

Thurrock Homelessness

Review

May/June 2015

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Thurrock Homelessness Prevention Strategy Review - 2015

1. Background

Legal background

Section 1 of the Homelessness Act 2002 places a duty on local authorities to formulate a homelessness strategy by carrying out a homelessness review for the district.

Section 2 of the Homelessness Act 2002 prescribes the considerations that local authorities should undertake in conducting a review of homelessness and the purpose of the review in terms of informing a future homelessness strategy.

The Homelessness Act 2002 determines that local authorities must formulate and publish a homelessness strategy based on the results of that review – the life of the strategy should be no more than 5 years, and when the strategy expires or is due for expiry, the authority must publish a new homelessness strategy.

There is a further duty on local authorities to keep the strategy under review – and they may modify it from time to time – however, any modifications must be published and before adoption of a homelessness strategy, or prior to modifying an existing strategy, the authority must carry out consultation.

In formulating or modifying a homelessness strategy, under section 153 of the Localism Act 2011, a local housing authority in England must also have regard to—

- (a) Its current allocation scheme under section 166A of the Housing Act 1996
- (b) Its current tenancy strategy under section 150 of the Localism Act 2011

Local background

Thurrock Council last reviewed its homelessness strategy in 2009 and implemented a new strategy in 2010.

In line with the legislative requirements and in view of the many changes over the past 5 years, including welfare reform, a new strategy is now required.

2. Consultation

In February and March 2015 an initial consultation was undertaken to review current homelessness. Meetings were held to receive feedback and those taking part included partner agencies, frontline housing staff and Council staff from other directorates. Three questions were asked:

- What are the issues & biggest challenges?
- Existing services & provision – what works well & where are the gaps?
- Identifying key areas for change / action points

Feedback from the groups can be broadly summarised into the following areas:

Private Landlords	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provision of incentives for landlords working with the Council • Improve working relationships with landlords • Consider use of private landlords outside of the Borough where appropriate
Finances	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase education & training on money management, budgeting and debt management • Provision of dedicated and specialised welfare advice for people across all tenures • Investigate options to increase Local Housing Allowance levels to meet higher market rents • Increase joint working over Discretionary Housing payments • Enable use of the homelessness prevention fund to include more creative options to prevent homelessness • Address welfare reforms in a more pro-active manner
Housing Supply	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase the supply of accommodation for single people and those with no priority need including young people under 25 • Increase the supply of supported accommodation – particularly for people with complex/dual needs • Increase the number of alternative housing options for working households on a low income e.g. shared ownership schemes • Investigate options for direct access hostel accommodation – possibly for the sub region
Education & Mediation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer school programmes to educate on homeless prevention & money management as part of their curriculum from year 7 • De- incentivise homeless applications through use of the allocations scheme to prioritise those who remain at home with family • Increase the use of mediation services to enabling people to remain in their current homes e.g. between landlord & tenant, Parent & child
Partnerships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve working relationships through better understanding of roles and responsibilities • Agree clearly defined working practices and robust service level agreements and protocols between partners • Strive for the earlier identification of vulnerable people • Agree pathways into housing for clients • Increase joint professionals working groups
Regional Working	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arrange and monitor working agreements with London and regional boroughs particularly around moving people across boroughs and ensuring adequate support is in place • Joint working with other boroughs to minimise competition for private landlords

<p>Tenancy Sustainment</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase resources for helping people to sustain tenancies – both Private and Social • Maximise the length of private sector tenancies to prevent the AST “revolving door” • Raise awareness of the implications of losing a social housing tenancy and be proactive in offering lessons in tenancy management • Robustly implement new Council introductory tenancy processes and intervene at an early stage to prevent evictions
<p>Customer Service</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make improvements to the online housing options assessment (HED) • Improve signposting and the customer service experience • Explore options for a one stop shop for housing to incorporate all tenures and options
<p>Health & Wellbeing</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure temporary accommodation is used for only minimal periods and that residents are still linked into medical services e.g. GPs/health visitors • Temporary accommodation should have appropriate facilities to meet basic needs e.g. cooking & laundry facilities, access to public transport • Ensure people have access to other services such as alcohol and drug support, debt advice and counselling services • Improved hospital discharge procedures and provision of adapted accommodation including temporary accommodation • Expand use of the mental health forum

DRAFT

In addition to the meetings above, an 8 week online survey was also undertaken. Around 850 recent service users were contacted and invited to take part and 116 (14%) responded. Key points and actions can be broadly identified as follows:

Results from Service Users survey	Actions Required
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 66% expected the Council to rehouse them • 85% felt that expectations were not fulfilled 	Need to better manage the expectations of service users before and after they approach for advice and assistance
<p>Around 30-45% of those surveyed felt that staff never</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listened to their problems • Understood them • Offered helpful advice 	<p>This matter will need to be addressed through training and monitoring.</p> <p>NB. Caution should be given that those presenting unfavourable information to the service users can often be seen as unwelcoming and impolite.</p>
<p>Approximately 50% of service users stated they were not given a Housing Officers name and contact details</p> <p>In addition, 60% stated they were not given any written information to take away with them</p> <p>55% claimed they did not know what would happen once the application had been made</p>	Need to improve initial contact between service users and front line officers and to ensure that every service user receives written advice along with contact details for the case officer
<p>90% felt that the council did not stay in regular contact with them regarding their housing circumstances</p> <p>96% of those responding felt that the council did not stay in touch with them during their stay in temporary accommodation and provide them with support.</p>	Need to improve communication between service users and front line officers throughout the assessment process and whilst in temporary accommodation
<p>Over 80% felt that the advice and information they were given was unhelpful for their housing problem</p> <p>72% of those responding felt that the Allocation Policy was not explained to them clearly</p> <p>86%, of those responding felt that although accommodation was not offered they were still not given good advice and guidance</p>	<p>Need to improve the standard of information and advice provided</p> <p>Need to ensure that advice given is relevant to the service users specific situation</p>

3. Statistical Background

- A) Thurrock Population
- B) Migration in and out of Thurrock
- C) Housing Stock and tenures
- D) Thurrock Housing market
- E) Thurrock Privately rented market
- F) Thurrock Social housing
- G) Homelessness
- H) Homeless Prevention & Relief
- I) Rough Sleeping
- J) Temporary Accommodation

A) Thurrock Population

Population:

At the 2011 census the population of Thurrock was recorded at just under 160,000

The population is predicted to grow by 5.2% over the next 5 years, which is not unexpected due to Thurrock being an area of regeneration – see A1

However, it is the 65+ age group that is anticipated to increase the most with an increase of over 13% on its 2011 level

A1 – Age comparison and predicted levels of population

	Current (at 2012)	Predicted (at 2017)	Increase	increase
0 to 19	42,700	44,800	2,100	4.92%
20 to 29	20,700	21,000	300	1.45%
30 to 44	36,300	36,400	100	0.28%
45 to 64	38,600	41,600	3,000	7.77%
65+	21,200	24,000	2,800	13.21%
Total	159,500	167,800	8,300	5.20%

Source: 2012 based ONS sub-national population projections

Ethnicity & Language

Thurrock has become increasingly diverse in the past 10 years; Black and Black British residents have replaced Asian and Asian British as the second largest group, with an increase of 6.65%, whilst white groups have reduced by over 9% - see A2

1.14% of the Thurrock population cannot speak English well or at all. This is higher than the neighbouring boroughs and the East of England see A3

Actions:

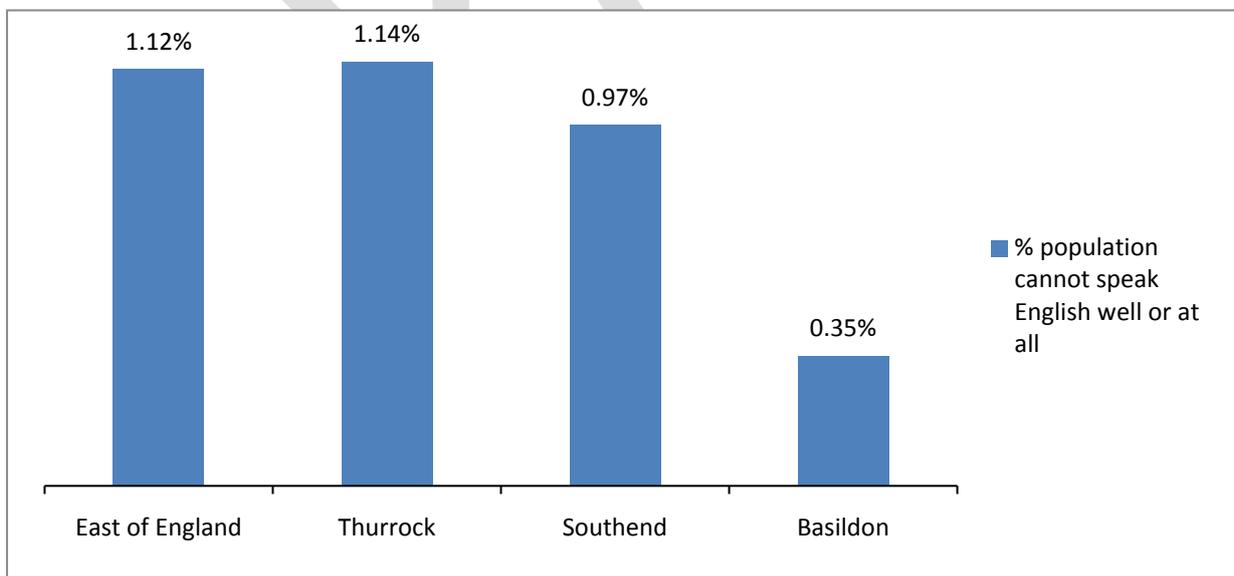
- Complete an equality impact assessment on the new strategy to monitor for adverse impacts on ethnic groups
- Continue to collect data on ethnicity of homeless households and monitor for any deviance from local data
- Ensure there are means of communication available for non-English speakers e.g. translations on web pages & application forms, translators available at interviews
- Encourage minority groups to be represented on Homelessness forums and during consultations

A2 – Ethnicity Comparison

	2001		2011		Change
White	136,399	95.30%	135,429	85.87%	-9.43%
Mixed	1,319	0.92%	3,099	1.97%	1.05%
Asian or Asian British	3,405	2.38%	5,927	3.76%	1.38%
Black or Black British	1,659	1.16%	12,323	7.81%	6.65%
Other Ethnic Group	346	0.24%	927	0.59%	0.35%

Source: ONS Census data 2011

A3 – English speaking



Source: ONS Census data 2011

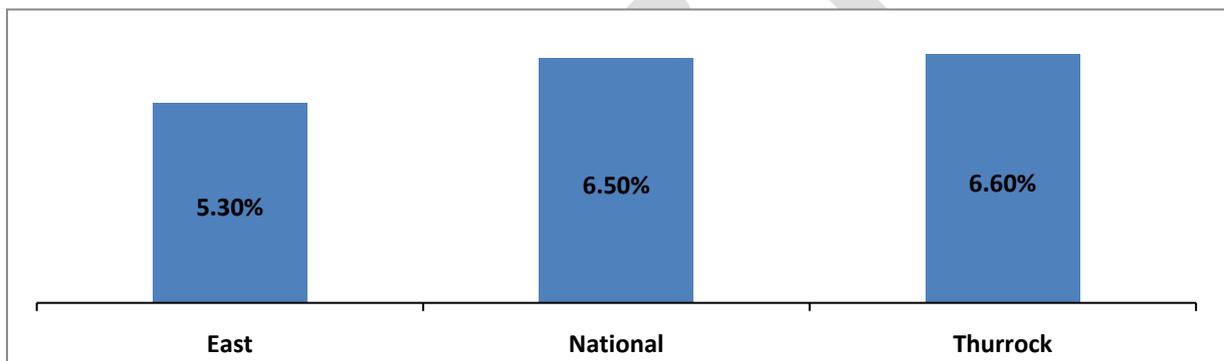
Unemployment:

Thurrock has a slightly higher level of unemployment compared to the regional and national picture – see A4

Actions:

- Ensure housing options incorporate employment advice and signposting
- Work in partnership with the Jobcentre to ensure access to skills training and employment services

A4 – Unemployment levels

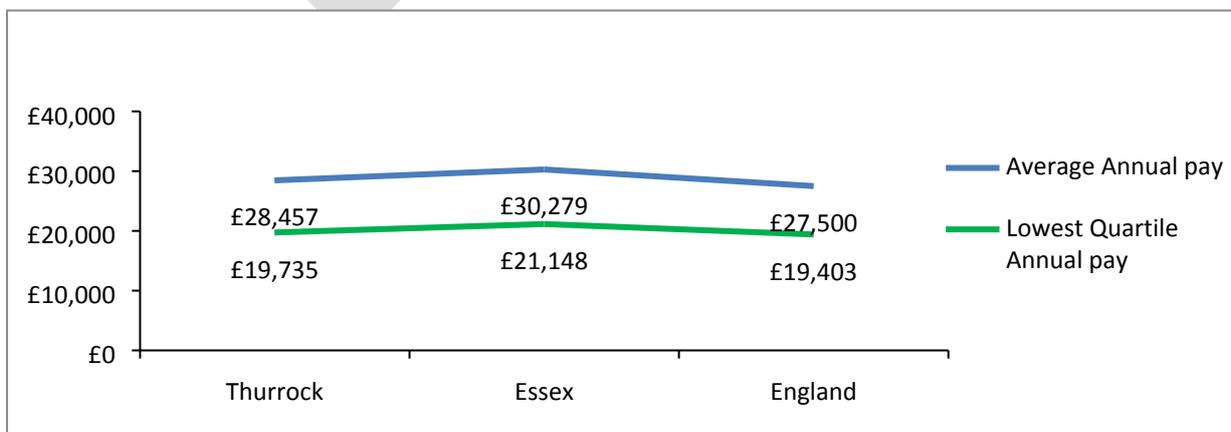


Source: ONS Census data 2011

Pay levels

Thurrock has slightly lower pay levels than Essex but is marginally higher than national figures – see A5

A5 – Pay levels



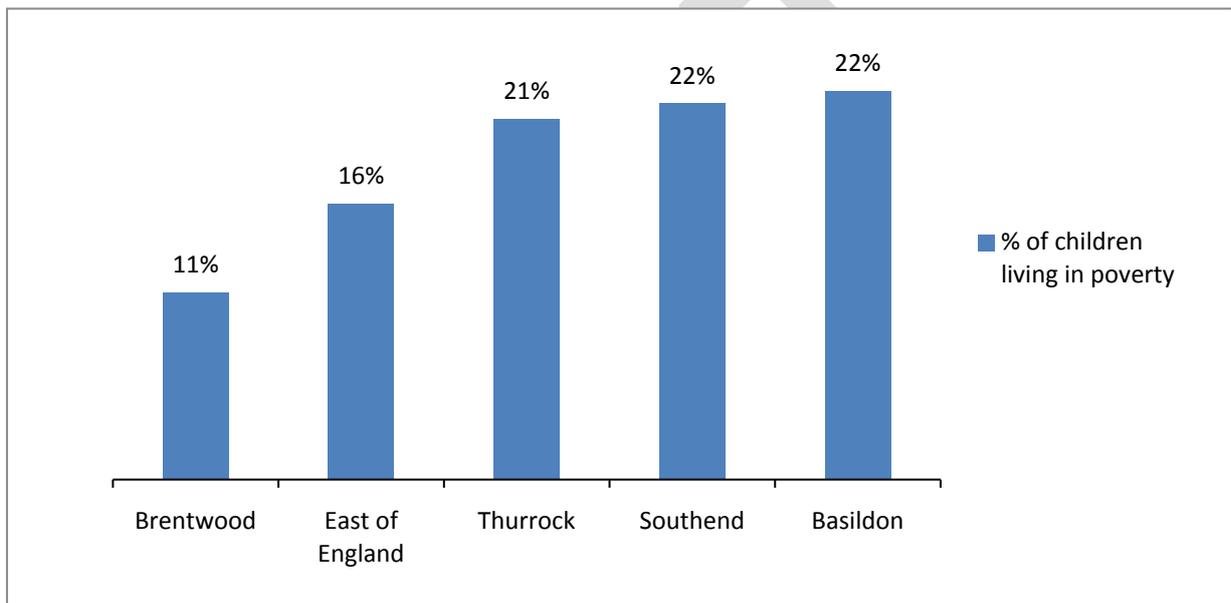
Source: Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (2014)

Child Poverty

A6 shows the percentage of children in households where the income is less than 60% of the median income

Thurrock is higher than the East of England and the neighbouring borough of Brentwood and only slightly lower than its other neighbours Basildon and Southend

A6 – Child poverty levels



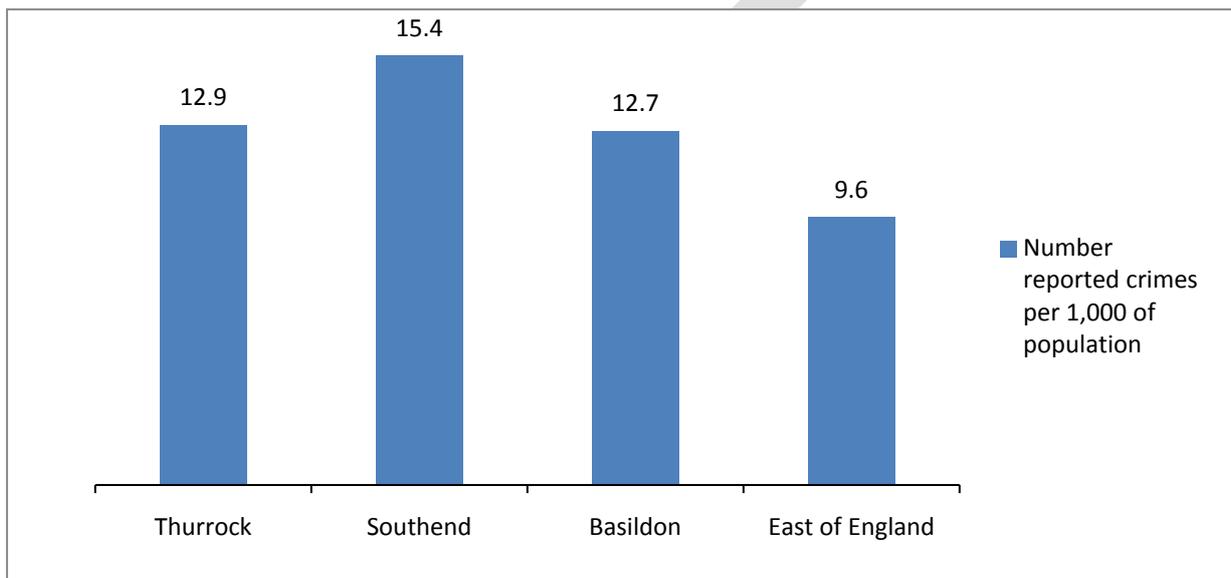
Source: Public Health England 2012

Crime levels

The borough has a higher level of reported violent crimes than the east of England as a whole but is lower than Southend and similar to Basildon - see A7

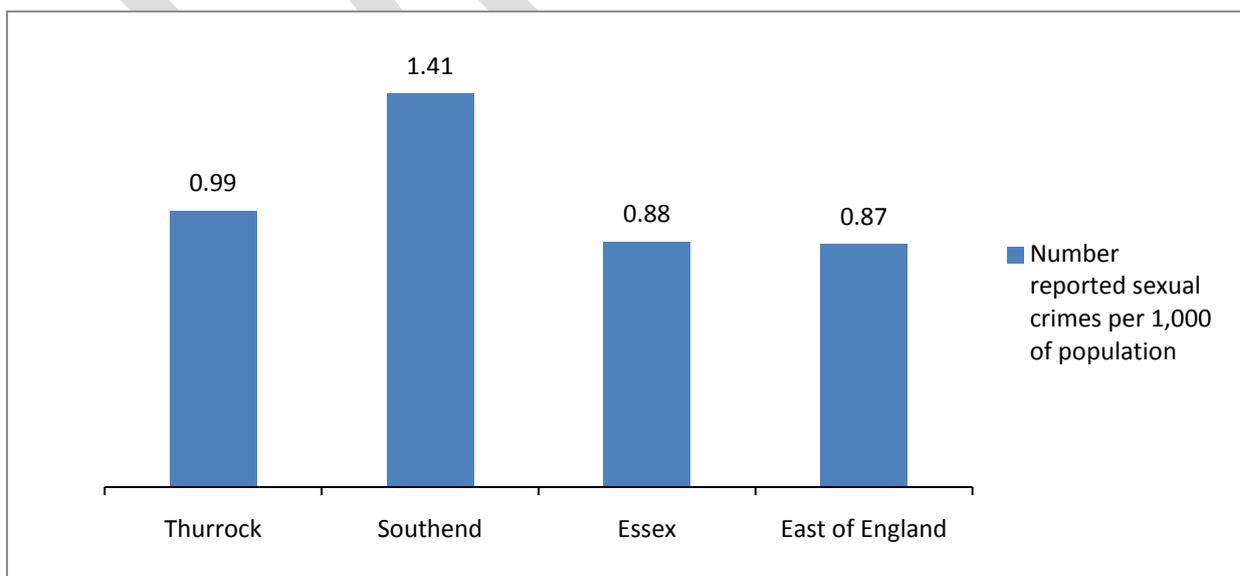
The picture is similar for sexual offences – see A8

A7 – Reported violent crimes and offences against a person



Source: Public Health England

A8 - Reported sexual offences



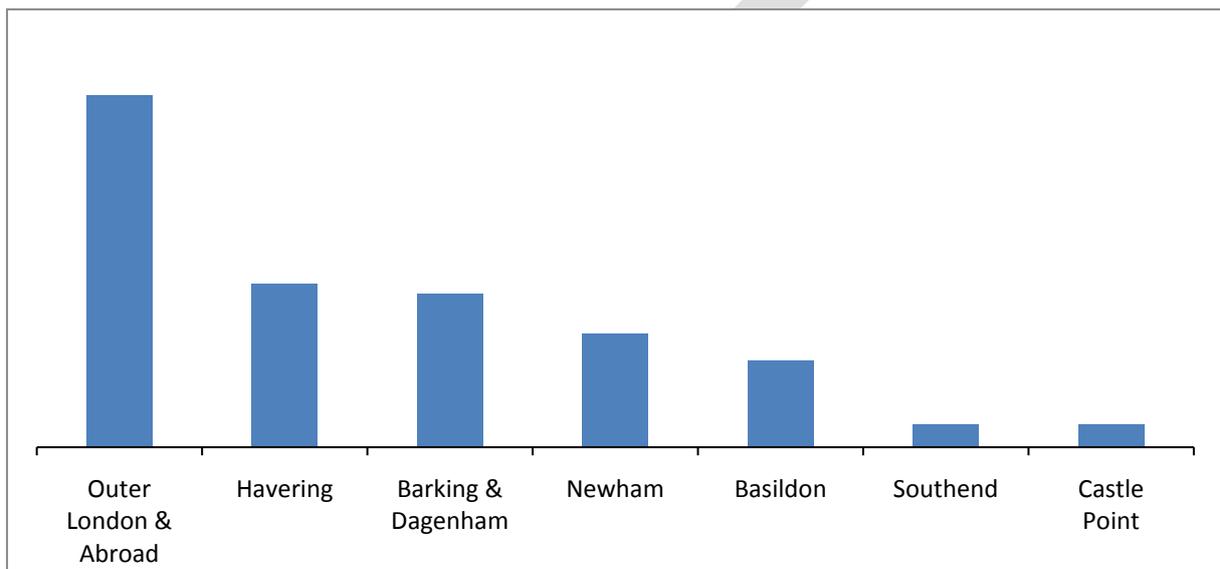
Source: Public Health England

B) Thurrock Migration

The 2011 census collected data on where people had migrated from and to and showed a net migration into Thurrock. It does not however show reasons why they have migrated.

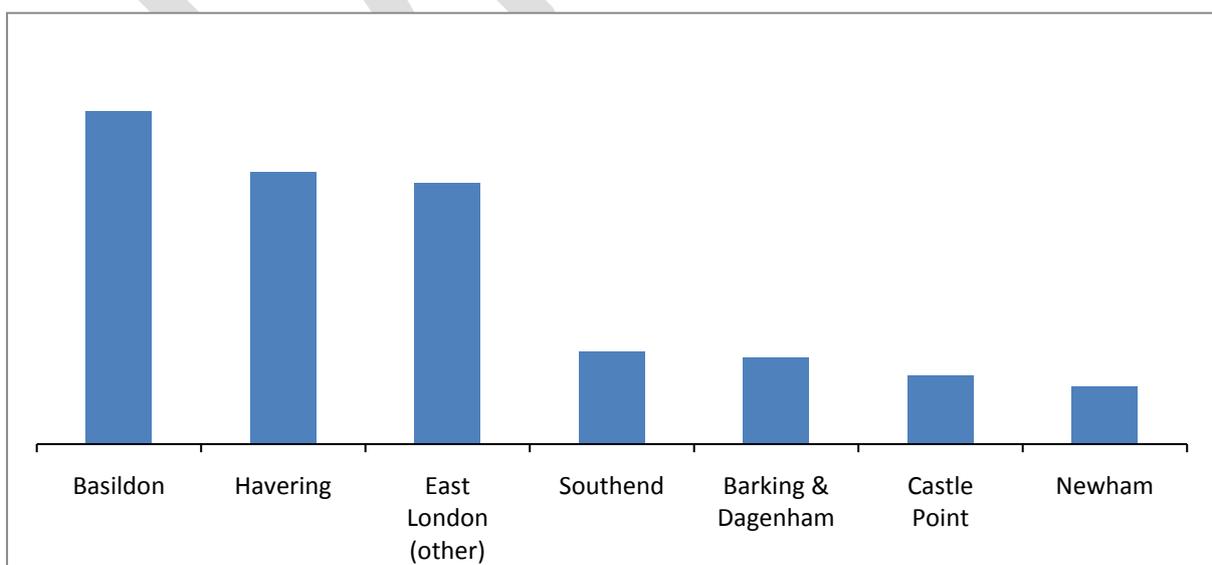
See B1 and B2

B1- Migration into Thurrock - Borough migrated from



Source: ONS Census data 2011

B2 – Migration out of Thurrock - Borough migrated to



Source: ONS Census data 2011

Out of borough placements in Thurrock:

London Boroughs:

A number of London boroughs are discharging their rehousing duty into Thurrock following greater freedoms introduced by the localism Act 2011 and a cap on benefits which makes local rents less affordable

Private properties in Thurrock are being used for accommodating London households in temporary accommodation either to meet the interim housing duty or whilst awaiting discharge of the full rehousing duty

Recent Examples:

- Havering Council are offering Landlords financial incentives for private sector leasing schemes and assured short hold tenancies
- Westminster Council has purchased 25 properties in the borough
- Newham Council placed at least 16 households in the borough in 2014
- Tower Hamlets advertised a £2,500 payment for one-bedroom properties to landlords agreeing to let to council-vetted tenants for two years and a £4,000 lump sum for homes with two or more bedrooms
- Westminster Council pay up to £4,000 as an incentive to Landlords

Under s 208 Housing Act 1996 local authorities who secure accommodation for applicants outside of their district, should give notice to the local housing authority in whose district the accommodation is situated. However, this is not consistently being followed and a recent Freedom of Information request by Inside Housing showed that at least 8,000 households have been placed outside of London in the past 2 years with no notification to the receiving local authority. (Source: Inside Housing 23rd April 2015)

Anecdotally, local partner agencies such as CMHT and Sericc have reported cases of households either being placed in inappropriate accommodation or in need of support services due to complex needs, with no referrals being made to the support services required

These events raise the following issues:

- London boroughs can offer greater incentives to private landlords due to greater resources
- There are concerns that this has led to an increase in notices on assured short hold tenancies in Thurrock (highest cause of homelessness)
- Because landlords can sign up to “better offers” with London boroughs, this reduces the private rented stock available to Thurrock residents

Neighbouring Boroughs

Basildon Council is also offering incentives to landlords in Thurrock and the surrounding areas with an offer of £1,000 for 12-month tenancies and £1,500 for 24-month tenancies.

Other neighbouring boroughs (within the sub-region) have indicated that they will not be offering incentives to Thurrock landlords in the near future

Actions:

- Investigate improved landlord incentives for Thurrock clients
- Improve working relationships with landlords
- Set up information sharing agreements with London boroughs, particularly regarding households with complex needs such as mental health, medical, specialist schooling and ASB issues
- Remind London boroughs of their duty to notify Local Authorities when placing people out of borough under s208 Housing Act 1996
- Work with other boroughs in the sub region to consider cross boundary joint partnerships to incentivise landlords

C) Thurrock housing stock

Tenures:

More than two thirds of the housing stock in Thurrock is owner occupied. This is slightly lower than figures for the region but slightly higher than the national figure. See C1 & C2

Nationally there has been a s50% increase in the private rented sector over the past 10 years, but the increase in Thurrock is more than twice this figures at 130%

Subsequently, the Private rented sector is now at similar levels to the social rented sector see C1 and C3

Reasons for the increase could include:

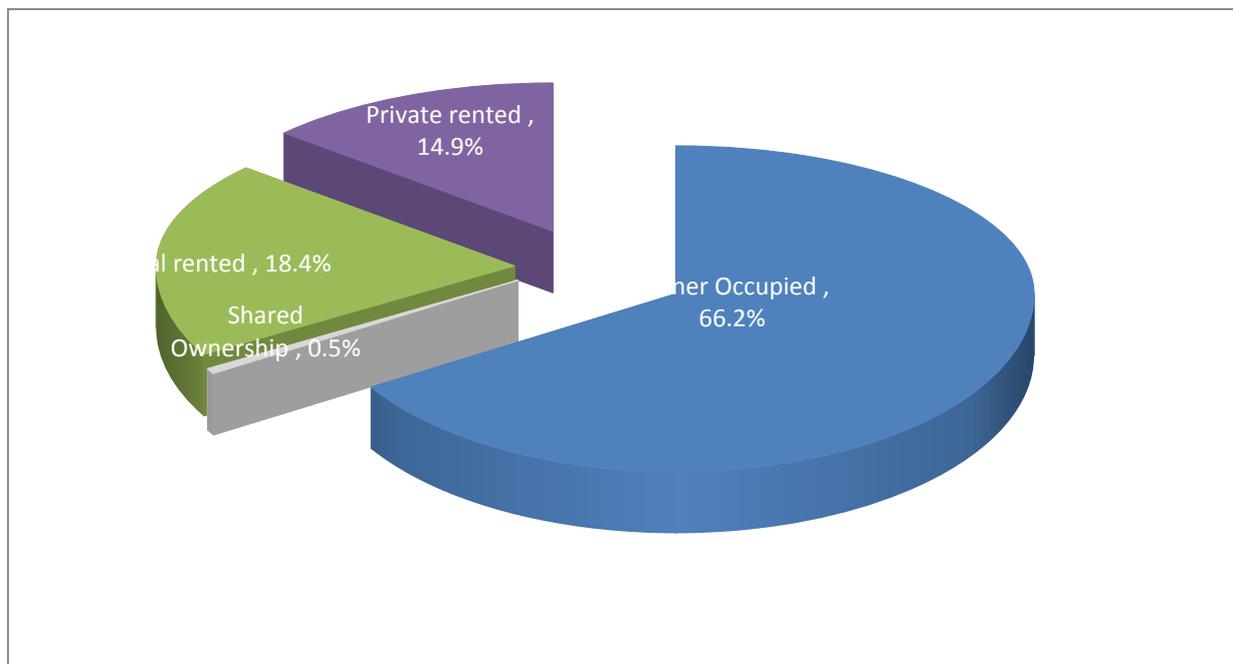
- reduced house prices over the past 10 years
- low interest rates for landlords buying to let
- an increase in the buy to let market

The increase provides greater opportunities for Thurrock residents to privately rent but also provides more opportunities for migration into the borough

Actions

- Explore incentives to landlords to offer accommodation to potentially homeless households
- Explore options for longer tenancies with private landlords
- Explore the long term impacts of welfare reforms on privately rented households – particularly Universal Credit - and any mitigations
- Consider improved monitoring of private landlords – e.g. Landlord licensing schemes

C1 – Tenure comparisons - Thurrock



Source: Source: ONS Census data 2011

C2 – National tenure comparisons

National Comparison				
	Thurrock	Essex	East	England
Tenure	%	%	%	%
Owner Occupied	66.2	71.4	67.6	63.4
Shared Ownership	0.5	0.6	0.7	0.8
Social rented	18.4	14.3	15.7	17.7
Private rented	14.9	13.8	16.0	18.1

Source: ONS Census data 2011

C3 – Changes to tenure

Thurrock Housing Tenure Profile – Comparison 2001 & 2011			
Tenure	2001	2011	Change
Owner Occupied with Mortgage	47.9%	40.7%	-7.2%
Owner Occupied no Mortgage	23.8%	25.5%	1.7%
Shared Ownership	0.3%	0.5%	0.2%
Social rented	20.4%	18.4%	-2.0%
Private rented	6.5%	14.9%	8.4%

Source: ONS Census data 2001 and 2011

Property type and size

Houses represent over 77% of all housing - See C4

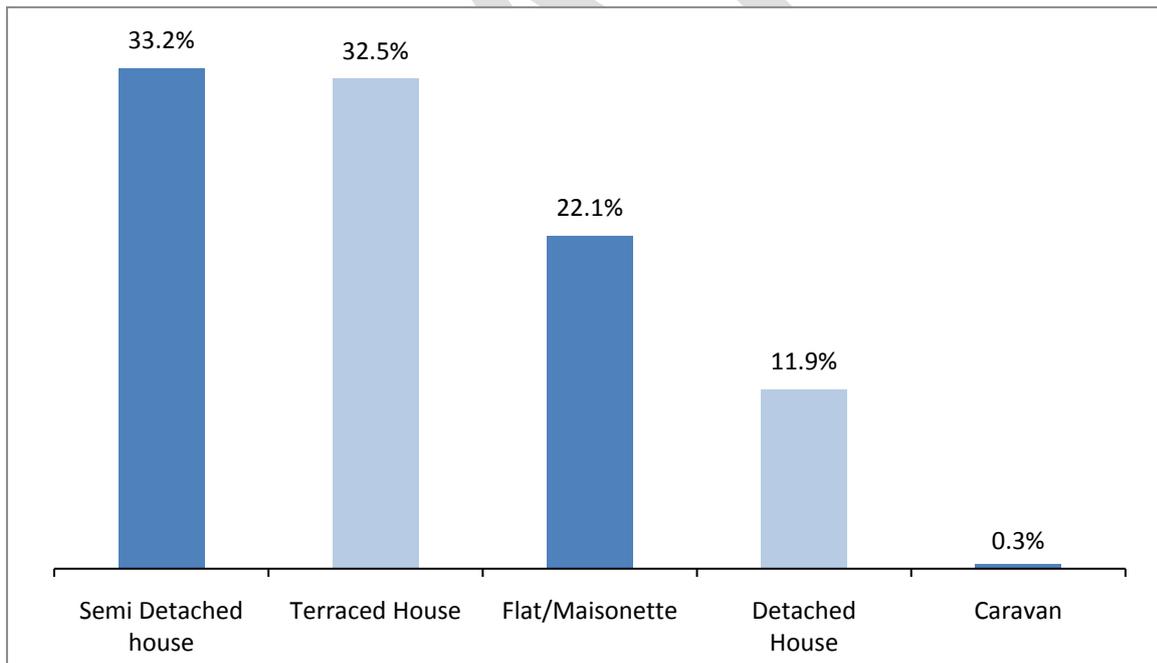
Over 75% of all housing stock is 2 or 3 bed roomed whilst just less than 12% is bedsit or 1 bed roomed. See C5

In comparison - 49% of households only require 1 bedroom (Singles and couples with no children). See C6

Action

- Influence future house building and planning to achieve an increase in smaller properties (1 bedroom or studio) to meet smaller household needs

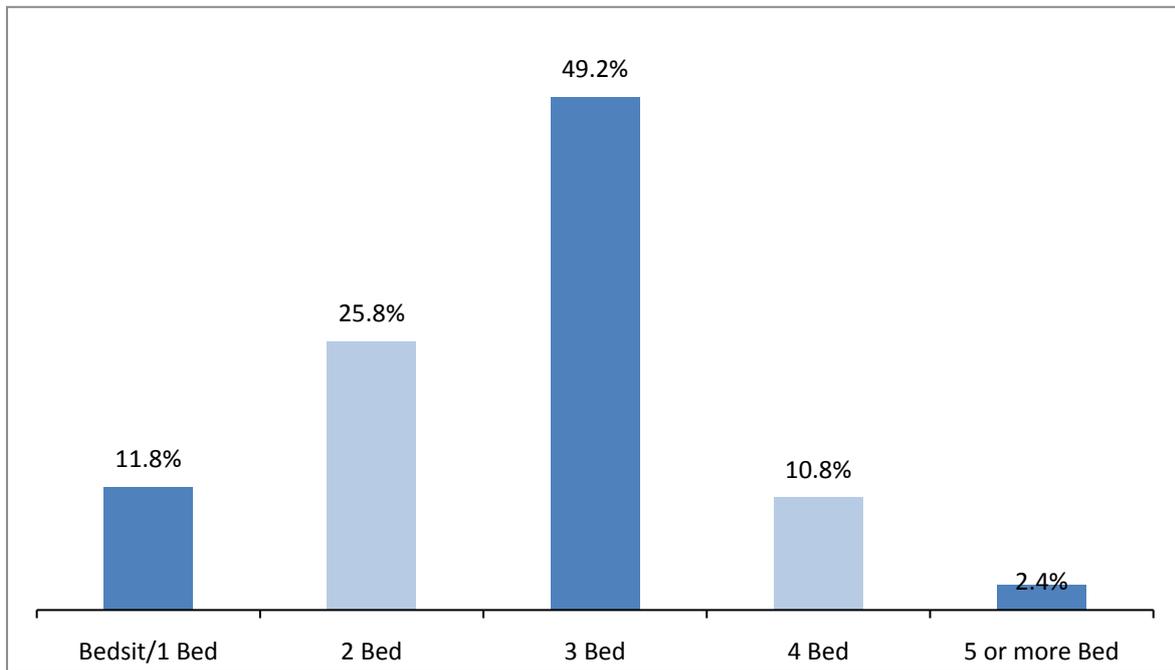
C4 – Comparison by property type (all tenures)



Source: ONS Census data 2011

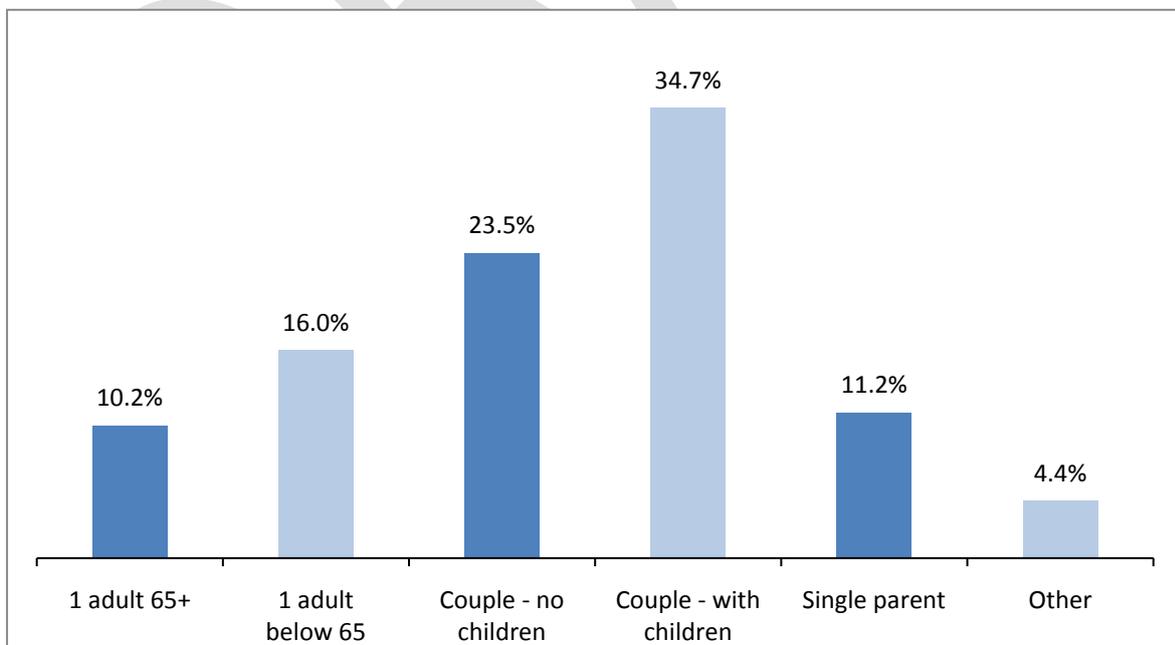
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C5 – Comparison by bedroom numbers (all tenures)



Source: ONS Census data 2011

C6 – Comparison by household make up (all tenures)



Source: ONS Census data 2011

Occupation levels

5.4% of households are over occupied (over crowded) in comparison to 64.3% who are under-occupied in the borough. See C7

The greatest overcrowding is in the private rented sector at 11.9% see C8
This is almost double the national average at 6% (Source: Survey of English Housing 2013/14)

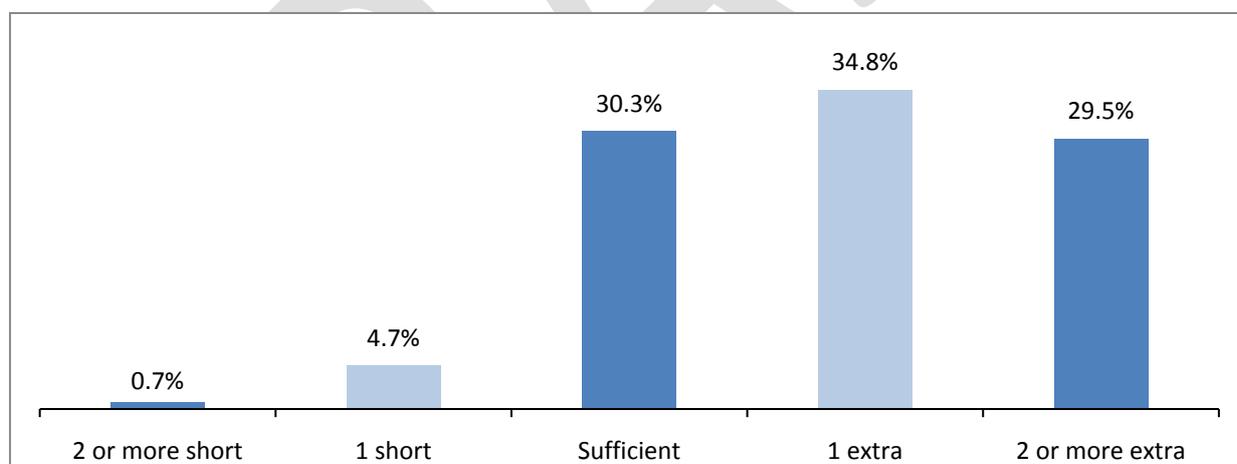
14.8% of socially rented stock is under occupied by 2 or more bedrooms – although lower than the owned stock, this represents around 1700 properties i.e. 36% of the total 3 and 4 bedroomed social stock

Actions

- Tackle under occupation across all tenure types
- Consider options for older under-occupiers (all tenures) to move into sheltered accommodation and rent out their properties to private renters
- Explore options for encouraging under-occupiers to take in lodgers

C7 – Comparison of overcrowding with under occupation (all tenures)

The chart shows the number of bedrooms short or extra to that required by the household size



Source: ONS Census data 2011

C8 – Overcrowding & under occupation by tenure comparison

Variance by tenure type	Under occupied (2 or more bedrooms)	Over occupied
Owned or shared ownership	37.6%	3.3%
Social rent	14.8%	7.8%
Private rented	10.9%	11.9%
All Stock	29.5%	5.4%

Source: ONS Census data 2011

D) Thurrock Home Ownership

Purchasing property

The average house price in Thurrock is £167,608 - lower than both the national and local figures. Average house prices in Thurrock have increased in the past 6 years by 12.35%. This also represents a lower increase than both Essex and the national figures – see D1 and D2

A survey in January 2015 identified lowest and average prices of properties available for sale - see D3

In order to outright purchase the cheapest property in Thurrock at that time, an annual income of at least £26,300 and a substantial deposit is required – see D3 and D4

Shared ownership allows households on a lower income the option to purchase a share of a property – lowest income requirement is £15,420 plus a deposit of £5,500 – see D5

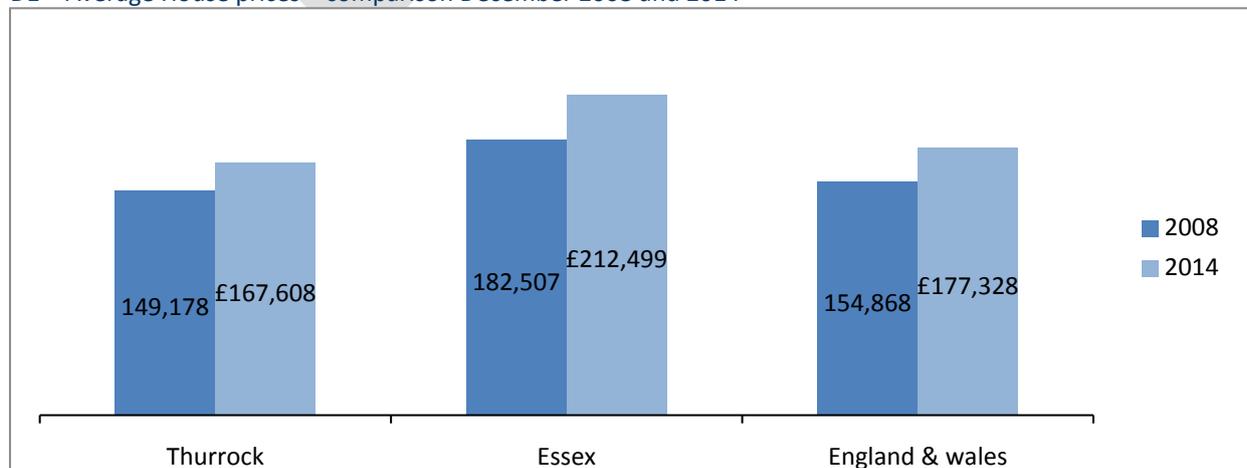
Help to Buy was introduced by the Government in 2013. Buyers can purchase a property with a 5% deposit and take out an interest free loan or mortgage guarantee for 20% of the purchase price.

Between April 2013 to March 2015, 47,018 properties were purchased across the country using the scheme of which 956 were purchased in Thurrock.

Actions

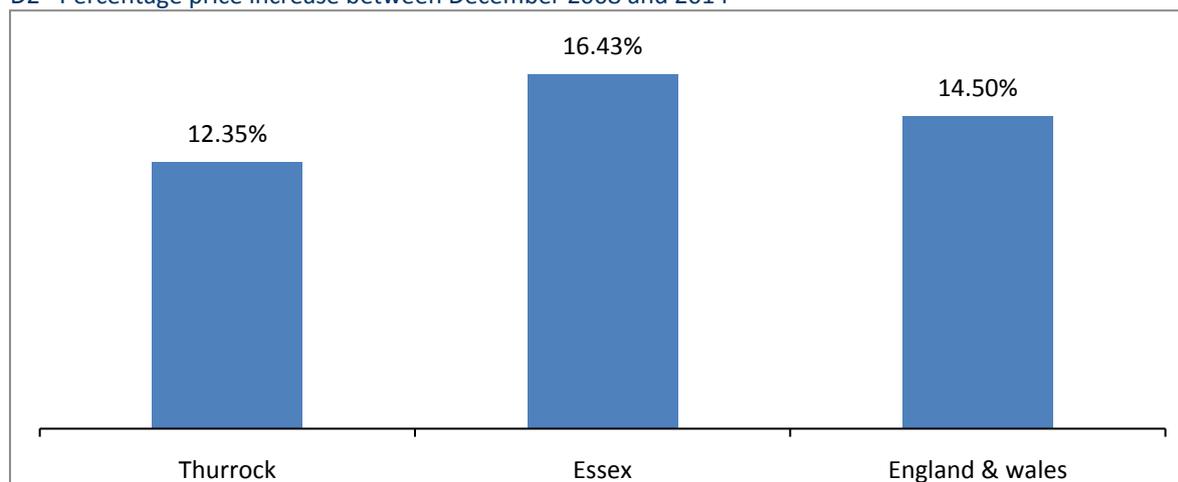
- Ensure all purchasing options are considered as a prevention to homelessness when providing advice and assistance through the housing options team
- Influence future housing supply to include more affordable purchasing options such as shared ownership

D1 – Average House prices – comparison December 2008 and 2014



Source: Land Registry

D2– Percentage price increase between December 2008 and 2014



Source: Land Registry

D3 – Property prices at January 2015

House Prices - sales	Lowest prices	Average prices
1 bed flat	£97,000	£115,313
2 bed flat	£124,995	£150,309
2 bed house	£178,995	£196,054
3 bed house	£199,995	£228,351

Source: DCA House price survey January 2015

D4 – Income Thresholds required to purchase

	Single income	Dual income	Deposit required 20%
1 bed flat	£26,300	£31,800	£19,400
2 bed flat	£33,900	£40,900	£24,999
2 bed house	£48,600	£58,600	£35,799
3 bed house	£54,300	£65,500	£39,999

Source: DCA House price survey January 2015

D4 – examples of shared ownership properties at January 2015

	Price	Share price	Share %	Rent	Mortgage	Total	Deposit needed	Income required
1 bed flat	£110,000	£55,000	50%	£126	£298	£424	£5,500	£15,420
2 bed flat	£150,000	£52,500	35%	£223	£284	£507	£5,250	£18,473
2 bed house	£200,000	£60,000	30%	£321	£325	£646	£6,000	£23,491
3 bed house	£230,000	£69,000	30%	£369	£374	£743	£6,900	£27,018

Source: share to buy

E) Thurrock Private Rental market

Privately renting property

The cost of privately renting is influenced by supply and demand and there are no restraints on how much rent a landlord can charge or achieve – see E1

Income threshold requirements are shown in E2

Average and lower quartile pay levels are shown in E3

Therefore whilst someone on an average income in Thurrock could afford to privately rent a one bedroom flat, if they are on an income in the lowest quartile or require a larger property, private rental becomes unaffordable without financial assistance (benefits). Affordability is determined as monthly housing costs not exceeding 33% of gross income

Housing Benefit provision for private tenants is available through Local Housing Allowance (LHA) and is means tested

LHA rates relate to the area in which the claim is made. These areas are called Broad Rental Market Areas (BRMA). A BRMA is where a person could reasonably be expected to live taking into account access to facilities and services

LHA rates for Thurrock at January 2015 are shown at E4

LHA rates are based on the lowest third of private market rents being paid in the BRMA; these can differ widely from advertised rents. Valuation Office Agency (VOA) Rent Officers collect the rental information from letting agents, landlords and tenants.

The BRMA for Thurrock includes Basildon, Brentwood, Billericay and Wickford

There is a shortfall between the Local Housing Allowance for Thurrock and actual rents in the borough – both average and lowest quartile – see E5

The impact of London Boroughs moving people into the area and paying London rates and incentives could lead to even higher market rents. In addition, the increasing population will also lead to higher demand. Therefore the shortfall could worsen over time

Actions

- Improve working partnerships with Housing benefits
- Investigate possible influences on LHA rates

E1– Cost of private rentals

	Average monthly rental (Jan 2015)	Lowest quartile monthly rental (Jan 2015)	Local monthly Housing Allowance (Jan 2015)
1 bed flat	£650	£595	£550
2 bed flat	£849	£750	£692
2 bed house	£885	£850	£692
3 bed house	£1,055	£950	£808

Source: Thurrock Housing Needs Assessment 2015 and GOV.

E2 - Income required

Income thresholds required for private rental	
1 bed flat	£28,600
2 bed flat	£36,000
2 bed house	£40,800
3 bed house	£45,600

Source: DCA House price survey January 2015

E3 – Pay levels Thurrock

	Average	Lowest quartile
	£28,457	£19,735

Source: Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (2014)

E4 – LHA rates Thurrock

	Local monthly Housing Allowance (Jan 2015)
1 bed flat	£550
2 bed flat	£692
2 bed house	£692
3 bed house	£808

Source: Gov.UK

E5 – Shortfall levels

	Monthly shortfall for average rental (Jan 2015)	Monthly shortfall for lowest quartile (Jan 2015)
1 bed flat	£100	£45
2 bed flat	£157	£58
2 bed house	£193	£158
3 bed house	£247	£142

F) Social Housing

Social Housing stock

Thurrock Council own just over 10,000 properties and Registered Providers have around 1500 properties for social renting in Thurrock. Both are let through the Council's Choice based Lettings scheme Thurrock Choice Homes.

Waiting lists are long but the number of years required to supply full demand varies greatly according to the size of property required – see F1

Almost half of people waiting need a 1 bedroom property and of these almost 30% are aged 25 and under – see F2

Over 25% of people on the waiting list have a need for 2 bedroom properties but the time taken to supply full demand is the highest at more than 11 years.

Only 12.3% need a 3 bedroom property but 3 bedroom relets represent almost 30% of the total, hence the much shorter wait for a 3 bed property

Future building

Thurrock Council has an ambitious building programme with plans to build almost 1300 new affordable homes within the next 5 years, subject to planning etc. – see F3

Actions:

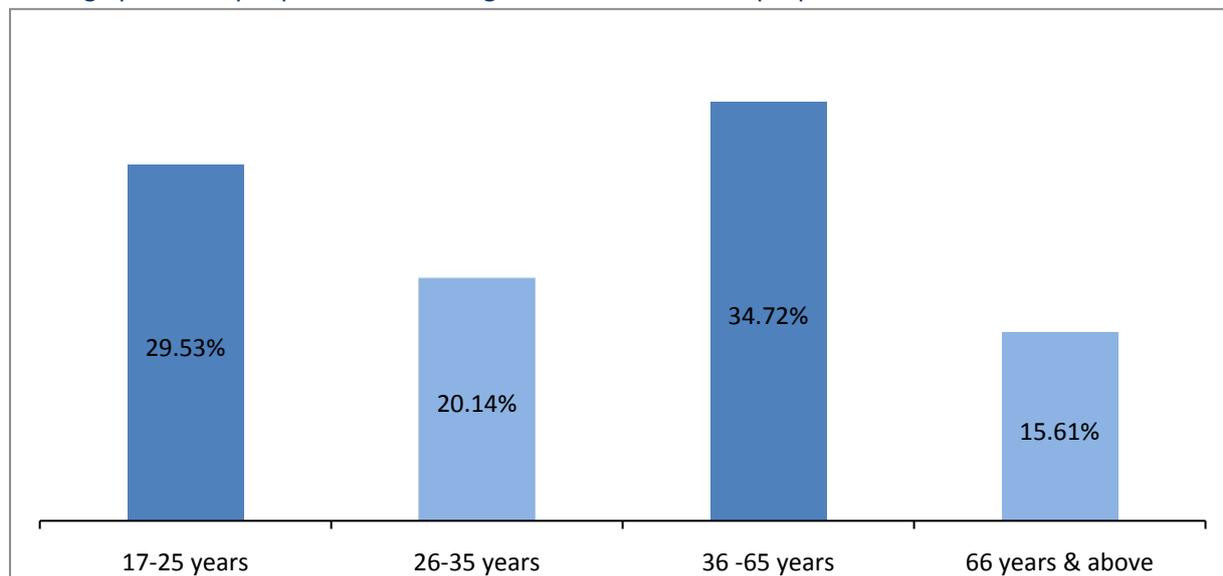
- Manage the expectation of being housed into social housing
- Ensure all housing options are represented in advice given
- Ensure a representative supply of 2 and 3 bedroom properties are included in the building programme

F1 – Council Housing stock

	Council stock	Waiting List (excl transfers)	% of waiting list	Relets in 2014	% of relets	*Years to supply full demand
1 bed	3,109	2,880	49.6%	317	44.1%	9.1
2 bed	2,307	2,066	25.6%	182	25.3%	11.4
3 bed	4,520	715	12.3%	214	29.8%	3.3
4+ bed	204	144	2.5%	6	0.8%	24
Total	10,140	5,805		719		

*Indicates the number of years required to fulfil the demand of current waiting list, through current rate of relets – i.e. takes no account of increases in waiting lists or other demands

F2 – Age profile of people on the waiting list for one bedroom properties



F3 – 5 year Building programme

	Total No. of units to be built	Of which - Affordable Homes	% of Affordable Housing on scheme	No. of units – affordable rented	No. of units – shared ownership/ LCHO
2014-15	709	148	20.9%	97	51
2015-16	305	142	46.6%	126	16
2016-17	635	419	66.0%	293	126
2017-18	1119	533	47.6%	328	205
2018-19	55	55	100.0%	30	25
Total	2823	1297	Av. 45.9%	874	423

The information is based on current planning permissions (April 2015) and the Council's own housing development programme

G) Thurrock Homelessness

Homelessness data

Data is provided to the DCLG quarterly via the P1E statutory return, and is broken down into:

- The number of people approaching the local authority for advice and assistance
- The numbers of homeless applications subsequently taken (where homelessness could not be prevented or relieved) and decisions made
- The number of people for whom a rehousing duty has been accepted by the Council

Thurrock Council has a Housing solutions team who provide a generic service incorporating housing advice, homeless prevention and homeless applications

Key Points

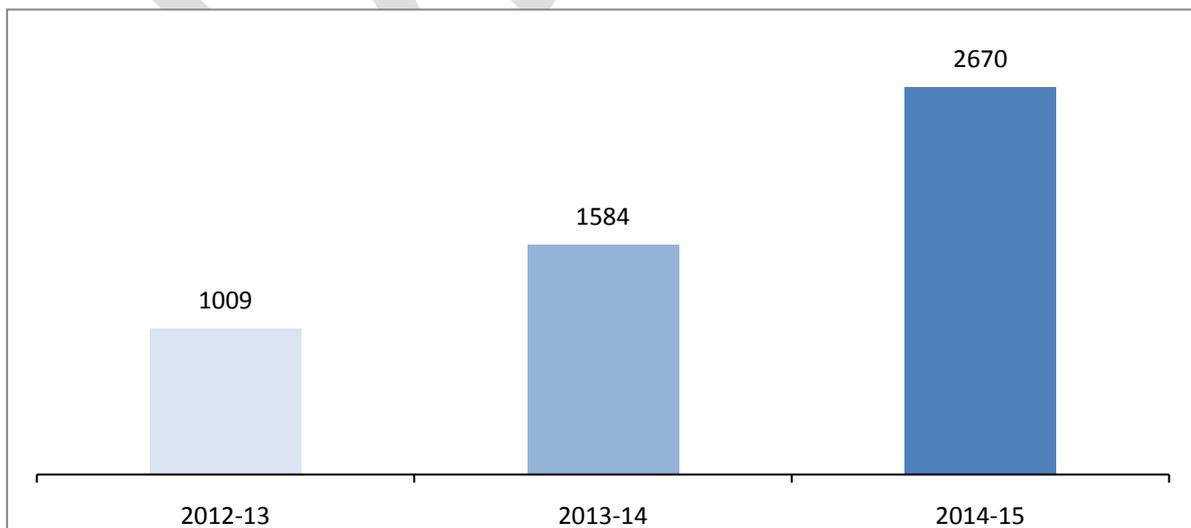
- The number of people approaching has increased by more than 260% in the past 3 years – see G1
- The ability to prevent homelessness has varied over the past 3 years but averages out at 38% of cases – see G2
- The number of homeless decisions made has also varied over the past 3 years but averages out at 254 decisions per year – see G3
- Of decisions made, just over half result in the full rehousing duty being accepted by Thurrock Council – see G5
- Reasons for homeless can be broken down into five main areas – see G6 and G7
 1. Exclusion (36%)
 2. Termination of an AST (27%)
 3. Violence (17%)
 4. Arrears (8%)
- Lone female parent households with dependent children have consistently been the largest household type – see G8
- Younger households (16 to 44) have also been more predominantly represented - see G9
- The largest reason for priority need has consistently been dependent children and/or pregnancy - see G12
- The 2nd largest reason for priority need is mental illness – see G12

- The ethnic makeup generally mirrors the population of Thurrock and does not identify any specific ethnic group as being over represented - see G10 and G11
- The number of 16 & 17 year olds for whom a rehousing duty was accepted has decreased dramatically since 2010-11. See G13. This follows the implementation of a Thurrock Council Housing and Children’s services protocol
- Council evictions were higher in 2014-15 than at any time in the past 7 years – see G14. The Council implemented a policy of Introductory tenancies for all new non sheltered tenancies from March 2014 in line with its Tenancy Policy. This allows a “trial” tenancy period during which tenants receive greater monitoring (quarterly visits) and more support if required to enable them to manage their tenancies. However, it also allows a mandatory right to possession within the introductory period where tenancies fail. It is impossible to determine whether or not the new policy has impacted eviction figures yet but careful monitoring is required

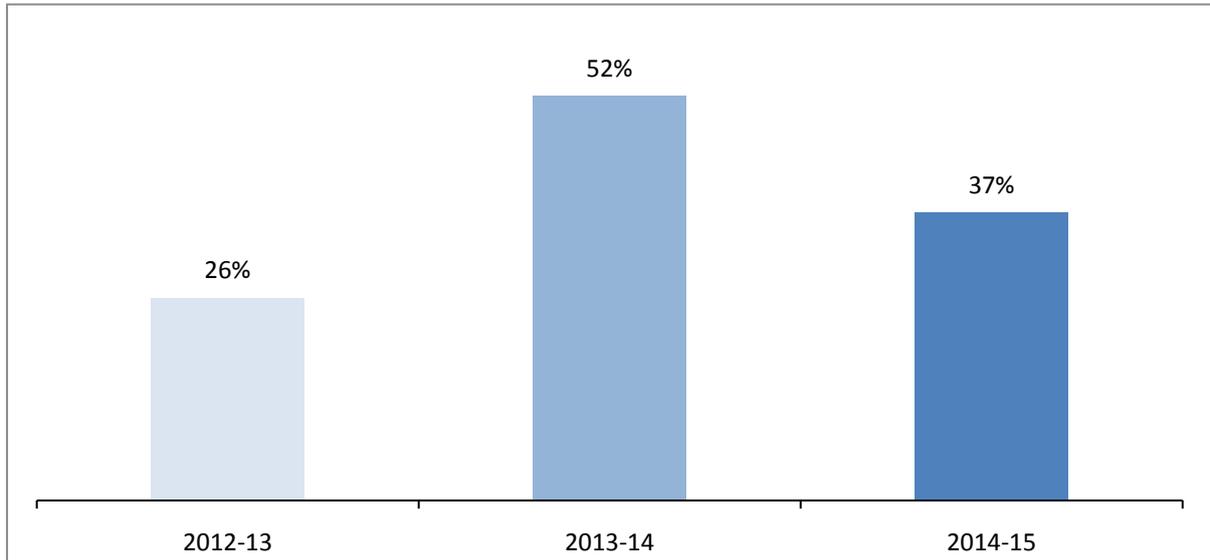
Actions:

- Develop action plans to specifically target the top 4 reasons for homelessness
- Continue to monitor ethnicity against local and national trends to ensure no specific ethnic groups is being adversely impacted
- Monitor Council evictions of Introductory tenancies to determine appropriate levels of support and monitoring
- Consider options for pre-tenancy training for potential tenants

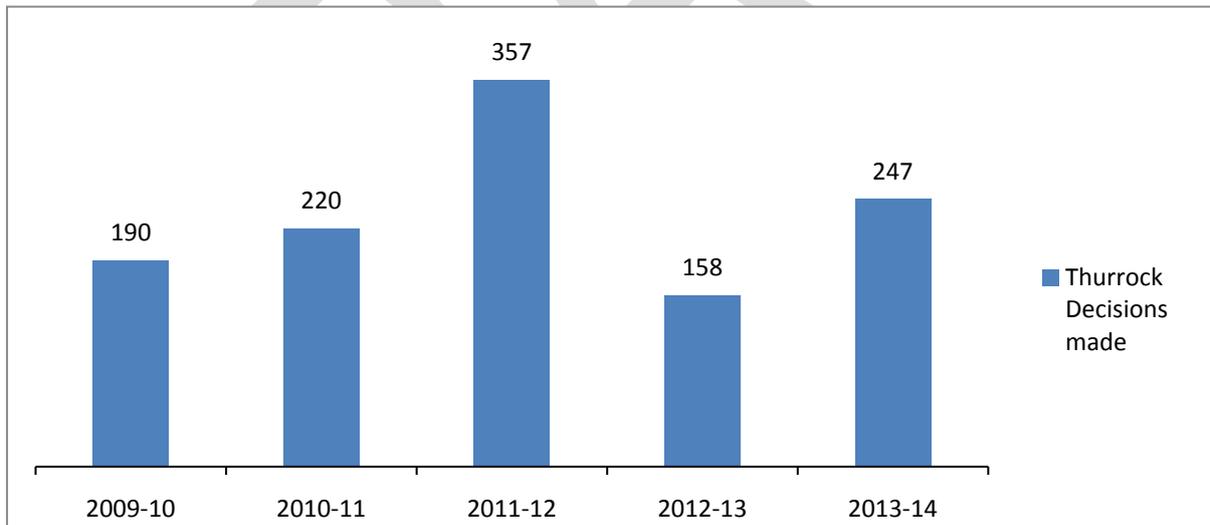
G1 – Number of households approaching for advice & assistance in Thurrock over past 3 years



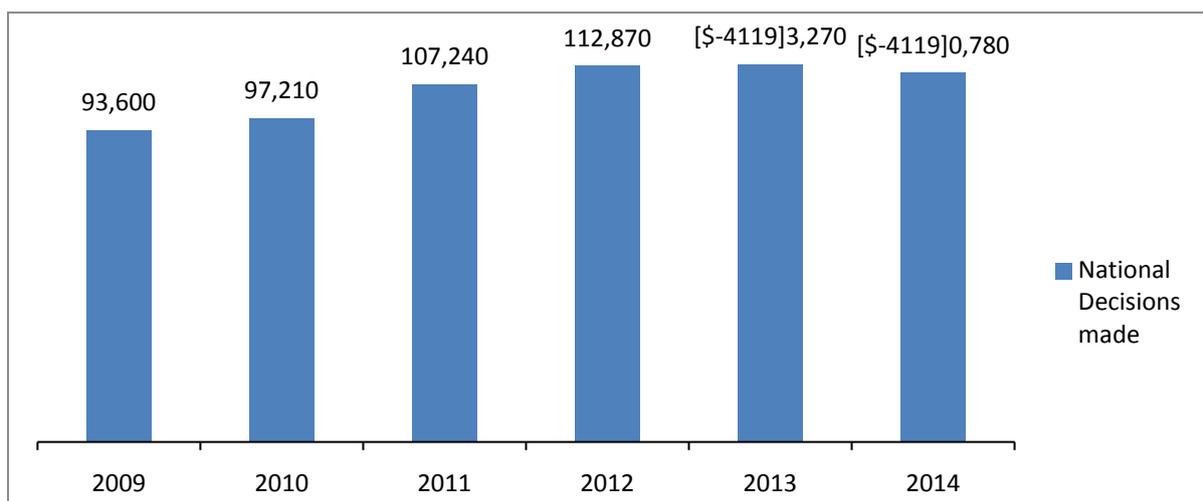
G2 Of these approaches –percentage where homelessness was prevented or relieved



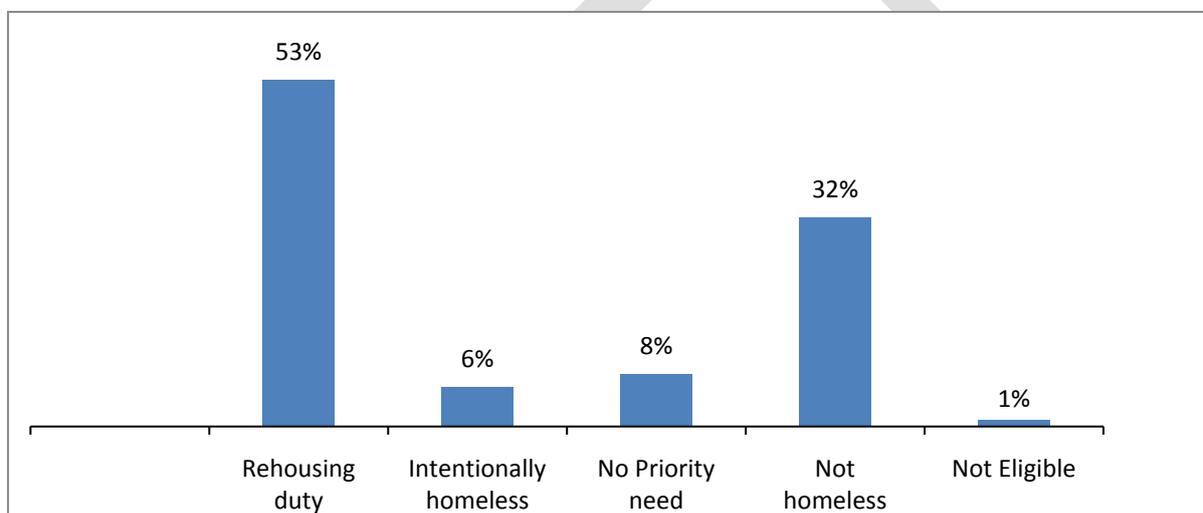
G3 – Number of homeless applications taken & decisions made in Thurrock



G4 – Number of homeless applications taken & decisions made nationally



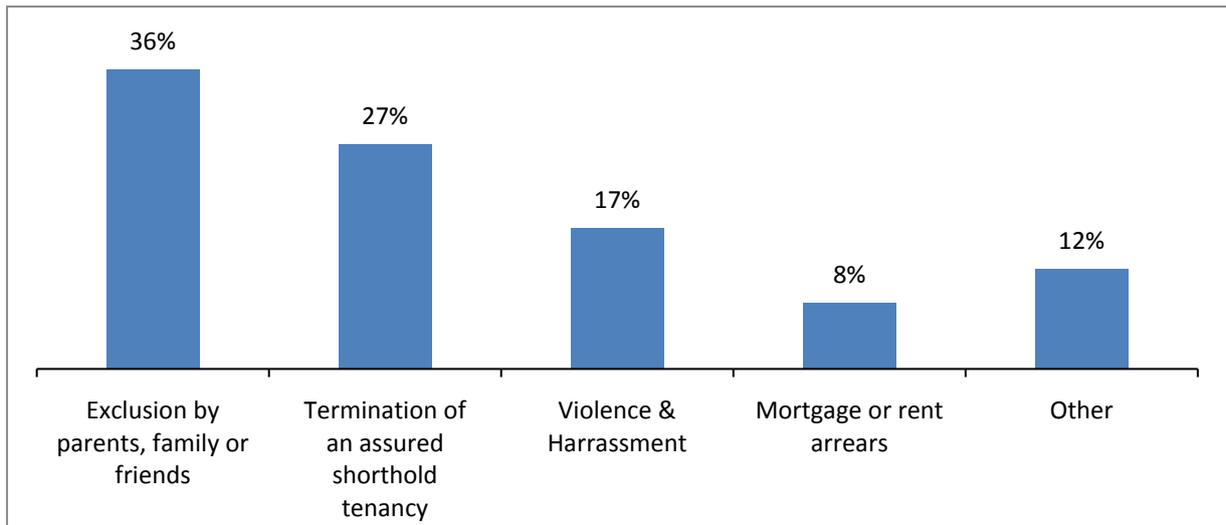
G5 Decisions made in Thurrock as a percentage over past 5 years



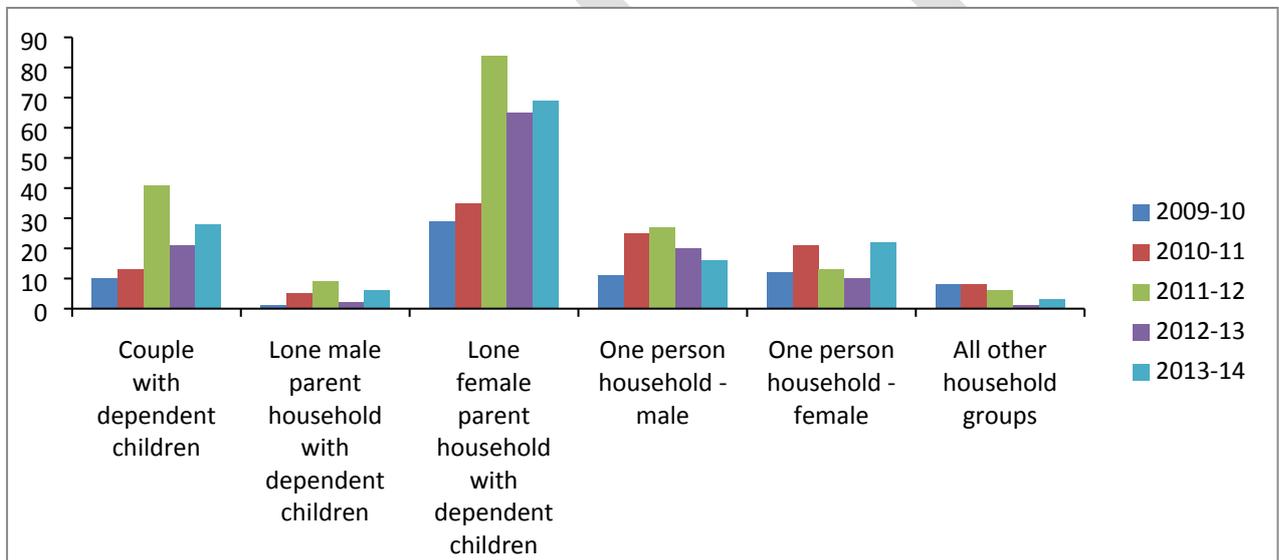
G6 – Top 10 reasons for homelessness in Thurrock for past 5 years (where rehousing duty accepted)

Causes of homelessness (2009 -14)	
Parental exclusion	25.44%
Termination of Assured short hold tenancy	23.67%
Other family or friends exclusion	10.95%
Violent relationship breakdown - partner	9.98%
Non-violent relationship breakdown	6.60%
Other reasons for ending AST	4.03%
Mortgage arrears	3.54%
Other forms of violence	2.74%
Violent relationship breakdown - associated person	2.42%
Rent arrears - Local Authority	2.25%

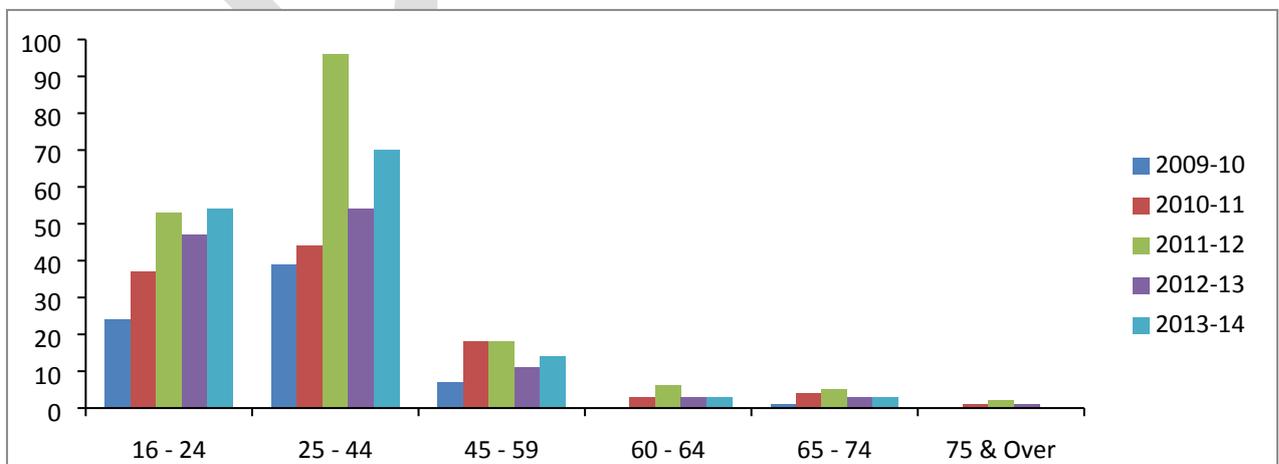
G7 – Homeless reasons by broad areas (where rehousing duty accepted)



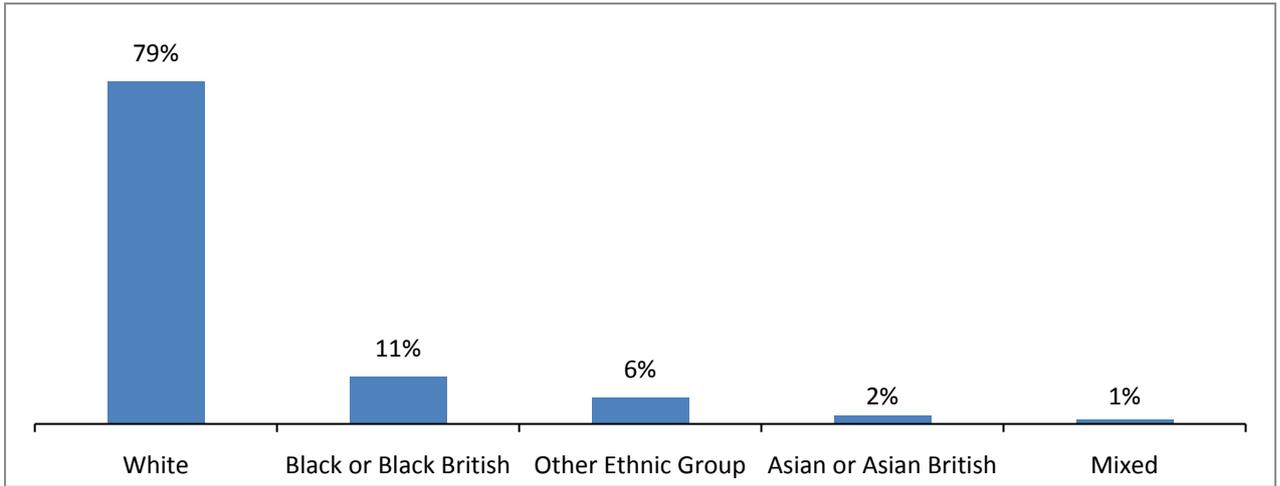
G8 -Household makeup (where rehousing duty accepted)



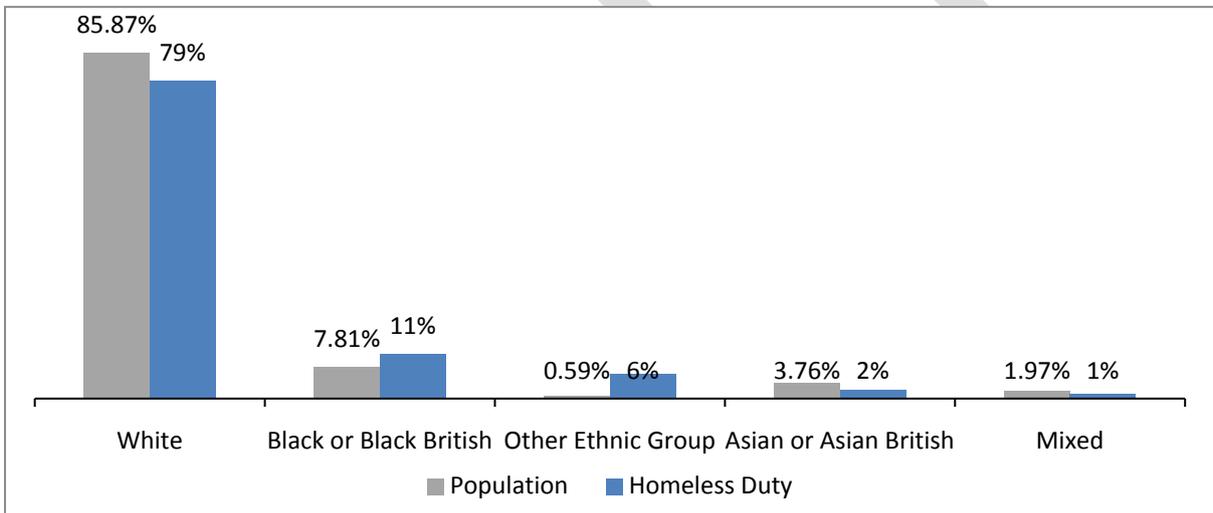
G9 - Household make up by age (where rehousing duty accepted)



G10 – Household make up by Ethnicity for past 5 years (where rehousing duty accepted)

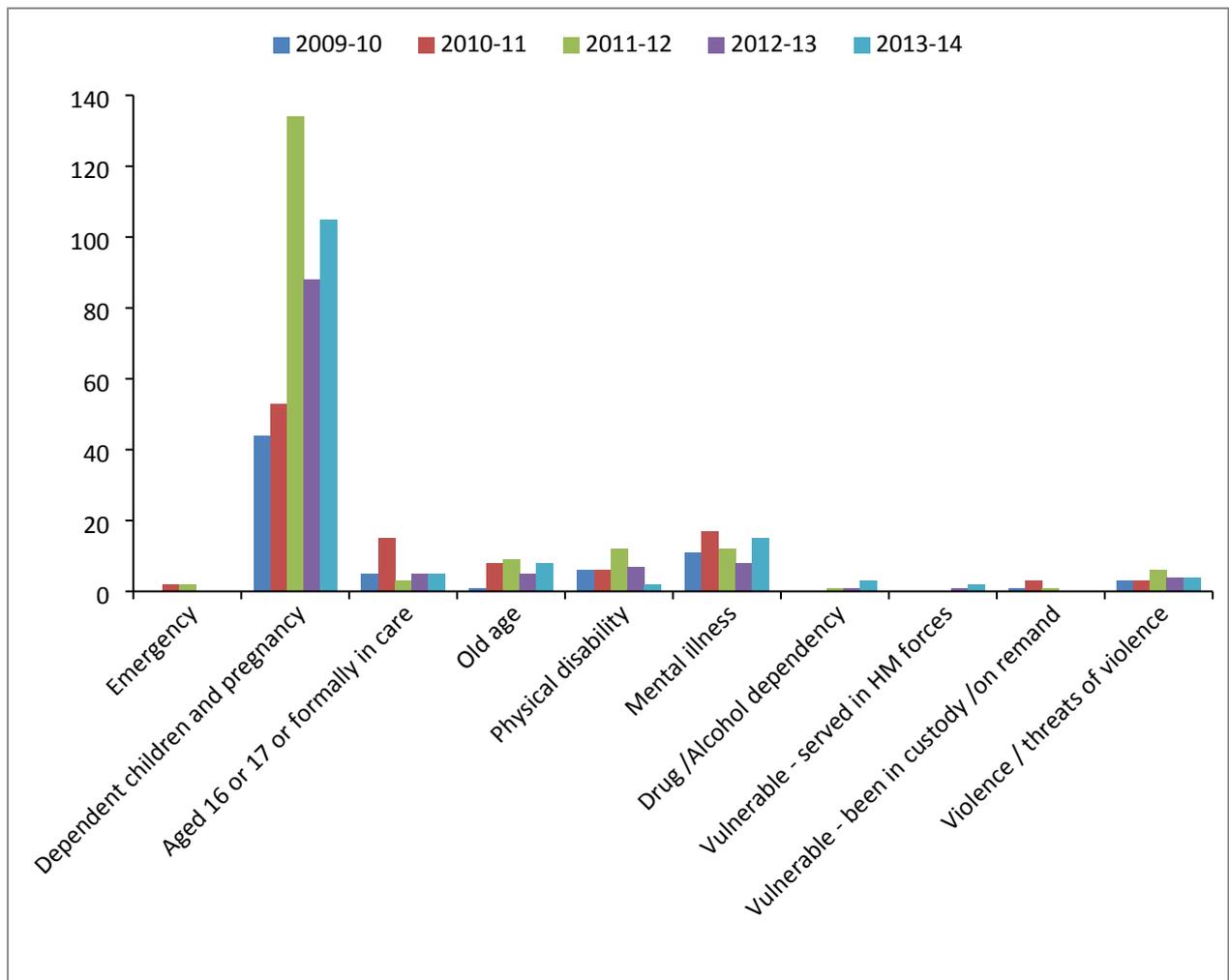


G11 – Comparison of Household ethnicity for homeless cases with the population of Thurrock

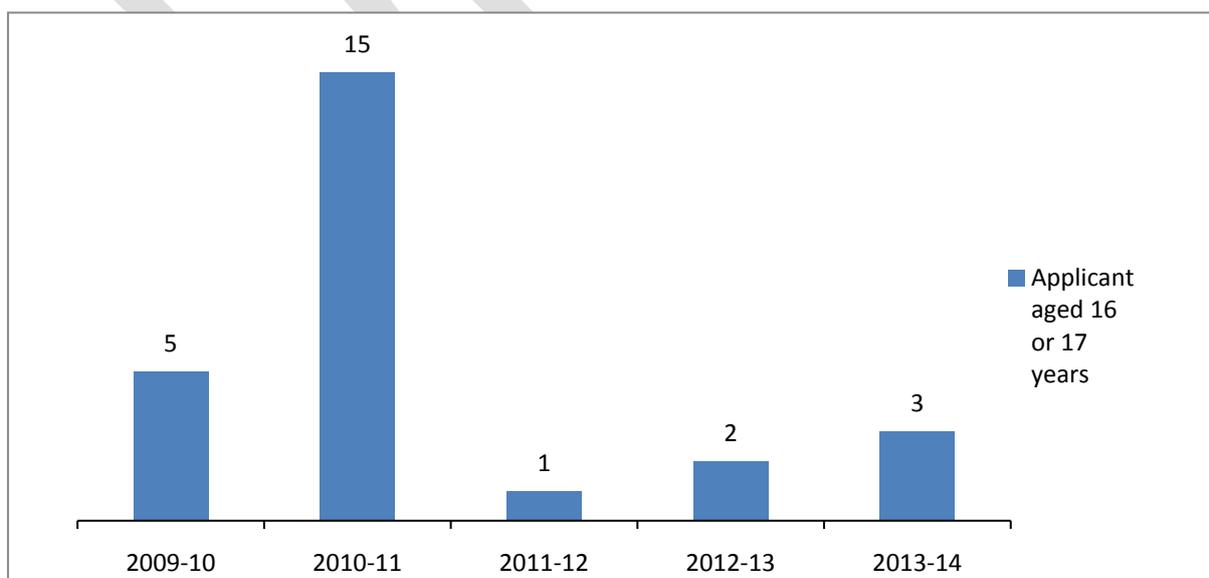


Source: ONS Census data 2011 & Thurrock Council data

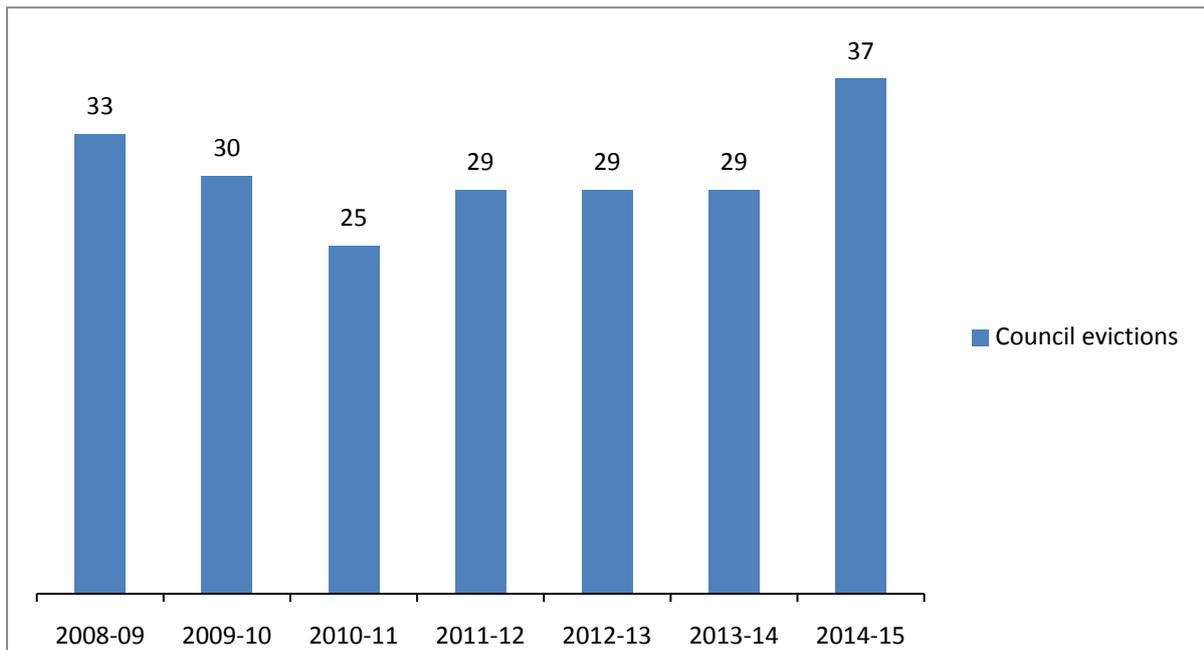
G12 - Household make up by Priority Need (where rehousing duty accepted)



G13 – Number of 16 & 17 year olds for whom a rehousing duty was accepted



G14 – Number of Council evictions



H) Homelessness Prevention & Relief

Where a person approaches the Council as homeless or potentially homeless but actions taken by the local authority mean that the homelessness does not materialise, then prevention is counted.

A prevention is the result of either

- i) An actual prevention where an action taken prevents the homelessness from happening – e.g. mediation with the excluder
- ii) A relief – where an action to find alternative accommodation for the household prevents the homelessness from happening - e.g. where alternative private rented accommodation is found

Prevention numbers were fairly consistent until 2012-13 but have decreased after that – see H1. Unfortunately, the statistics collected have not been consistently detailed – for example in quarter 4 of 2013-14, of the 120 cases where homelessness was prevented, 100 are described as “other” for the reason prevention was achieved.

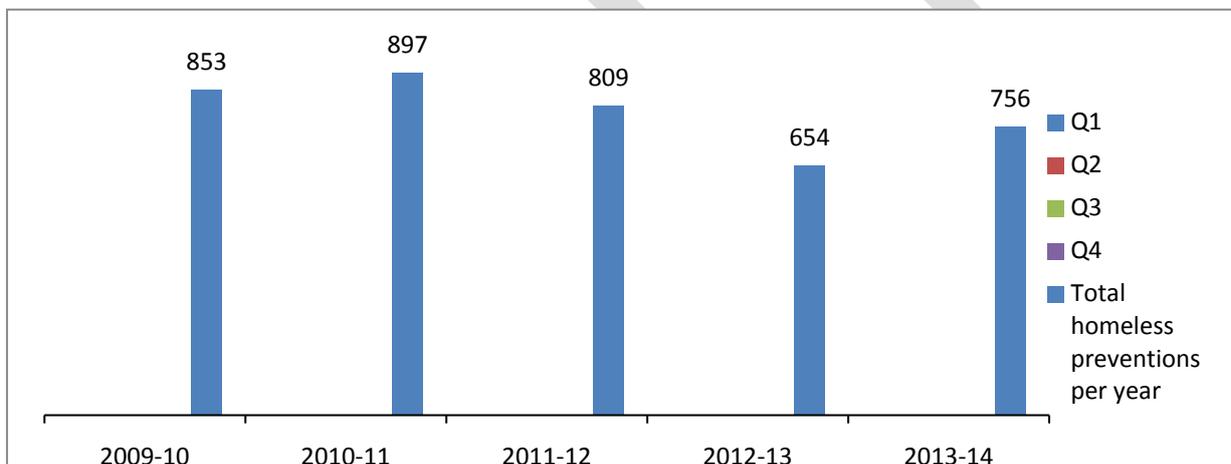
Homeless prevention is a primary aim and therefore it is essential to monitor the actions which are successful and those which are not in order to direct future limited resources

To do this a more detailed picture is required. Data is obtained through an integrated Housing IT system. The Council will be updating its IT system in 2014-15 so it is essential that the new system is configured to capture appropriate data.

Action:

- Ensure statistics collected are more detailed and consistent to enable a better understanding and assist with forward planning
- Ensure staff are trained in how to capture data accurately and that consistent definitions are used
- The new Housing IT system must capture appropriate and accurate data - ensure the correct parameters are set during the implementation programme
- Ensure sufficient expertise within the Housing department to update data requirements if necessary

H1 – total homeless preventions per year



I) Rough Sleepers

Rough sleeper count

Each year (October/November) local authorities report on the number of people sleeping rough in the borough on a specific night. This can be estimated through liaison with appropriate agencies such as the police, or an actual count can be organised.

Thurrock carried out an actual count in 2014 after 4 years of estimations. See I1

Of the ten people identified as meeting the criteria only one was actually sleeping rough on the street. The other nine were sleeping in 2 cars in a service station car park and were thought to be workers staying overnight in cars to prevent accommodation costs, however this could not be verified as the nine people were unwilling to engage.

Outreach & reconnection

In October 2014 Thurrock Council launched a new outreach and reconnection service through a sub-regional contract with St Mungos' Broadway. The key aims of the contract are

- (1) providing an outreach and intensive support service, to identify rough sleepers and enable them to access appropriate support such as health and substance misuse
- (2) providing assistance to reconnect where appropriate or to access new accommodation

A support worker is allocated to cover Thurrock, Basildon and Brentwood areas and he/she responds to reports of homeless individuals made via the national Street link website, which enables members of the public to report any person they believe is sleeping rough. Referrals are also made direct

The worker will attempt to locate the rough sleeper and support them as required. This involves joint working with the local authority and other partner agencies

Data provided by St Mungos Broadway show that 14 people were referred between the launch of the service and the end of year (Nov 14 to April 2015) - see I2 and I3

Of the 14 people identified 9 were rehoused from the streets – the other 5 refused to engage

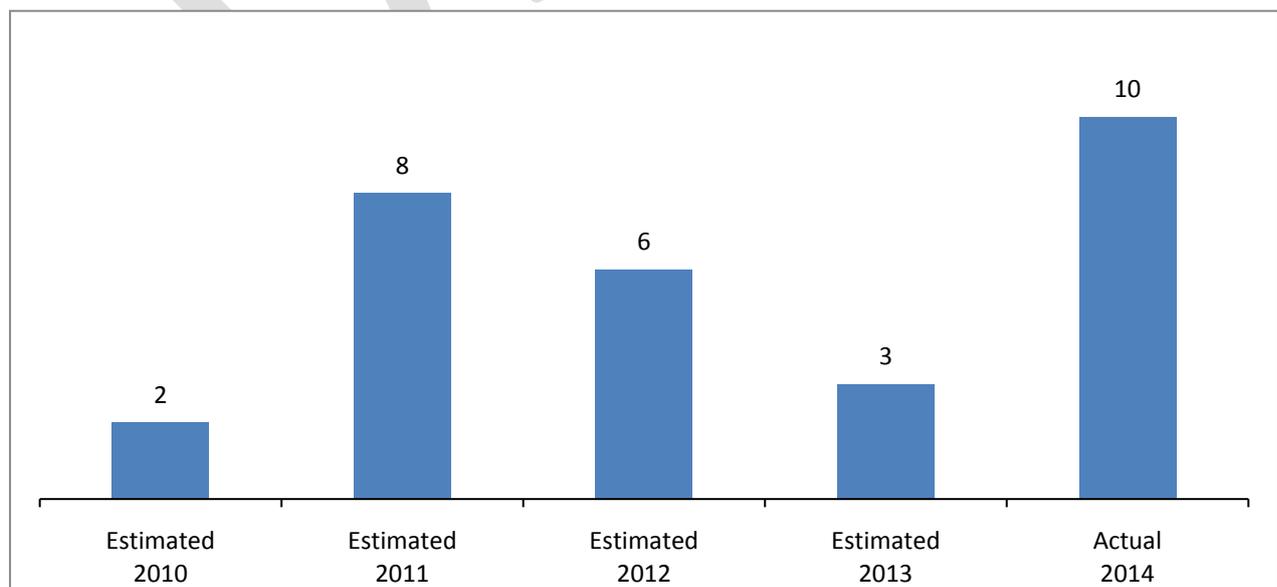
Whilst the data indicates that rough sleeping is not a large problem within the borough the Council is keen to promote the No second Night Out programme instigated by the DCLG – see section 5 below

Thurrock Council does not have a direct access hostel or night shelter and relies on space within other boroughs.

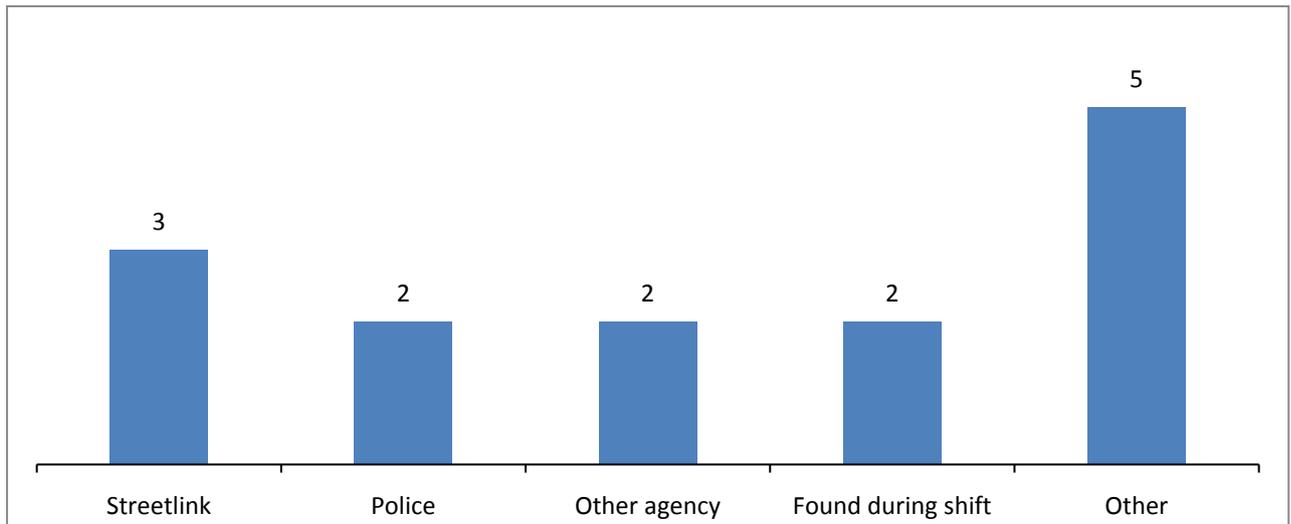
Action:

- Investigate options for non-priority need homeless applicants

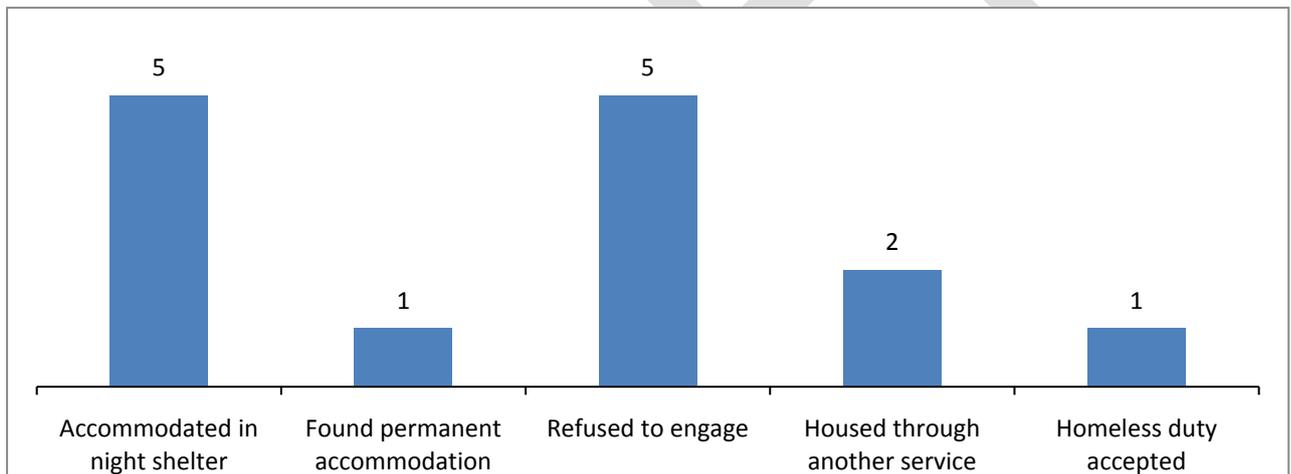
I1 – Rough Sleeper counts in Thurrock for past 5 years



I2 Referrals to St Mungos (Nov 2014 – April 2015)



I3 Outcomes of referrals received by St Mungos (Nov 2014 – April 2015)



J) Temporary Accommodation

Accommodation profile

There is a duty to provide temporary accommodation to applicants where there is reason to believe the applicant is homeless, eligible for assistance and in priority need. The duty continues whilst a homeless assessment is made and may continue until a rehousing duty is discharged

In order to meet this duty Thurrock Council uses the following types of temporary accommodation

- Bed & Breakfast (private establishments)
- Hostel (Charles Street hostel in Grays)
- Self-contained (Private accommodation rented on a nightly basis)
- Furnished lets (Furnished accommodation within the Council's own stock)

Thurrock Council recognises the unsuitability of bed & breakfast (B & B) accommodation for families and young people and is committed to using alternative suitable temporary accommodation

wherever possible

Charles Street hostel provides 29 units of supported accommodation for single people and families and includes 5 rooms for 16 & 17 year olds supported by Children's Services.

The Council acquired a new 18 bed hostel in Clarence Road, Grays which is due to open in May 2015. The accommodation consists of

- 16 single person rooms with en-suite shower rooms and shared kitchens.
- 2 self-contained family units

The accommodation will be managed by a 3rd party who will provide intensive housing management and support services. Four of the 16 single rooms will be provided to Children's Services as move on accommodation for care leavers and unaccompanied asylum seekers with a higher package of support

Brooke House in Grays accommodated 10 people, with referrals through a multi-disciplinary panel and was used to provide accommodation for single people who do not meet the priority need threshold. Due to funding cuts Brooke House closed on 31st March 2015 and there is subsequently no hostel or night shelter provision in the borough

During the recent Gold Standard peer review the standard of temporary accommodation was recognised as high with an overall score of 86%

Statistics

The number of households being provided with temporary accommodation has increased by 13.5% over the past 2 years –see J1

However the average time spent in the accommodation has decreased by more than 50% – see J2

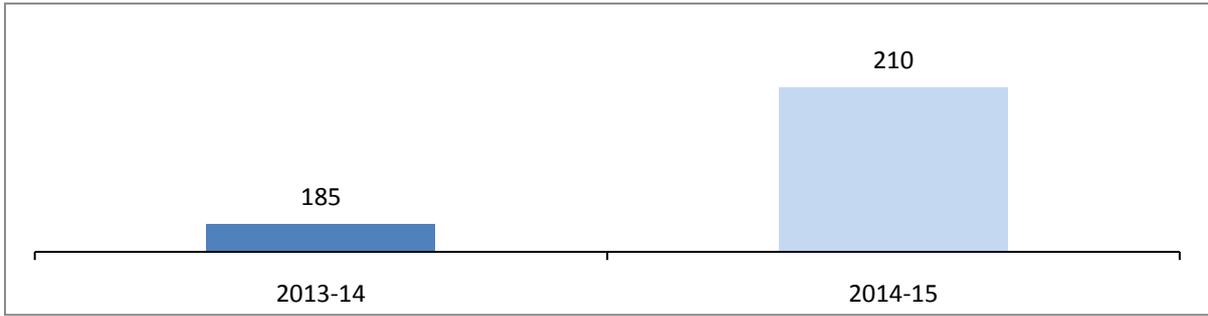
Four households with children have been accommodated in B & B for more than 6 weeks in the past 5 years (2009 – 2015)

No 16 & 17 year olds have been accommodated in B & B for more than 6 weeks in the past 5 years (2009 - 2015)

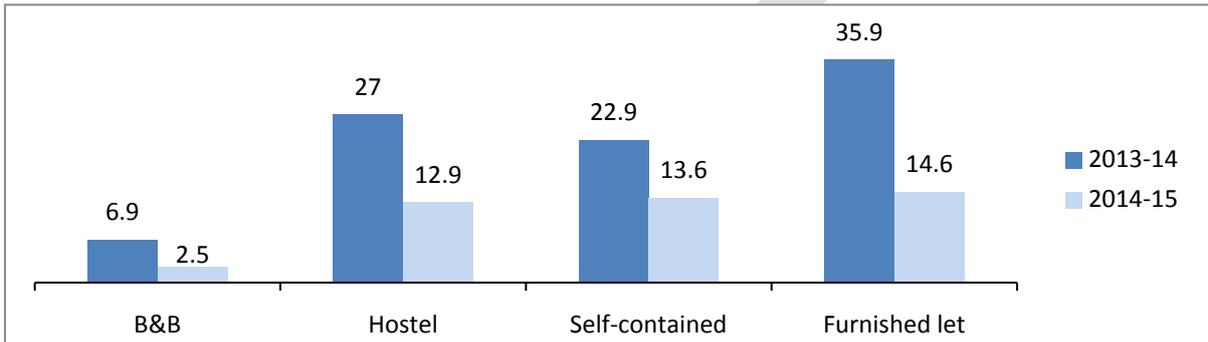
Actions:

- Ensure there is sufficient supported accommodation available so that no 16 & 17 years are placed in B & B accommodation
- Ensure no households with children are placed into B & B unless in an emergency
- Eliminate the use of B & B for all customers except in an emergency and then for a minimal period
- Work closely with children's services to provide suitable (supported) accommodation for homeless 16 & 17 year
- Ensure temporary accommodation meets high standards
- Consider options for accommodation for homeless non-priority need customers

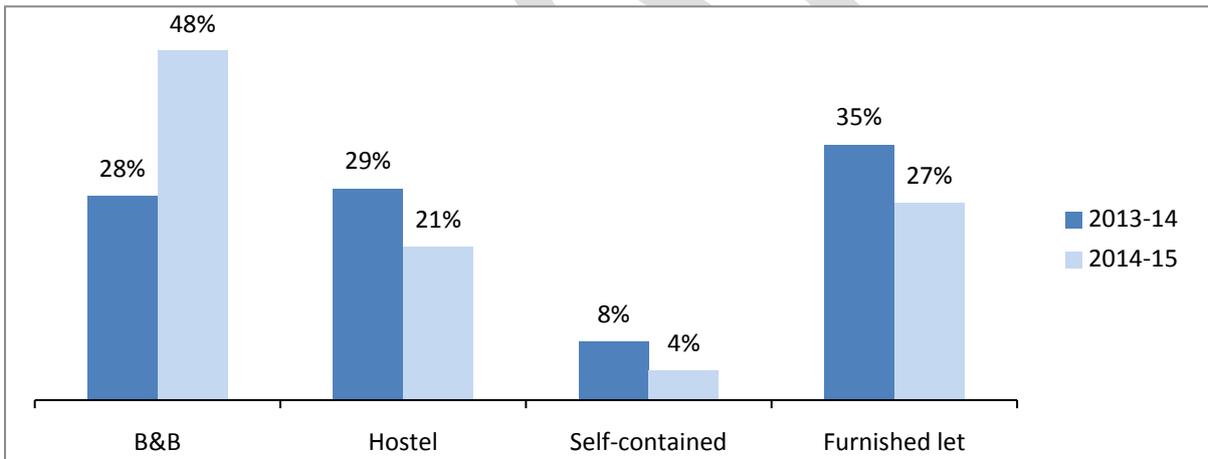
J1 – Households provided with temporary accommodation during the year



J2 – Average number of weeks spent in Temporary accommodation



J3 – Type of accommodation used as a percentage of total accommodation



4. Health & Wellbeing

Physical health & disability

Thurrock has a worse than average figure for overall premature deaths in England. It is particularly badly placed in the listings for lung cancer, heart disease and stroke

These statistics are supported by high overweight and obesity levels in the borough, both adults and children, which are linked to the prevalence of these diseases - see 4.1, 4.2 and 4.3

Obesity figures show that Thurrock is the worst local authority area in the east of England region with almost one third of adults categorised as obese and more than two thirds categorised as either

overweight or obese.

It is also the worst local authority area for smoking related deaths

Poor quality housing has long been established as a contributor to poor health:

- damp, mould and excess cold increases the risk of cardiovascular and respiratory disease
- psychological illness such as depression and anxiety are linked to poor housing and uncertainty around homelessness
- falls are more common when residents need adaptations or where there are structural faults
- high housing costs often lead to the purchase of cheaper unhealthy food

Thurrock Councils' Housing allocations scheme recognises the need to prioritise people with insanitary or hazardous housing conditions through its priority banding for reasonable preference groups. It also prioritises those with medical conditions which are worsened by their housing situation.

However, removing people from poor housing does not resolve the root of the problem and could result in those people simply being replaced with others. It is therefore important to tackle landlords of poor quality housing and provide alternative options for owner occupiers who are unable to meet the costs of repairing their own unsatisfactory housing.

People with disabilities who face homelessness will not only suffer the uncertainty of a homeless situation but may also be placed into temporary accommodation that is not adapted to meet their specific needs. Prevention of homelessness in such circumstances is of an even high priority.

Actions:

- Housing solutions team to work closely with environmental health and other enforcement agencies to ensure that landlords carry out their responsibilities to provide safe and sanitary conditions in order to prevent homelessness
- Consider options for offering alternative accommodation to owners who are frail or elderly and repairing their properties in return for long lease arrangements
- Ensure the Council makes good use of adapted properties via its Accessible Housing Register – for example by early maximisation of priority banding for potentially homeless applicants in need of adapted properties, even where they are not yet homeless within 28 days
- Ensure temporary accommodation meets disability criteria wherever possible

Mental health

Thurrock has a slightly lower percentage of people with long term mental health problems than the national picture but mental health is the 2nd highest reason for priority need in homeless people (after dependent children and/or pregnancy) - see 4.4

South Essex Partnership University NHS Foundation Trust (SEPT) provide mental health services across Essex including the Assertive Outreach service from Grays Hall and the Community mental health team from Basildon hospital.

The Housing and Mental Health forum was established as a joint project between SEPT and Housing

in June 2011 and brings together housing, mental health and other professionals on a regular basis. Individual cases can be brought to the group for a multi-disciplinary approach to resolving housing issues and a number of successful homeless preventions have been achieved. However numbers attending can be low and when this is the case it is more difficult to resolve issues.

Thurrock has a supported housing scheme for adults with mental health problems – Balfour Court – which accommodates 8 people

Unfortunately a number of the tenancies at Balfour Court (historically) are assured tenancies which indicate a lifetime tenancy rather than a supported housing move on plan. This has meant that very few properties become available for new residents and subsequently people in need of supported accommodation may have to be housed in general needs without the support needed.

Thurrock has a number of agencies and charities that offer other support to people with mental health problems including Mind, POhWER and Family Mosaic. Support ranges from day to day budgeting skills & maintaining a tenancy through to advocacy and counselling

Often such support can prevent a homeless situation from occurring or escalating and therefore it is essential that all agencies are aware of service provision and how to access it

Thurrock Councils' housing strategy recognises the need to provide more specialist housing for those with mental health problems and one of its action points is to "support those with mental health needs, autism and learning disabilities through working with Adult Social care and identify suitable accommodation and support services meeting REACH standards"

Actions:

- Research the need for more supported housing accommodation for people with mental health problems and feed into development programmes
- Work with ASC to identify suitable accommodation and support services which meet REACH standards
- Improve knowledge of partnership support provisions and how to access them
- Improve commitment to, and attendance at, the mental health forum by all partners
- Encourage a programme of move on from Balfour Court to free up valuable supported accommodation

Learning Disabilities

Thurrock has a slightly lower percentage of adults with learning disabilities compared to Southend and Essex at 3.6% of the population - see 4.9. This equates to around 5700 people

Just over a quarter of these adults are living in unsettled accommodation – see 4.10

There are two supported housing accommodation schemes in Thurrock for adults with learning disabilities –

- Lloyd House – accommodates 8 people
- Devon House – accommodates 10 people

It is envisaged that many people with learning disabilities will be able to live independently but may

require a period of time in supported accommodation in order to build their independent living skills. The two schemes offer supported accommodation for up to two years

It is essential that spaces become available within supported housing schemes and that a robust move on programme is maintained

Thurrock council does not have statistics which quantify the number of adults who come through the housing solutions service and who need supported housing

Thurrock Councils' housing strategy recognises the need to provide more specialist housing for those with a learning disability and one of its action points is to "support those with mental health needs, autism and learning disabilities through working with Adult Social care and identify suitable accommodation and support services meeting REACH standards"

Actions:

- Promote and encourage move-on from the supported housing schemes
- Feed into the Councils housing development programme
- Work with ASC to identify suitable accommodation and support services which meet REACH standards
- Maintain statistics on people with learning disabilities approaching the Council for assistance

Young parents

Thurrock has a much higher level of teenage conceptions than neighbouring boroughs - see 4.5. However for live births the figure is similar to neighbouring areas. Subsequently there is a large gap between the two in comparison, suggesting higher levels of aborted pregnancies

The highest priority need group amongst homeless acceptances is single females with children or pregnancy

Thurrock has young parent accommodation at Ruth House which provides supported accommodation services for 9 people. There are also two move-on flats and a floating support service. The client group is primarily aged 16 to 25

Between January and December 2014

- 35 referrals were made to the scheme
- Referrals came from the Housing solutions team, Social care and self-referrals
- Of the 35 referrals made, 30 were added to the waiting list and of these 21 were accommodated during the year (60% of referrals)
- 10 of the 35 referrals were aged 16-17 years and 25 were 18 to 25 years

The Council offers a move on priority banding through its allocations scheme where residents of Ruth House have completed the required support programme and are ready to live independently – usually this lasts up to 2 years and allows a flow through of supported accommodation

Actions:

- Ensure all partners are aware of the young parent scheme and services for young people and

- make referrals to prevent homelessness
- Make use of the floating support service as a means of helping young women to remain at home where they are threatened with exclusion

Drug and Alcohol abuse

The percentage of people in drug treatment in Thurrock is lower than Southend but higher than the rest of Essex.

For alcohol treatment the figures are fairly consistent across Essex - see 4.6

20% of those in drug treatment and 15% in alcohol treatment have a housing problem – see 4.7 and 4.8

KCA have been commissioned by the Council to provide drug and alcohol services. Their aim is to provide a simplified whole treatment system to make it easier and more accessible for adults with drug and alcohol issues to get the support, guidance and treatment they need to achieve their recovery goals

Often people have both alcohol and drug abuse, and accompanied with mental health problems prove to have complex needs which often result in homelessness and abuse

There is no specific supported accommodation for people with complex needs. Where the person faces homelessness and has to be placed in temporary accommodation this often fails due to a chaotic lifestyle and/or behavioural issues. Subsequently the person loses their accommodation which exacerbates the problems. Often housing is an essential first requirement before any support can be implemented

Actions:

- Ensure all partners are aware of the young parent scheme and services for young people and make referrals to prevent homelessness
- Make use of the floating support service as a means of helping young women to remain at home where they are threatened with exclusion
- Explore options for a “Housing First” approach

Domestic Abuse and Sexual violence

Violent relationship breakdown with a partner represents almost 10% of reasons for homelessness where a rehousing duty has been accepted over the past 5 years – this equates to around 62 cases over 5 years but does not account for cases where Thurrock tenants apply to other local authorities for rehousing

Violent relation breakdown with an associated person represents a further 2.4%

The Council’s housing allocations policy provides for the highest banding (Band 1 priority) for applicants who need urgent rehousing due to violence or threats of violence and a housing management panel regularly reviews applications.

Band 2 priority can be awarded where the urgency to move is less

Thurrock Council has recently adopted a Community Safety Strategy which states the following:

- *We will not tolerate domestic abuse perpetrated by our tenants against their partners, family members or others who live with them*
- *We will work with other agencies to empower survivors and reduce immediate harm and use existing legal remedies against any tenant causing domestic abuse*
- *We will seek to reduce harm to both adults and children who are at risk as a result of domestic violence*
- *We will support survivors who report of domestic violence*
- *We will facilitate effective action against offenders so that they can be held accountable*
- *We will adopt a proactive multi-agency approach in preventing and reducing domestic abuse and violence*
- *We will work with Essex Police to allow victims to remain safe in their home with professionally installed security measures through the Sanctuary Project*
- *Our Domestic Abuse Officers are trained to carry out risk assessments and appropriate referrals; give practical information and advice on housing options and referrals to secondary support agencies for residents suffering domestic abuse*

The council uses management moves for Council tenants fleeing domestic abuse and provision of Sanctuary schemes where appropriate – both are effective homeless prevention measures

Thurrock has refuge provision which accommodates 15 women (plus children) and offers a floating support service

South Essex rape and incest crisis centre (SERICC) is based in Thurrock and offers information, support, advocacy and counselling

The housing directorate has dedicated domestic abuse officers who assess all homeless applicants and tenants who are victims of Domestic Abuse

Recent cases with very complex needs have highlighted requirements for safe houses/refuge with high levels of support especially around drug & alcohol abuse and mental health problems which are often associated with domestic abuse and sexual violence

Closer working with support agencies and defined housing pathways have been identified as necessary and a dedicated protocol is required

Actions

- Increase access to specialised refuge spaces
- Improve working relationships between housing solutions team and partners
- Promote the domestic abuse service within housing as the single point of entry for all homeless domestic abuse cases
- Increase training and awareness for housing staff
- Research options for safe houses within Council stock
- Promote the sanctuary scheme as an alternative to moving home – across all tenures
- Agree a working protocol with support agencies

Autism

Thurrock Council has a specialist school for children and young people (aged 3 to 19 years) on the autistic spectrum. A recent OFSTED report (November 2014) found the school to be Outstanding and subsequently it is a popular choice for parents around the country. This in turn has led to more people moving into the borough to attend the school and subsequently a higher chance of homelessness amongst households with a member who is on the autistic spectrum

Thurrock Council developed an autism strategy in 2014 which states:

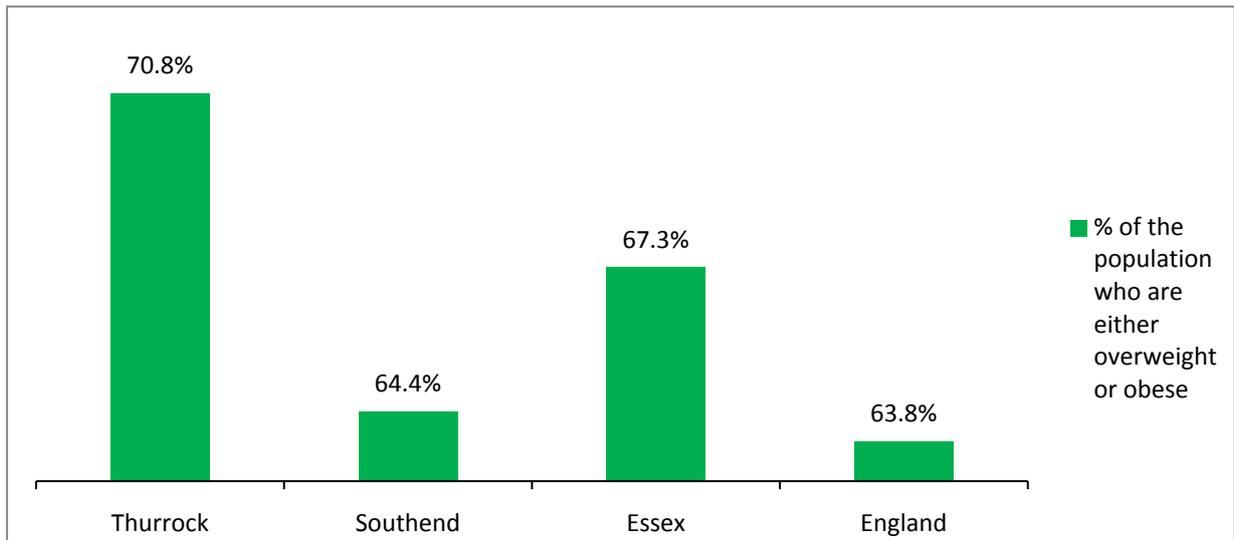
“People with autism have varying levels of support and housing needs with some being able to live completely independently whilst others need full residential care

Currently there is no specific provision within Thurrock and therefore no options for a household with a member on the autistic spectrum. Should the local authority have a homeless rehousing duty it would be very difficult to discharge that duty into a suitable accommodation locally”

Thurrock Councils’ housing strategy recognises the need to provide more specialist housing for those with autism and one of its action points is to *“support those with mental health needs, autism and learning disabilities through working with Adult Social care and identify suitable accommodation and support services meeting REACH standards”*

Action

- Work with the housing development team to ensure adequate numbers of supported accommodation are included in work programmes
- Work with ASC to identify suitable accommodation and support services which meet REACH standards for those in temporary accommodation or facing homelessness
- Improve the collection of data around homeless applicants with supported housing needs and autism in order to inform further development



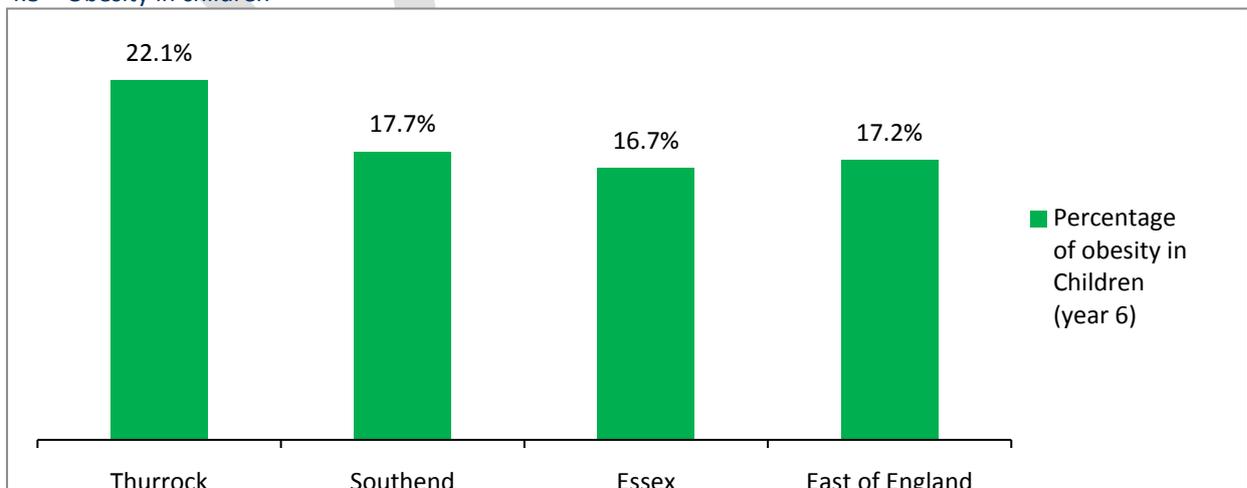
Source: Public Health England

4.2 – Obesity in Adults



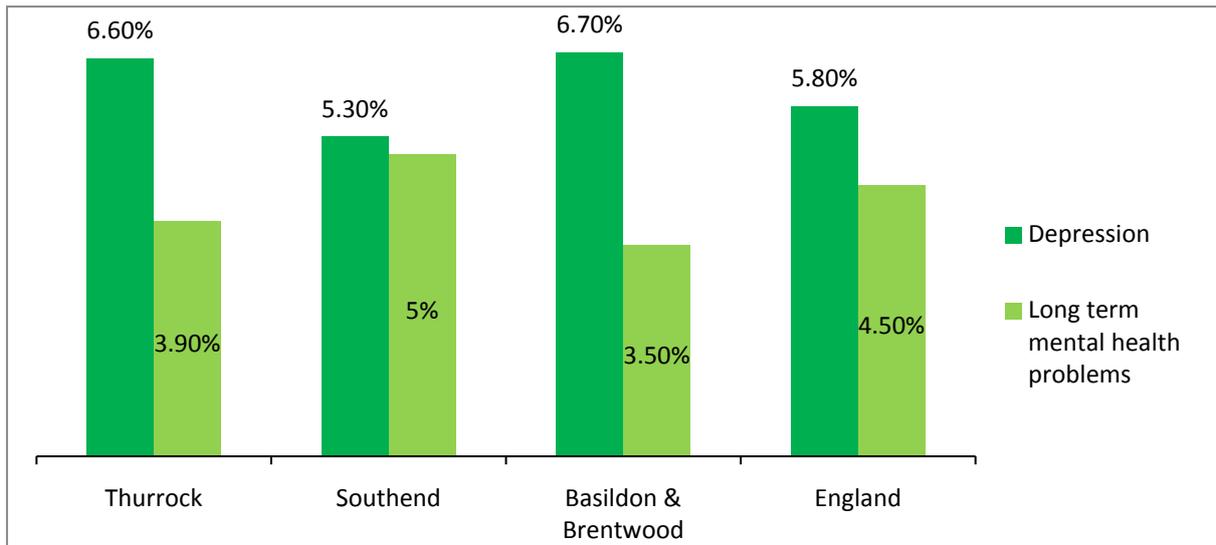
Source: Public Health England

4.3 – Obesity in children



Source: Public Health England

4.4 Prevalence of mental health problems



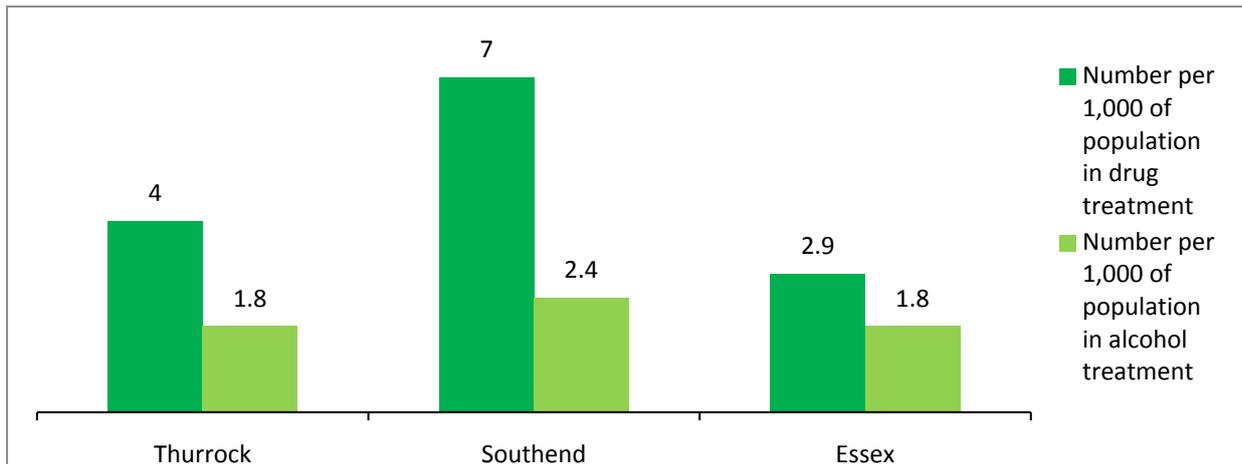
Source: Public Health England

4.5 Teenage pregnancies – rates per 1,000 of the population



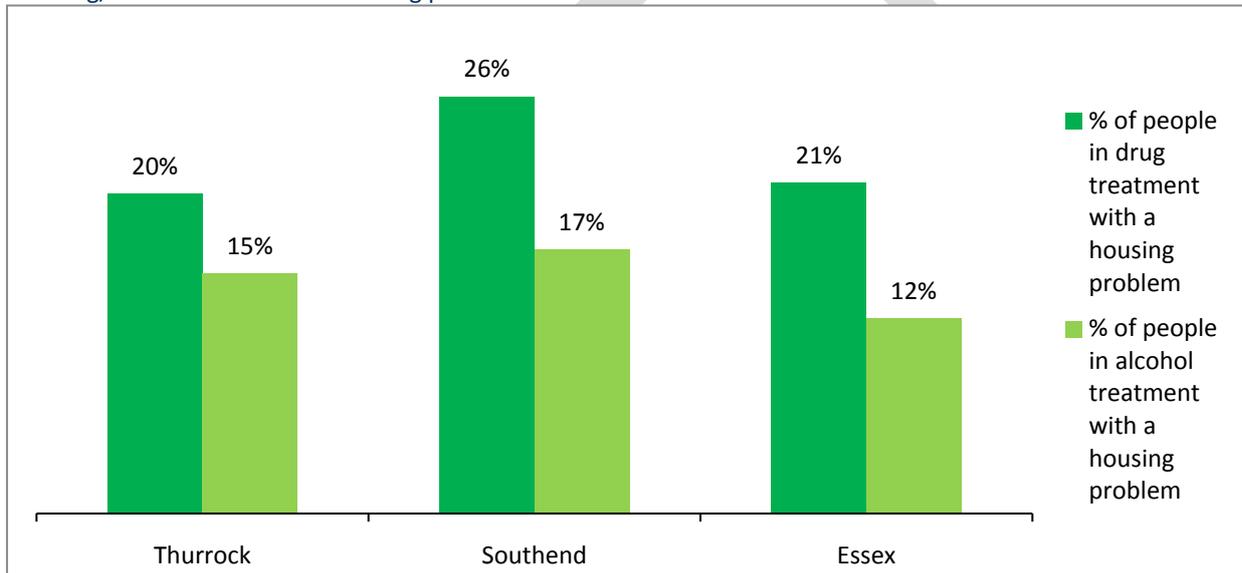
Source: Public Health England

4.6 Drug & alcohol treatment



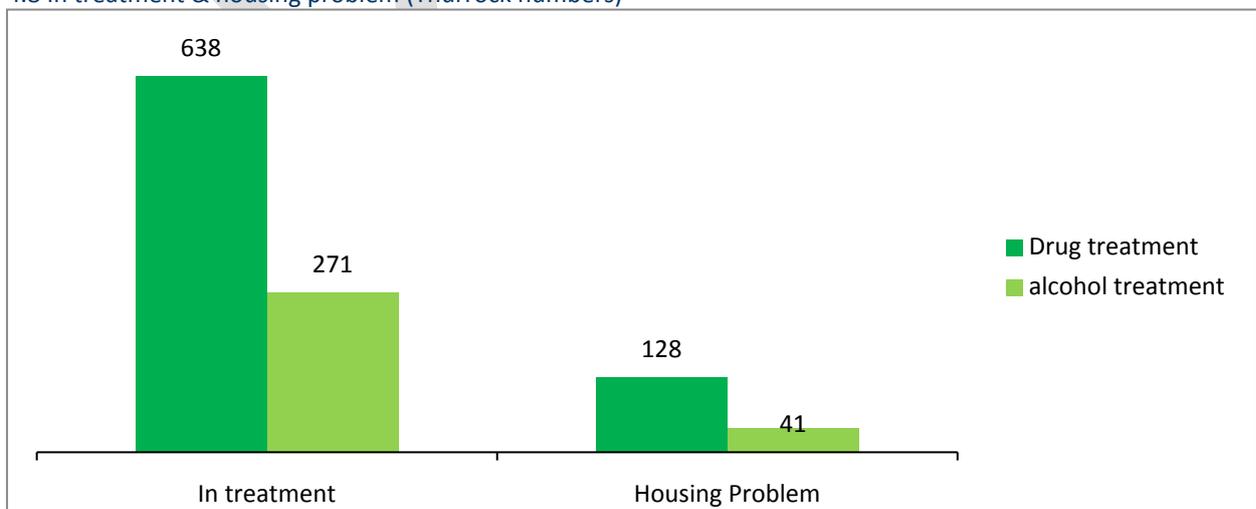
Source: Public Health England

4.7 Drug/alcohol treatment & housing problem



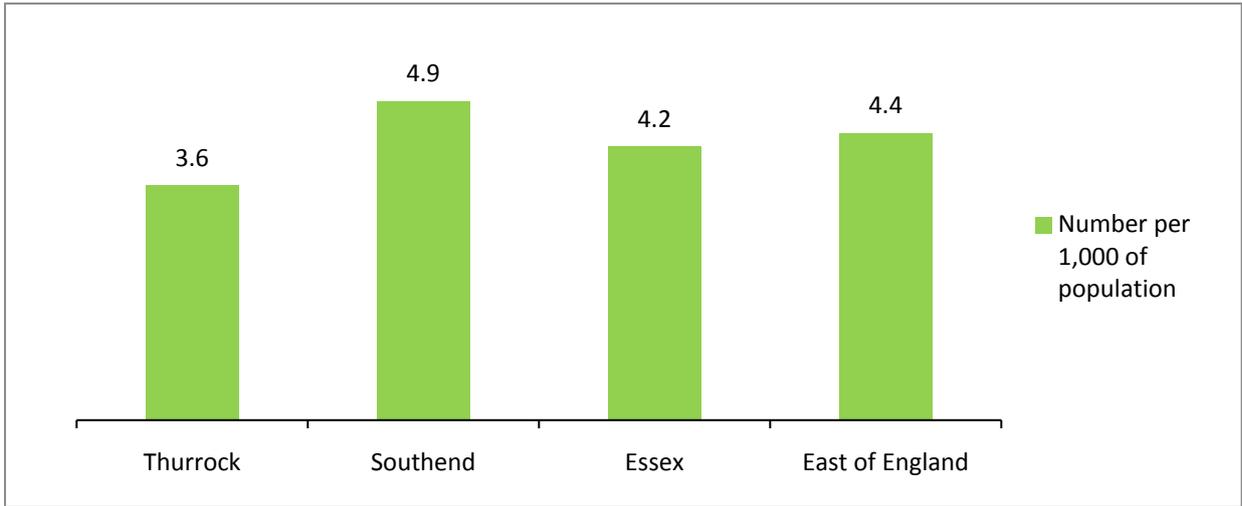
Source: Public Health England

4.8 In treatment & housing problem (Thurrock numbers)

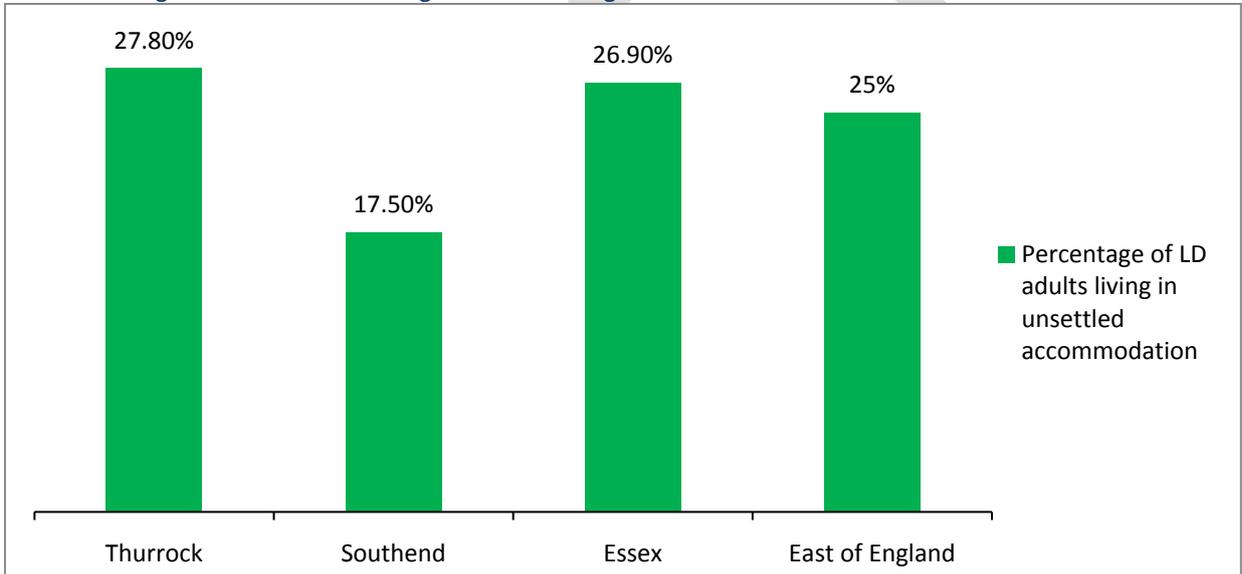


Source: Public Health England

4.9 Percentage of adults with learning difficulties who are known to the local authority



4.10 Percentage of adults with learning disabilities living in unsettled accommodation



5. Policy, legislative and the socio economic context

5.1 The recession, austerity measures and economic downturn

Due to the world economic situation and the need for financial austerity, the government has prioritised reducing the national deficit and both local authorities and voluntary sector organisations have seen a significant reduction in budgets over the last 5 years.

The impact of the reductions in public expenditure locally is:

- An end to ring fencing of LA grants – including supporting people and homelessness grant
- Reduction in homeless prevention budget
- Reduction in government subsidy for Council tax and localised schemes from 2013 – Thurrock council residents will have to make a contribution of at least 25% of their Council tax bill
- Localised welfare system has replaced community care grants and crisis loans for general living expenses (including rent in advance)
- Changes to the Legal Aid system resulting in decreased funding

5.2 Localism and social housing reform

The Localism Act 2011 gave new flexibilities and powers to local housing authorities and providers of social housing to meet local needs more effectively. The key measures of the Localism Act with regards to homelessness and housing include:

Flexible tenancies

From April 2012 all registered providers were able to introduce fixed term tenancies or continue with lifetime tenancies. These tenancies could be as short as two years although this would be viewed as exceptional.

Some Registered Providers in the borough have subsequently introduced flexible tenancies.

Thurrock Council Members chose not to introduce fixed term tenancies and the Council's Tenancy Strategy lays out its intention to continue with secure tenancies but to introduce an Introductory Tenancy period of one year with the option to extend if required.

Discharge homelessness duty into the private rented sector

Provisions allow Councils to end the main homelessness duty with the offer of a private rented property and unlike the preceding provision of a "Qualifying Offer" the duty may be ended without the applicants consent. The tenancy needs to be for a minimum period of 12 months and suitable in terms of affordability, property condition and household circumstances. Guidance on what constitutes suitability is provided.

Thurrock Council has chosen to use the new provisions as a means of discharging its main rehousing duty and has produced a policy document outlining how and when the provisions will be used.

Guidance on suitability with regards to location given in the recent case of *Nzolameso v City of Westminster* [2015] UKSC22 will also be taken into account.

Housing allocations

Provisions allow Local authorities to restrict who can access their Housing Waiting list by means of Qualification criteria. Thurrock Council reviewed its Allocations Scheme and in May 2013 implemented 5 year local connection, financial threshold and behaviour requirements.

However, applicants meeting the reasonable preference criteria within Part 6 of the Housing act 1996 cannot be disqualified.

Neighbouring boroughs have also implemented qualifying criteria including Basildon Council with a 7 year local connection qualification rule.

The new housing allocations scheme awards a priority banding (Band 3) to applicants who meet any of the Reasonable Preference criteria including the main rehousing duty under Part 7 of the 1996 Housing Act.

A higher (Band 2) priority can be awarded where there is cumulative priority.

5.3 Welfare benefit reform

The government's welfare reforms have set out to cut the increasing expenditure on benefits, reduce benefit dependency, reduce the budget deficit, provide incentives for people to work and reduce under occupation of rented accommodation.

Reforms have included the following:

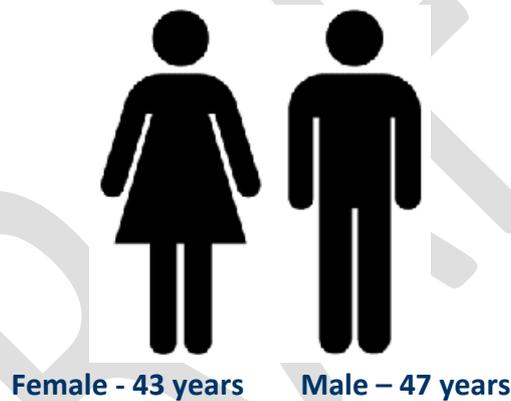
- Local Housing allowance – now fixed at the 30th percentile rather than the previous 50th – this means the LHA covers only one third of private rents rather than a half;
- An increase in non-dependent deductions for Housing benefit – this means council tenants with non-dependents will have to find more of their rent;
- Increasing the age threshold for the shared room rate in housing benefit from 25 to 35 years old – this means single people under the age of 35 will receive the lower level and may only be able to access shared accommodation; there are exemptions for certain categories;
- LHA rates set annually and indexed to CPI;
- The spare room subsidy – widely referred to as the “Bedroom Tax”. This affects social housing tenants of working age who are under-occupying their property. Tenants have had their housing benefit cut by 14% for one bedroom under-occupied and by 25% for two or more bedrooms under-occupied. Thurrock Council has offered incentives to council tenants wishing to downsize including a priority banding to transfer and financial payments. Where tenants have indicated a wish to down size and are actively bidding for properties Discretionary Housing Benefit has generally been awarded to meet any shortfall;
- Household benefit cap – this provides a cap (limit) to the total benefits a household can receive – currently capped at £500 a week for couples (with or without children living with them) and for single parents whose children live with them and £350 a week for single adults who don't have children, or whose children don't live with them

- Universal Credit replaces six benefits, including Housing Benefit and aims to give individuals responsibility to manage their own benefits; It is paid directly to the individual who is responsible for making payments for rent, Council tax etc. direct to their landlord. Payments are made monthly rather than weekly and in arrears. Thurrock has started to move over to Universal Credit, initially with all new claims for single people from April 2015. Private and social housing landlords have expressed concerns regarding potential arrears and some are refusing to offer tenancies/licences to people in receipt of Universal Credit

5.4 No Second Night Out

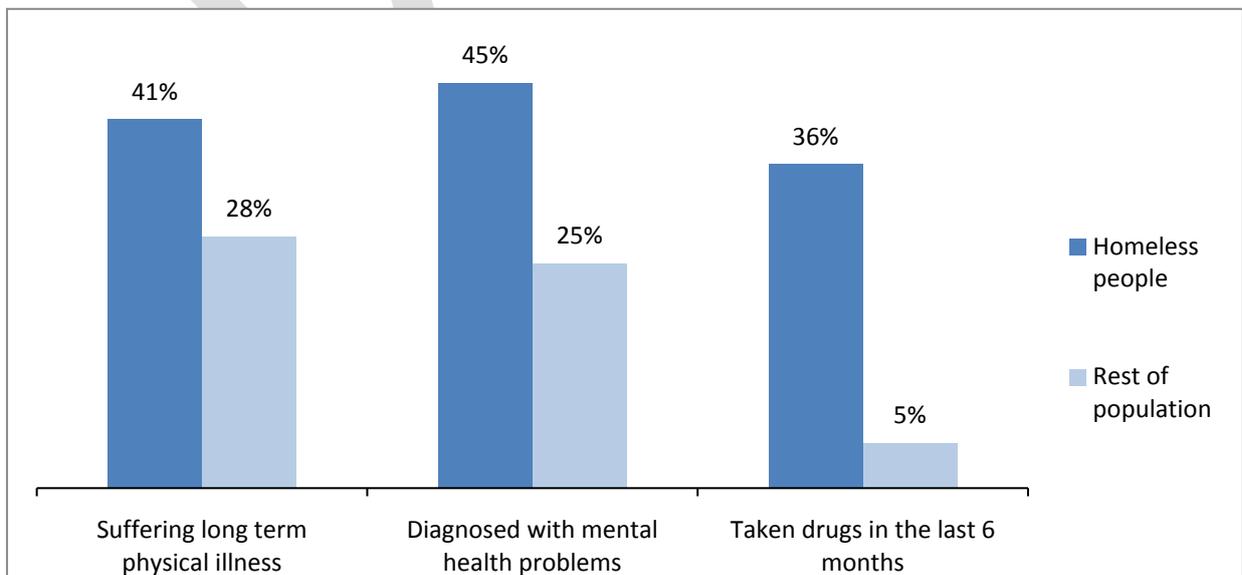
The government introduced a programme to identify new rough sleepers and reconnect them so that their rough sleeping was minimised.

It is estimated that rough sleeping shortens life expectancy by about 30 years with the average life expectancy of a rough sleeper estimated at:



Source: Crisis 2012

Rough sleeping can also lead to higher levels of illness and substance misuse



Source: Homeless Link 2014

Thurrock Council has joined with eight other local authorities in the region to provide a reconnection and support service through a joint contract with St Mungos Broadway

A reconnection worker seeks out rough sleepers in the borough following referrals from Homeless Link who provide a reporting mechanism for members of the public identifying rough sleepers. Referrals can be made via telephone, email or via an online form

The worker will assess any rough sleepers found and offer support to reconnect them or to find alternative accommodation. Referrals to support agencies can also be made

The contract which started in September 2014 lasts 18 months

5.5 Making every contact count: A joint approach to preventing homelessness

The government's second report on preventing homelessness was published in August 2012 and focuses on how services can be managed in a way that prevents all households, regardless of whether they are families, couples, or single people, from reaching a crisis point where they are faced with homelessness

The report aims to make sure that every contact local agencies make with vulnerable people and families really counts and it brings together a number of government commitments to:

- Tackle troubled childhoods and adolescence
- Improve health
- Reduce involvement in crime
- Improve skills; employment; and financial
- Pioneer social funding

From this report the DCLG posed ten local challenges to all local authorities:

1. Adopt a corporate commitment to prevent homelessness which has buy in across all local authority services
2. Actively work in partnership with voluntary sector and other local partners to address support, education, employment and training needs
3. Offer a Housing Options prevention service, including written advice, to all clients
4. Adopt a *No Second Night Out* model or an effective local alternative
5. Have housing pathways agreed or in development with each key partner and client group that includes appropriate accommodation and support
6. Develop a suitable private rented sector offer for all client groups, including advice and support to both clients and landlords
7. Actively engage in preventing mortgage repossessions including through the Mortgage Rescue Scheme
8. Have a homelessness strategy which sets out a proactive approach to preventing homelessness and is reviewed annually so that it is responsive to emerging need
9. Not place any young person aged 16 or 17 in Bed and Breakfast accommodation
10. Not place any families in Bed and Breakfast accommodation unless in an emergency

These ten challenges form part of the Gold Standard programme which has been developed and administered by the National Practitioner Support Service (NPSS) to encourage local authorities to develop a continuous programme of improvement. Thurrock Council has pledged to develop this improvement and has subsequently signed up for the Gold Standard challenge.

5.6 The Test for Priority Need

The “Pereira Test” has been established law since 1998 and is identified within the 2006 Homelessness guidance as the test for vulnerability in homeless applicants without dependent children or pregnancy. The test required officers to determine:

“[whether the applicant] when homeless [will be] less able to fend for himself than an ordinary homeless person so that injury or detriment to him will result when a less vulnerable man would be able to cope without harmful effects”

Lord Justice Hobhouse in *R v Camden London Borough Council, Ex p Pereira* (1998) 31 HLR 317 at p.330

That test has been challenged in the courts through three joined cases and a Supreme Court ruling in May 2015 has determined that a different test now applies.

“In order to decide whether an applicant falls within section 189(1)(c), an authority or reviewing officer should compare him with an ordinary person, but an ordinary person if made homeless, not an ordinary actual homeless person.”

Lord Neuberger in *Hotak v London Borough of Southwark; Kanu v London Borough of Southwark; Johnson v Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council* [2015] UKSC at 58

The correct comparator is then, not the “ordinary homeless person”, but the ordinary person who is homeless.

We have yet to see further court definitions of the “ordinary person who is homeless” but the implication is that a wider group may now meet these criteria and that they are likely to be singles or couples with no children/pregnancy.

Since Thurrock Council’s highest cause of homelessness is eviction by family/friends this could increase the number of people owed a duty in the coming years and the requirement for studio or one bedroom accommodation.

It is also important to note that, following the Conservative Governments re-election on 7th May 2015 with a majority of seats in the House of Commons, further welfare reforms are expected. The possibility of removing Housing benefits for under 21 year olds job seekers has been widely predicted.

It is important to monitor the impact of any proposed reforms and to ensure a better supply of affordable accommodation for smaller households is available.

6. Gold Standard – Ten local challenges

As part of the Gold standard programme, Thurrock Council Housing solutions team undertook a Peer review of its services in November 2014 and achieved an overall score of 64%. This involved an intensive review of current services by housing service managers from Basildon and Southend Council's and enabled the service to move onto the next stage of the programme.

Subsequently, the service is working on the ten challenges set out by the Gold Standard Programme (see above) in order to achieve Gold Standard status and has identified specific areas work for improvement:

- To develop a Homelessness Prevention strategy with a proactive approach to preventing homelessness;
- To continually monitor the quality of the service provided including frontline service provision, case work and new procedures;
- To review and make good use of online services including an online Self-assessment programme (HED) which allows clients to access housing advice and information on line with sign posting to appropriate services including the facility to identify potentially homeless applicants at an earlier stage in order to take a more proactive approach to homeless prevention
- To actively work in partnership with voluntary sector and other local partners to address support, education, employment and training needs & to ensure partners are fully aware of the Councils strategic objectives
- To agree housing pathways with key partners and client groups that include appropriate accommodation and support
- To set up quarterly partnership forums for sharing information, training & developing links with the Housing solutions teams
- To work with partners to investigate the impacts of welfare reforms & austerity measures & develop an action plan to mitigate the impacts
- To adopt a corporate commitment to prevent homelessness which has "buy in" across all local authority services
- To investigate all funding streams to ensure effective use for homeless prevention including homelessness grant, DHP & DWP funding and one off government funding opportunities
- To develop a Housing advice service which encompasses all housing options
To investigate the option of a one stop shop for all housing options either within the Civic offices or in another location
- To investigate a local mortgage rescue scheme
- Prepare a pre-tenancy information programme/workshop and roll out for all new incoming tenants
- Develop specific Temporary Accommodation options for 16 & 17 year olds to eliminate the use of B & B for this group
- Review the terms of reference for the Joint Referral Panel to ensure co-operation and pathways through accommodation for non-statutory homeless
- Improve and develop services for all client groups – statutory and non-statutory homeless

7. New ways of working

Since the last homelessness strategy was implemented (2010) new operational working practices have been introduced:

- The Homeless and allocations teams were restructured into one Housing Solutions team in 2012
- An online Housing application form was introduced in 2013 and applications for housing (new applicants and transferring tenants) are accessed through this single entry
- An online single point of access for housing advice and options (HED) was introduced in 2014. Applicants completing the assessment who are facing homelessness are highlighted within the system and offered face to face and telephone appointments whilst those requiring only advice and information can obtain this 24/7. A specific action plan is produced to meet the individual requirements depending on the information provided.

8. Partnerships

Thurrock Council housing solutions work in partnership with many agencies including the following:

- Adult Social Care
- Children's Services
- Probation
- SEPT
- NHS Trust
- Public Health
- Education
- Police
- Family Mosaic
- Sanctuary housing association
- Open Door
- Mind
- POhWER
- Women's Aid
- Sericc
- Thurrock Racial Unity Support Task group (TRUST)
- St Mungos Broadway

9. Next steps

This review document and accompanying initial action plan will feed into a further consultation period and will provide an evidence base to identify key areas for improvement and development.

This second consultation period will provide an opportunity for meaningful and effective discussions on the issues identified, and communication of ideas for tackling them. It will be delivered across a range of mediums including

- Face to face conversations
- Joint meetings with a wide range of partners, staff, private and social landlords, and Members
- An online public survey

The review will also be presented to the Councils Youth Cabinet, the Education, Children's and Social Care directorates and the Health & Wellbeing Strategic Board for further consultation.

Because Prevention is key the Action plan will link every actions to one of the four main causes of homelessness which have been identified – this should focus attention on prevention

The Four main causes of homelessness are:

1. Exclusion by parents, family or friends
2. Termination of an assured short hold tenancy
3. Violence or Harassment
4. Mortgage or rent arrears

Clear proposals will be identified within the action plan that

- Are able to drive through improvements
- Are "SMART" with short, medium & long term aims
- Involve Partnership working – particularly amongst Social Care & Registered Providers who have a statutory duty to assist with the Homelessness strategy

There will be an Emphasis on positive and proactive actions and more delegated leadership across partners

Following the consultation period a new homelessness strategy will be completed with identified links into Thurrock Council's

- Allocations scheme
- Tenancy strategy
- Discharge into private sector strategy
- Housing Strategy
- Autism Strategy

Mechanism for regular reviews will be identified – including shorter (annual) reviews with the first review being 12 months after implementation of the strategy.