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Managing Welfare Reform: Emerging Lessons from the Homelessness Prevention Trailblazers
Introduction

- Homelessness vs Local Authorities
Introduction

- Southwark profile
- Welfare reforms
- Homelessness duties
- The Homelessness Reduction Bill and the new clauses
- What we have done
- Key themes
- Challenges
- Wider considerations
- Questions and answers
Southwark Profile

- 315,000 residents
- Lack of affordable housing and growing housing list
- Over-crowding
- Traditionally high numbers of homeless approaches
- High expectations for council accommodation
- Scarcity of PRS options within the borough
- Low rates of home ownership
- Major regeneration schemes
Welfare Reforms

- Since 2012 Southwark has committed to preventing homelessness by assisting those affected by Welfare reforms.
- Increase in the numbers of those affected by new benefit cap
- New cap introduced in November 2016 has seen benefit reductions of up to £350pw in the extreme cases
Welfare Reforms

- Southwark and Croydon are UC boroughs
- Currently campaigning to remove UC from temporary accommodation placements
- Working with the DCLG and LGA to reduce the impact of removal of housing benefit from 18–21 year olds
- Impact of LHA rates
Welfare Reforms

- DHP Fund
- £1.119 million allocated to Southwark for 2016/17
- 1598 DHP applications received in 2016/17. Roughly 50% accepted due to fund allocation policy.
- Fund allocation– 57% council tenants, 28% HA and 15% PRS
Homelessness: applications and acceptances

- Homelessness Duties:

  - **2,097** homelessness decisions for the 2016/2017 financial year as at 1\(^{st}\) of March 2017.
  - **816 (39%)** accepted as priority need customers
  - **1,801** customers seen each month or **450 customers** per week
  - Largest number of homelessness applications in London
  - Prevention of homelessness is the 23\(^{rd}\) best in England
  - **70% of approaches** due to eviction by family or friends and AST evictions
  - Quarter three data - **571 homelessness decisions** - 231 (40%) accepted as homeless, 53 (9%) intentionally homeless, 162 (28%) not in priority need, 125 (22%) not homeless
Comparison between Southwark’s homelessness acceptance rate and the average London, Inner-London and England borough average rate (2011/12 to 2015/16)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2011/12</th>
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<th>2013/14</th>
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<td>Southwark</td>
<td>53.2%</td>
<td>56.6%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Inner London</td>
<td>49.1%</td>
<td>51.5%</td>
<td>57.1%</td>
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<td>London</td>
<td>45.1%</td>
<td>48.0%</td>
<td>51.0%</td>
<td>54.8%</td>
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<tr>
<td>England</td>
<td>46.3%</td>
<td>47.4%</td>
<td>46.7%</td>
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Increased demand for Temporary Accommodation (Homeless Households)

TA has increased nationally by approximately 50% since 2010 – this trend is reflected in Southwark
The Homelessness Reduction Bill

- Private Member's Bill introduced by Conservative MP Bob Blackman.
- Will receive Royal Assent shortly
- Government committed to funding the new duties
- May be implemented across England late 2017 or early 2018
Clause by Clause

- **Clause 1** – Meaning of threatened with homelessness: 56 days and valid section 21 notices
- **Clause 2** – Duty to provide advisory services: to everyone to **PREVENT** homelessness (detailed leaflets, and advice framework)
- **Clause 3** – Assessment in writing and personalised plans for everyone. Focussed on what customers want? Its reviewable.
Clause 4 – Duty in cases of customers threatened with homelessness: Reasonable steps in preventing homelessness for all eligible customers. Reviewable.

Clause 5 – Duties owed to those who are homeless. Reasonable steps in relieving homelessness for all eligible customers. Reviewable.

Clause 6 – Duty to help secure accommodation, notifying receiving authority. Reviewable.
Clause by clause

- **Clause 7** – Deliberate **AND** unreasonable refusal to co-operate: Duty upon giving a notice: Links back to personalised plans. Refusal of accommodation reviewable.
Clause 8 – All care leavers who are owed continuing duties under section 23C of the Children Act 1989 are deemed to have a local connection in the area of the local authority that owes them those duties.

Where a care leaver has lived in a different area to the above for at least two years, some or all of which falls before they turned 16, they also have a local connection with that district until they are 21.
Clause by clause

- **Clause 9** – Reviews (see later slide)
- **Clause 10** – Duty of public authorities to refer cases to any housing authority of the customer’s choice
- **Clause 11** – enables the Secretary of State to produce codes of practice dealing with local housing authorities’ functions in relation to homelessness or homelessness prevention.
- **Clause 12** – Suitability of private rented accommodation. New suitability order.
What can be reviewed?

- Decision under section 195(2) as to the steps to be taken where an applicant is threatened with homelessness – Prevention Duty
- Decision under section 195(5) to give notice they are bringing the above duty to an end
- Decision as to what duty is owed to an applicant under new sections 189B Relief Duty (S.188 duty?)
- Decision as to the steps they are to take to help the applicant secure suitable accommodation under section 189B(2)
- Decision to give notice they will bring the duty to help secure accommodation under section 189B (5) to an end;
What can be reviewed?

- Decision to give an applicant notice that they have deliberately and unreasonably failed to cooperate under section 193B(2);
- Decision that a customer has deliberately and unreasonably failed to cooperate
- Makes a decision as to the suitability of accommodation offered by way of a final Part 6 offer or a final accommodation offer (under section 193C or 193A).
- Appeal of negative decisions
- Suitability of temporary accommodation
2nd Quarter of 2016/17

Wales

- 2,666 customers
- 504 homelessness decisions
- 81% accepted
- 1,923 in TA
- 42% of TA in PRS
- 138 in B and B
- 1,086 preventions into PRS
- LHA rate same or above PRS rent levels
- Preventions appears to be some confusion
- Funding next year £8 million

Southwark

- 5,385 customers
- 616 homelessness decisions
- 38% accepted
- 1,545 in TA
- 10% of TA in PRS
- 536 in B and B
- 24 preventions into PRS
- LHA rate 38.23% of PRS rent levels
- Preventions 23rd best in England
- Funding next year £5.3 million?
What has Southwark done

- One of the three trailblazer early adopters
- Southwark Council is a strong supporter of the Homelessness Reduction Act
- External critical friend and Shelter assessment
- Project Group (managers and officers)
- Implemented parts of the Act in November 2016
- Trained all staff twice since the summer 2016
- Listened to customers, and partner agencies
- Local Legal Aid organisations views
What has Southwark done

- Trailblazer Delivery Plan
- Set up a Monitoring group from different agencies to review the Delivery Plan
- Interviewing customers who are homeless within 56 days
- Issuing Personal Housing Plans
- Meeting with Providers to review type of accommodation provided
- Working with DCLG on Data Template
- Recruiting Apprentices from the local community
What has Southwark done

- Changes to our processes to ensure that customers are advised at the earliest opportunity
- Telephone interviews for single non priority and straightforward cases. Possible online assessment for some?
- Incentives for single people to be rehoused in the private sector
- Visiting officers to prevent homelessness
- Resettlement officers to settle customers into their new homes
What has Southwark has done

- Predictive modelling
- Visualisation of affordability material and options
- Produced referral form for public authorities
- Employment creation and building resilience
- Employping apprentices growing our own
- Training all partners
- Visited Wales to see how it works on the ground
Key Themes

- Culture change among staff. Investigators vs Negotiators and Mediators
- Engaging with partner agencies
- Early intervention and assistance
- Isolationist bill
- Bureaucracy is here
- Training all the way
Key Themes

- Offer of a six month assured shorthold tenancy good but does not address affordability issues
- It's important to get the letters right and in plain English
- Get your reception service 100% correct
- Same service for everyone and transparent
- Same officer can not review the case twice, but there are **SEVEN** new reviewable acts
Impact of Welfare reforms – benefit cap

2 million pound has not been paid in UC claims. Waiting 7 weeks before first payment in the straightforward cases

Lack of affordable properties in Southwark

LHA is 38% of the market rent in Southwark

24% of PRS customers came off HB last year

More property procurement out of the borough
Rental Prices vs LHA in Southwark

- Studios £383 per week
- 1 bedroom £409 per week
- 2 bedroom £694 per week
- 3 bedroom £1,450 per week

LHA rate in Southwark

- Studios £95.18 week
- 1 bedroom £204.08 per week
- 2 bedroom £265.29 per week
- 3 bedroom £330.72 per week

Average rental prices in Southwark, by number of bedrooms
Challenges

- **IT** – Probably the most frustrating challenge
- More officers required to prevent GK.
- Working with current legislation and piloting the new one
- Recruitment of officers for the project
Wider considerations

FINANCE

Inadequate funding? – AHAS £161 million, London Councils £77 million, Lewisham £2.38 million, Ealing £2.55 million

£663 million spent on TA in London in 2014/15 and only 170m came from the general funds.

Inadequate funding will derail the thinking behind the Act
**Wider considerations**

- **PRS**
- Private rented sector as solution? AST eviction is the main cause of homelessness and yet it is the solution to the same problem.
- The new bill ends a relief duty with a 6 month assured short hold tenancy. Will that work?
- No housing benefits for 18–21 year olds
- 60% of rough sleepers are non-UK nationals. What impact will Brexit have on this?
Wider considerations

- OTHERS
- Broken housing market
- Lack of supply of affordable housing
- Sale of most expensive council stock
- Act will not build a single home
- Ten Reviews. Seriously?
- EO and IE: Extreme Optimism and Intense Pessimism around the bill
Conclusion

- The Act is a step in the right direction
- It will ensure that more people are assisted
- Data science, code of practice and special advisors will help
- There are wider issues which will make the government’s desired outcome challenging
- A holistic approach to resolving homelessness is required
Conclusion

- Our goal is...

KEEP CALM AND LET ME PUT A SMILE ON YOUR FACE
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- Come and visit us if you wish?
- Any questions?