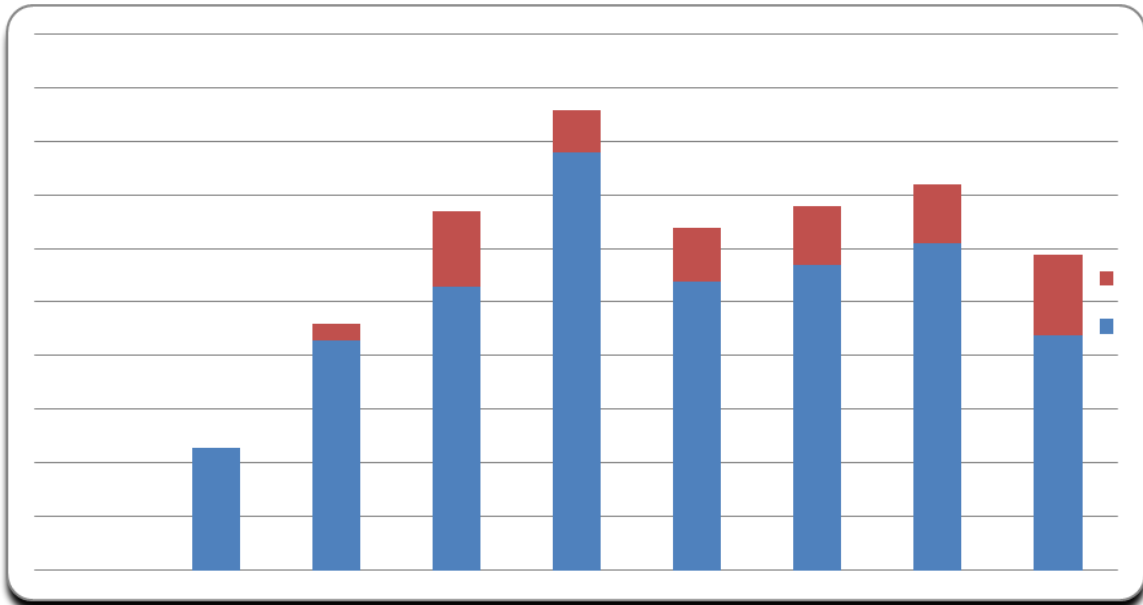
#### **How MVDC meets this standard**

MVDC has operated the HomeChoice Scheme for households who meet certain criteria under the homelessness legislation for over six years and is described above. On occasion we have also assisted single people or couples outside this definition when we have been notified by a landlord of a property that we cannot allocate to the aforementioned client group. This has been the exception rather than the norm. Over recent years the split of households helped through the HomeChoice scheme has been as shown in Fig.6 below.

In 2013/14 the DCLG gave funds to the Surrey districts and boroughs to enable a single offer to be made to all clients who can sustain a private rented property the offer of assistance to access this sector. This is part of one of the tasks set for the Surrey Homeless Alliance to achieve. In Mole Valley we have adopted the single offer approach, which is also to be adopted Surrey wide. This will mean that any household regardless of makeup, who has a local connection with the district and is believed can sustain a tenancy in the private sector, will be offered a deposit bond by which to access private rented housing.

It will largely be the responsibility of the individual to find the accommodation, and property size will depend on household makeup and affordability. Where the local authority is notified of a vacant property however we will advise clients of this.

In addition to this, MVDC now has the ability to discharge its homelessness duty to an accepted household within the private rented sector instead of providing temporary accommodation within its own stock. A variety of extra checks are required on both the landlord and the property in order for this duty to be able to be fulfilled, however we have successfully used this new piece of legislation on two occasions within the last year where a full homelessness duty had been accepted. The challenge will be to provide a suitable private rented sector offer for those clients where we have concerns about their ability to sustain accommodation within this sector without a considerable support package, for example where the individual has a historic record of poor financial management. In cases where MVDC does not feel that the households can sustain accommodation within this sector we will be unable to refer them to a private sector landlord.



**Fig. 6 Categories of households assisted by the Home Choice Plus scheme**

#### **Action Point**

- **Provide a ‘flat mate’ function through our HomeChoice internet pages to help single people and couples to find rooms to rent within and outside the district**

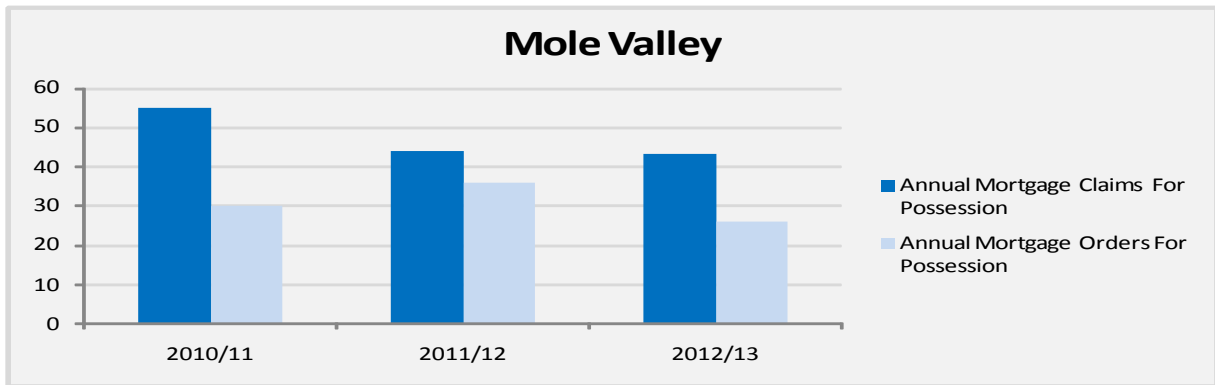
### **S7. To actively engage in preventing mortgage repossession including through the mortgage rescue scheme**

#### **How MVDC meets this standard**

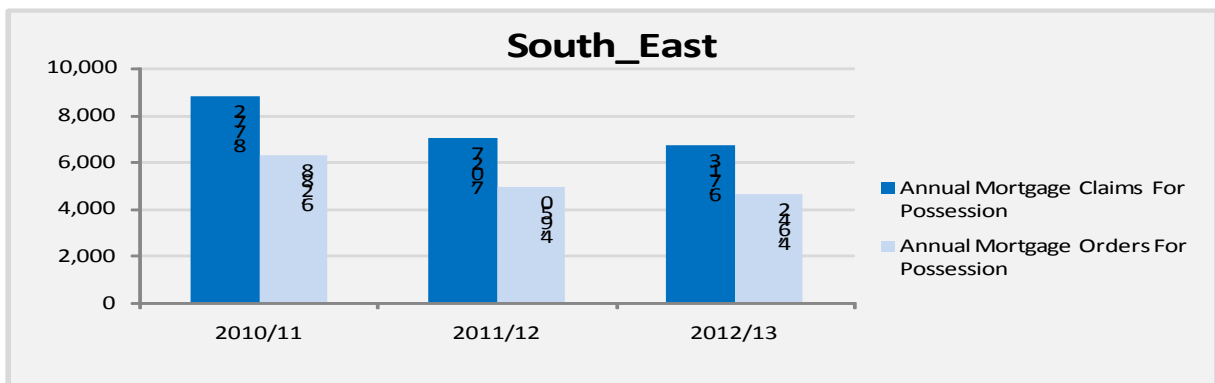
As shown in the Homelessness Review (page10) and figures nine and 10 below, Mole Valley has experienced a very low number of mortgage repossession claims over the last three years. Despite a small increase in 2011/12, the number of actual possession orders made has also remained low. This has generally followed the pattern for the South East as a region.

Through the hard work of the Housing Team, two Mortgage Rescue Scheme cases have been successful. Both households had originally purchased their properties and accrued mortgage arrears. The scheme funded a housing association to acquire the properties and then they rented them back to the former owners. These cases were long and complex and took nearly a year to complete. The scheme closed at the end 2013/14.

Mole Valley is committed to preventing mortgage repossessions from occurring. As part of the mortgage pre-repossession protocol, we are notified of all cases within our district where the mortgage company is seeking to repossess and all those clients are contacted to ask if they require assistance with their situation. We will continue to assist these cases in whichever way possible to prevent their homes being repossessed and will refer them to appropriate agencies for money advice.



**Figure 7. Mortgage possession claims and orders made in Mole Valley**



**Figure 8. Mortgage possession claims and orders made in the South East**

### Action points

- Signpost clients facing mortgage repossession to the Getwise service, CAB for money advice and other appropriate support services
- Refer clients facing mortgage repossession to government schemes available
- Negotiate with mortgage lenders to prevent homelessness where possible

**S8. To have a Homelessness Strategy which sets out a proactive approach to preventing homelessness and is reviewed annually to be responsive to emerging needs**

The Homelessness Strategy will in future need to be reviewed annually by the Scrutiny Committee to meet this requirement.

### Action Point

- The Homelessness Strategy to be reviewed annually by the Scrutiny Committee.

## **S9. To not place any young person aged 16 or 17 in bed and breakfast accommodation**

### **How MVDC meets this standard**

Since the advent of the Surrey County Council Youth Support Service (YSS) in 2012, which helps prevent homelessness for 16 and 17 year olds, only one person in this age group has approached MVDC as homeless, compared to the peak of five in 2009. Where MVDC is approached by a young person of this age and we are unable to refer to the YSS, MVDC will always endeavor to place the young person in an emergency bed within a supported housing environment or through Surrey Nightstop, although out of hours this will be unlikely. In these circumstances bed and breakfast accommodation may be the only option until the next working day.

Where there is no statutory duty held by Surrey County Council's Children's Services and the YSS is unable to place the young person in accommodation, then the young person may wish to make a homelessness application. If there is no supported accommodation available MVDC may have to use bed and breakfast unless there is an adult who can guarantee a tenancy for the young person. In law 16 and 17 year olds are unable to hold a tenancy so a guarantor is always needed.

Where other agencies have the lead, such as Children's Services, it is important to pool resources to ensure that regardless of statutory responsibility the young person's needs are best met. Where there is a vacancy in one of Mole Valley's young person's schemes (managed and owned by Hyde Housing Association and supported by Transform Housing) the Housing Team will not only consider individuals who have approached MVDC direct, but also those with a local connection to Mole Valley, who are being assisted by Children's Services or the Youth Support Service. With the latter, this will normally be identified at the monthly Youth Homelessness Prevention Panel.

As mentioned above, a County wide young persons' commissioning project for accommodation and support has been undertaken in consultation with the district and boroughs. This was to help eliminate the use of bed and breakfast accommodation throughout Surrey for this age group and up to aged 21. The newly formed Surrey Nightstop, which is to be provided by Morgan Browne, is currently recruiting host families to increase the short term emergency access beds for this age group.

### **Action Points**

- **To ensure where possible that bed and breakfast accommodation is not used for 16 or 17 year olds and that emergency beds through Surrey County Council and Surrey nightstop are fully utilized.**

## **S.10 To not place any families in bed and breakfast accommodation unless in an emergency for no longer than 6 weeks**

This is a significant challenge. It has already been stated that we have an increasing number of households that we have seen over the last three years approaching the

housing options team as homeless or threatened with homelessness. Under new legislation it is possible for the local authority to discharge a homelessness duty to a household into the private rented sector. However, whilst our private rented sector scheme is successful, it remains the case that not everyone will be suitable for the private rented sector because they may not be able to sustain a tenancy, and MVDC cannot risk, in this fragile climate, placing someone who we do not feel can keep a tenancy even with some support into private rented accommodation. For some households, MVDC's emergency accommodation will therefore be the only option.

As previously mentioned to avoid the use of bed and breakfast accommodation we have increased the number of MVDC's emergency accommodation units with an investment of £1.4m. When we have no choice but to use bed and breakfast accommodation then we do our best to ensure it is as close to the district as possible and for as short a time as possible. This accommodation will, where possible, be over night stay placements in self contained units rather than bed and breakfast hotels that offer little or no ability for families to prepare cook and eat their meals together.

The majority of both nightly stay and bed and breakfast accommodation that we currently use are outside the district, and we therefore ask households when offering accommodation under S188 (our interim duty) which they would prefer. It is often the case that they would prefer the bed and breakfast as it is closer to the district than the nightly stay accommodation despite the latter being self contained.

Critical to preventing the use of bed and breakfast is the development of new affordable homes. New supply creates movement within the social housing sector and not only allows people on the housing register and those accepted as homeless to be housed a little quicker, it also helps existing tenants who require a move, who in turn release vacancies for those in need. This flow of movement in the permanent stock has a knock-on effect and creates movement within the emergency accommodation stock and releases the bottle neck of households waiting for accommodation. Without this movement there is stagnation in the social and emergency stock and inevitably MVDC is forced to use bed and breakfast if other prevention measures have been exhausted.

### **Action Points**

- **Complete the acquisition of additional self contained emergency accommodation units**
- **Look to source both nightly stay and bed and breakfast placements in Mole Valley or the surrounding areas to minimize the use of out of district placements**
- **Ensure that no household with dependent children is in bed and breakfast accommodation for more than 6 weeks**
- **Develop an average of 50 new affordable homes per year**



## 8.2 Other Areas for Improvement and Challenges

### **Making best use of existing stock – social and private rented accommodation**

We will continue to support and encourage housing associations to address under occupation and overcrowding. We retained the Band 1 status for those households in social housing who are under occupying properties (where there are no rent arrears) when the Housing Allocations Scheme was reviewed. We will also work towards encouraging tenants who are under occupying, but wanting to move, to take in lodgers on a temporary basis which will not only alleviate temporary financial hardship caused by the spare room subsidy, but also provide single rooms for those households of single people and couples looking for somewhere to rent privately.

#### **Action Points**

- **Assist under occupiers affected by the spare room subsidy to find lodgers**

- **Leatherhead Pitstop**

Closer relationships with the trustees of Leatherhead Pitstop will be pursued to work with the charity to provide positive temporary relief for those people who are homeless or socially excluded. Measures will be investigated as to how MVDC can assist the charity with this, thereby alleviating any long term reliance on the service by its users. This should allow the charity to provide directed and focused short term input to the most vulnerable without them becoming overly dependent on the service.

#### **Action Points**

- **Work closely with Leatherhead Pitstop to provide a short term directed and focused service to those homeless or socially excluded service users**

- **Tackling financial hardship and managing welfare reforms**

The continuing high level of consumer debt and financial difficulties, which are being experienced by some households affected by welfare reform measures means that the number of households approaching MVDC either as homeless or facing homelessness is likely to remain at a high level. We need to investigate the measures that can be taken to relieve these financial issues and assist those households experiencing them. If this does not happen then it is possible that these households will have difficulty paying their rent and will face homelessness. MVDC will continue to work closely with the Citizens Advice Bureau and GetWise who can provide direct financial advice to these clients. Closer working with the Surrey Credit Union should also be investigated, as should discussions with local banks as to the possibility of assisting clients who will receive Universal Credit about the possibility of ring-fencing a proportion of their Universal Credit to cover their rent liabilities.

## **Action Points**

- **Explore closer links with the Surrey Credit Union**
- **Speak with local banks regarding the possibility of ring fencing monies for rent once universal credit begins**

## **9. FINANCING AND RESOURCING THE STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN**

Many of the action points that follow in the Appendix 1 Action Plan are largely administrative and procedural and can be met from existing budgets.

Achieving the Standard will require significant staff resource. It requires a commitment to a nine day peer review process that involves three local authorities, with three days spent at each authority. Subject to achieving a 60% score at the peer review MVDC would need to address each of the 10 challenges with evidence. The National Practitioner Service has advised that authorities on average need a month to prepare the submission of each challenge. Temporary staffing may be needed to cover front line positions to release staff to complete this process.

## **10. CONCLUSION**

The Homelessness Review has highlighted both the good practices that are in place at Mole Valley as well as identifying the gaps in the service. We already have a strong housing options service and our challenge is to build upon this and improve it in the most efficient and effective ways with our partner agencies. This Homelessness Strategy and Action Plan at Appendix 1 will allow us to meet our vision and ensure that the service we provide to the community is wide reaching and well resourced over the next five years.