

## **Commissioners' response to the recommendations of Croydon's 2013/14 JSNA chapter on homeless households in TA**

### **Section 1: Recommendations**

The recommendations of the 2013/14 JSNA chapter on homeless households in temporary accommodation are derived from review of the literature dealing with the health impacts of homelessness and on focus groups held with homeless households living in emergency accommodation. The recommendations will enable an efficient use of resources to improve the health of Croydon's population and should also reduce costs by minimising the impact on the health and wellbeing of homeless households arising from extended stays in emergency accommodation.

The services the Council and other agencies are providing to homeless households and those at risk of homelessness are set out in Section 4 of the JSNA chapter, as are the projects and initiatives underway to increase housing supply in the borough. This information is not reiterated in any great detail in this response to the recommendations. Rather, the response focuses on better targeting of existing services/resources, improved joint working and new projects to tackle the impacts identified in the JSNA chapter.

The recommendations are described in detail in Section 6 of the 2013/14 JSNA chapter on homeless households in temporary accommodation and tackle the areas highlighted in the JSNA concerning:

- Information, advice and support for homeless families
- Access to health services
- Children missing education
- Access to employment and training opportunities
- The supply of temporary accommodation
- Homelessness prevention

#### **Information, advice and support for homeless families**

Households applying as homeless currently receive limited information directly related either to the progress/outcome of their application, or concerning their temporary accommodation. This is due to the high volume of applications and the number of placements in temporary accommodation required in recent years. Feedback from the focus groups was that more information on the progress of homeless applications would be reassuring and helpful, general information about how to report problems with accommodation would also help, and general information about how/where to find or organise, food, healthcare, benefits and schools once placed in temporary accommodation. Providing this information will help homeless households cope with the disruption caused by homelessness and living in temporary accommodation, will alert the Council to problems with the accommodation provided earlier, and reduce the amount of unneeded contact on the progress of homeless applications.

#### **Access to health services**

Households homeless often become "harder to reach" in relation when providing routine healthcare /prevention services once placed in temporary accommodation. Visits from health

visitors, registration with a GP, and attending regular clinics, contact with midwives, nurses, consultants and accessing other healthcare services are inevitably disrupted, particularly when households are placed some distance away from their previous accommodation. Better targeting healthcare services to households in temporary accommodation and encouraging registration with GPs local to temporary accommodation will help tackle this issue and reduce reliance on emergency health care.

### **Children missing education**

Being placed in temporary accommodation can also be disruptive to a child's education and can result in them missing school, and not being able to participate fully in educational activities (for example, accessing/submitting homework online). The emotional impact of homelessness can also impact on focus in lessons, behaviour and result in bullying. Providing information on how to make in year school applications and closer working between education and other professionals will help reduce this impact and provide better support to children in homeless households

### **Access to employment and training opportunities**

Homelessness may include loss of employment as an underlying cause, and living in temporary accommodation can also make maintaining employment difficult, particularly if the employment requires attendance at short notice, is largely outside normal office hours, or is difficult to access due to the distance from the temporary accommodation. Whilst acknowledging that accessing employment may not be possible/feasible for all households experiencing homelessness, for some the support of colleagues in Job Centre Plus to tackle some of the barriers to employment (training, language, child care) and opportunities to work may be the start of a journey towards independence and a sustainable future.

### **The supply of temporary accommodation**

The Council does not have sufficient accommodation to provide permanent accommodation immediately for all homeless applicants. Levels of homelessness have been so high in recent years that the Council has had no option but to use all available sources of temporary accommodation in Croydon and at times outside the borough, including bed and breakfast hotels providing shared facilities, in order to meet its statutory duty to secure accommodation for homeless households. Securing an adequate supply of self-contained accommodation for homeless households is an on-going priority for the Council.

### **Homelessness prevention**

Preventing homelessness is a key part of a strategic approach to tackling homelessness. Identifying households early that are at risk of homelessness, providing support to deal with the underlying causes of homelessness or vulnerability, and taking a holistic view of the needs of households approaching the Council and other partner agencies for support each make a significant contribution to reducing the demands on temporary accommodation and help to minimise the length of time households stay in this situation. Projects and initiatives that prevent homelessness continue to be a priority for the council.

## Section 2: Commissioners' response to the recommendations

The commissioners' response to the recommendations included in the 2013/14 JSNA chapter on homeless households living in temporary accommodation is set out in the table below. The response has been completed by:

- Leonard Asamoah, Director of Housing Need
- Brenda Scanlan, Director of Integrated Commissioning Unit and Adult Commissioning
- Mike Robinson, Director of Public Health
- Mark Fowler, Director of Gateway and Welfare Services
- Jane Doyle, Director of Universal People Services
- David Butler, Head of School Standards

Summarised Recommendations from the JSNA	Commissioners' response	
	Action currently being taken	Future actions being considered
<b>Improved information, advice and support for homeless families (Lead: Director of Housing Need)</b>		
<b>6.1 Improved information, advice and support for homeless families</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Council provides a 24 Hour homelessness service (out of hours provided by Emergency Duty Team)</li> <li>• Emergency accommodation is provided for homeless households in priority need of housing (which includes families with children, and vulnerable single people)</li> <li>• A Family Liaison Officer also provides support for families in large B&amp;B hotels (e.g. Gilroy Court)</li> </ul>	(Set out below)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Write to homeless applicants providing reasons why their application has not been decided within 40 days</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Applicants receive a letter setting out the Council's decision on their homeless application (S184 letter).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Council will write to all applicants who have not received a decision on their application within 40 days explaining why the decision is delayed</li> </ul>

Summarised Recommendations from the JSNA	Commissioners' response	
	Action currently being taken	Future actions being considered
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide an information pack (Emergency Accommodation Pack) to every household admitted to emergency accommodation including information on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ GP registration</li> <li>○ Location of GP surgeries</li> <li>○ Dentists</li> <li>○ Schools and education</li> <li>○ Access to specialist health care</li> <li>○ Shops</li> <li>○ Advice and information</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An Emergency Accommodation Pack has been developed for households placed in emergency accommodation including information on GPs, Dentists, other health services, Childrens Centres, Education etc.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To develop the Emergency Accommodation Pack into a smartphone app</li> <li>• To develop Emergency Accommodation web pages</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Target household budgeting and money management advice services to homeless families in temporary accommodation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Council provides welfare benefits advice, a hotline and benefit surgeries, debt advice and discretionary support to households needing support</li> <li>• The Council also commissions the Citizens Advice Bureau to provide a housing advice services</li> <li>• The Citizens Advice Bureau also provides debt advice service</li> <li>• Croydon and Sutton Law Centre also provide free money and debt advice</li> <li>• Croydon, Merton and Sutton Credit Union</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As part of the People Gateway project households in TA will be identified as requiring /income budgeting support around income maximisation, household budgeting and debt management</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As a priority develop a new TA Placement Policy which will clarify how long households will have to wait in temporary accommodation before receiving</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A new TA Placement policy will be developed as part of the TA Action Plan (see 6.6 below) explaining the process by which TA is allocated.</li> <li>• The Council will also be developing a long-term TA procurement plan which will provide a more accurate</li> </ul>

Summarised Recommendations from the JSNA	Commissioners' response	
	Action currently being taken	Future actions being considered
an offer of permanent accommodation		picture of the need for TA, and the length of stay for homeless households
<b>Improving access to health services (Lead(s): Director of Housing Need with Director of Public Health, Director of Integrated Commissioning Unit and Adult Commissioning (in liaison with Croydon CCG))</b>		
<b>6.2 Improving access to health services</b>	<p><b>Local GP services and SLaM</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Croydon's aim is to provide mental health services at the lowest point of intervention</li> <li>• Access to most mental health services is via GP referral [issue to increase GP registration]</li> <li>• Homeless households can also self-refer to psychological therapies</li> </ul> <p><b>Local GP services and Homeless Health Team Childrens Social Care</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Rainbow Centre surgery provides the full range of primary care services to homeless households</li> <li>• Meningitis is preventable via completion of vaccination programmes in childhood, plus additional vaccinations for those travelling to high risk areas (such as parts of Saudi Arabia and Africa)</li> </ul> <p><b>Turning Point @ Lantern Hall</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Services provided to anyone aged 18+ registered with a GP and with a drug or alcohol issue</li> <li>• Also services provided through Croydon recovery network</li> <li>• A nurse is also provided to support clients in</li> </ul>	(Set out below)

Summarised Recommendations from the JSNA	Commissioners' response	
	Action currently being taken	Future actions being considered
	Palmer House (supported housing for former rough sleepers)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Include GP Registration Forms in the new Emergency Accommodation Pack</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Emergency Accommodation Pack includes details on how to register with a local GP</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify effective methods to improve GP registration among homeless families placed in TA</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with local GPs to improve GP registration rates</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Homeless households placed in B&amp;B in Thornton Heath can register with a local GP (on Brigstock or London Road)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify effective methods to improve GP registration among homeless families (see above concerning registration information in Emergency Accommodation Pack)</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As part of the Healthy Child Programme ensure health visitors follow up of childhood immunisations and new born screening with families in emergency accommodation.</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Healthy Child Programme to target hard to reach families through health visitors and follow up of childhood immunisations and new born screening.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve information on how to access psychological therapies and other mental health services</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve information and identify effective methods on how to sign post and improve access to psychological therapies and other mental health services (see Emergency Accommodation Pack above)</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Publicising surgery times of the Homeless Health Team and Rainbow Health Centre</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Update information and in the Emergency Accommodation Pack to include Rainbow Health Centre details</li> </ul>
<b>Ensuring children do not miss education (Lead(s): Director of Housing Need with the Head of School Standards)</b>		
<b>6.3 Ensuring children do not miss education</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Notify – a database designed to track children in B&amp;B and inform housing, childrens social services and education staff of placements in</li> </ul>	(Set out below)

Summarised Recommendations from the JSNA	Commissioners' response	
	Action currently being taken	Future actions being considered
	temporary accommodation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Council's Children Missing Education (CME) Officer takes referrals from professionals concerned about children not going to school</li> <li>• Professionals refer also issues to Reintegration and Exclusions Officer (deals with behaviour and exclusion)</li> <li>• Information about these services is also provided on councils web site</li> <li>• Families can make referrals to Reintegration and Exclusions Officer if they are concerned about their child's behaviour at school</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve liaison between housing and education on children placed in emergency accommodation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Notify - liaison and communication between housing, social services and education has improved and a better understanding of the benefits and remit of Notify developed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop effective methods to improve recording and update of housing circumstances on referral forms into Reintegration and Exclusions Officer and CME Officer</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Council will develop closer links between with B&amp;B hotels and Children Missing Education Officer (CME Officer)</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop closer links between with bed and breakfast hotels and the CME Officer</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Carry out comparative research to determine how many children in emergency accommodation are likely to be missing school</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Analyse bed and breakfast data and CME data to provide a better understanding of the impact of homelessness on children missing education</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide information on school admission (including in year admissions process), attendance and exclusions in the Emergency Accommodation Pack</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Information on school admission (including in year admissions process), attendance and exclusions will be included in Emergency Accommodation Pack</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve recording of housing</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Steps will be taken to improve recording of housing</li> </ul>

Summarised Recommendations from the JSNA	Commissioners' response	
	Action currently being taken	Future actions being considered
circumstances on referral forms into Reintegration and Exclusions Officer and CME Officer		circumstances on referral forms into Reintegration and Exclusions Officer and CME Officer
<b>Improving access to employment and training opportunities (Lead(s): Director of Housing Need with Director of Gateway and Welfare Services and Director of Universal People Services)</b>		
<b>6.4 Improving access to employment and training opportunities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Job Centre Plus (JCP) provides employment and employment support services</li> <li>• Housing Welfare Reform Team also provides support to families impacted by welfare reform and works with them to achieve sustainable housing and employment solutions</li> </ul>	(Set out below)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify homeless households in B&amp;B that are unemployed and work with JCP to target communications and services to them</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As part of the People Gateway project a pilot initiative is underway to target households in TA and support them overcome barriers to accessing employment into training/work</li> <li>• Another People Gateway pilot project is targeting support to potentially homeless households at an earlier stage – when they make an appointment to meet housing advisor. The aim being to provide a solution to the housing problems and prevent a homeless application</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The People Gateway project will develop and expand shaped by the learning gained from this and other pilot projects.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide DWP outreach service to Gilroy Court</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• DWP Outreach has been included in the People Gateway pilot above to carry out initial assessments</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Link eligible households into the new Gateway Project</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• See People Gateway pilots above</li> </ul>	



Summarised Recommendations from the JSNA	Commissioners' response	
	Action currently being taken	Future actions being considered
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Link eligible households into Child Poverty Strategy work on flexible working/employment</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>As part of the Child Poverty Strategy Croydon is considering becoming a Flexible Working Borough and increasing the flexible working for families, in particular lone parent families, to help in lifting them out of poverty</li> </ul>
<b>Increasing the supply of temporary accommodation (Lead(s): Director of Housing Need)</b>		
<b>6.5 Increasing the supply of temporary accommodation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>See page 41 of the JSNA which sets out a range of initiatives to increase supply, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Converting surplus/redundant council buildings</li> <li>Empty properties</li> <li>Setting up a pilot lodgings scheme</li> <li>Purchasing up to 100 properties on the open market</li> <li>Investing in the Real Lettings Property Fund</li> <li>Developing a "Market Rent" and a "Guaranteed Rent" scheme</li> <li>Securing Concord House and Sycamore Houses as TA</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This work is ongoing and the Council engages with housing providers to explore new opportunities to increase supply</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continue to focus on maintaining a lawful position on the use of shared bed and breakfast accommodation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The position on the lawful use of bed and breakfast is monitored weekly and action taken to move households into suitable TA, and to increase the supply of TA is taken in response to spikes in demand</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continue to bring forward innovative projects to diversify the council's temporary accommodation portfolio and to</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(See supply initiatives above)</li> </ul>	

Summarised Recommendations from the JSNA	Commissioners' response	
	Action currently being taken	Future actions being considered
move away from the use of shared B&B for households with children (e.g. the pilot Croydon Lodgings For Families scheme)		
<b>Preventing homelessness (Lead(s): Director of Housing Needs)</b>		
<b>6.6 Preventing homelessness</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Council works in partnership with the voluntary sector and others to prevent homelessness or relieve homelessness by providing alternative accommodation. This includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Family mediation/conciliation</li> <li>○ Financial payments from prevention fund</li> <li>○ Debt Advice</li> <li>○ Resolving HB/rent/arrears problems</li> <li>○ A domestic violence sanctuary scheme</li> <li>○ Crisis intervention</li> <li>○ Negotiation or legal advocacy</li> <li>○ Mortgage arrears interventions</li> </ul> </li> <li>• In addition to the statutory housing advice and options service the Council also commissions the following services aimed at preventing homelessness: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Independent housing advice service</li> <li>○ Preventing repossessions service</li> <li>○ Turnaround Centre Housing Advice Reception</li> <li>○ A rent in advance service to help people move-on from supported and hostel accommodation and prevent repeat homelessness</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• (Set out below)</li> </ul>

Summarised Recommendations from the JSNA	Commissioners' response	
	Action currently being taken	Future actions being considered
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Peoples Gateway project includes work streams aimed at preventing homelessness through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Empowering individuals &amp; communities to be better able to take more responsibility for themselves and each other</li> <li>○ Providing information and advice so that residents can make informed choices about how to meet their needs</li> <li>○ Providing high quality universal services which give everyone the best opportunity to have a good quality of life</li> <li>○ For residents requiring support, providing a joined up approach to assessing the needs of individuals and families, empowering people to resolve issues early</li> <li>○ Providing high quality specialist services so that children and adults maximise independence and are safe from harm</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop a prevention response to the current homeless situation including research on landlords ending assured shorthold tenancies, a supply of immediately available private rented accommodation sufficient to reduce the flow of households</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work is underway with colleagues in the People Gateway pilots to work with households living in private rented accommodation about to be made homeless and their landlords</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cabinet will receive a report in July 2015 setting out and action plan on the Council's use of TA which will include proposals to introduce a new prevention allocation priority on the housing register for households who are working with the People Gateway</li> </ul>

Summarised Recommendations from the JSNA	Commissioners' response	
	Action currently being taken	Future actions being considered
into emergency accommodation, plus a prevention allocation priority on the housing register for households who are working with the People Gateway to achieve affordable and sustainable solutions to their homelessness		

**Commissioners Response prepared by:** Leonard Asamoah  
**Director of Housing Need**  
**People Department, London Borough of Croydon**