

<p>Current key projects within Portfolio</p>	<p>My portfolio combines several busy front-line services with a more strategic function. One of my priorities has been to support Julie Cook, as head of service, and the staff in general, to help them do the best for our residents. I'm in regular touch with Julie and her staff. I set out some of the key projects below.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accelerating delivery of affordable housing <p>Increasing the supply of affordable and social housing has been a key priority from day one. I recognise there are challenges in achieving a massive step-change and that much of my work and the officers to date will not bear fruit immediately but that it will be better to measure the impact in a couple of years. My work in this area is five-fold:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) Building relationships with our housing association partners – to set out our priorities and make it clear that we want to support them to provide more affordable housing. b) Encouraging officers across the Council to explore all avenues to aid delivery and to step up the pace. This is now paying dividends – see the planned refurbishment of Weybridge Hall and the diversification of the Council's approach to acquisition to buildings for potential future use as affordable housing. Acquisition is a route being followed as an assessment of Council-owned sites (that I pushed for) revealed limited potential for delivering significant numbers quickly. c) We are also looking at other potential sites now to provide more temporary accommodation to stop using bed and breakfast. d) Harnessing the Council's resources – I've pushed for and achieved the replacement of the Affordable Housing Member Panel with the Affordable & Social Housing Working Group. Whilst still being non-partisan, the latter has been set up to be more proactive and is already showing its value in relation to the local housing company options. e) Taking forward the LGA Housing Peer Review – alongside supporting others to deliver affordable housing, I am keen for the Council to have greater control / input in its design, development and if necessary, management. We've commissioned Local Partnerships to assist re: the housing company option and Cabinet is scheduled to receive a further report in Autumn.
---	--

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reducing use of bed & breakfast accommodation / out of borough placements for homeless households <p>Again, this is a long-standing priority and a work in progress. There are several projects in train to provide more suitable, and more local, alternatives and I am sure that officers know that they have my support to make things happen. These include supporting Crown Simmons to buy properties on the open market for use as TA. Transform Housing Group designating some of its Elmbridge properties for homeless households, refurbishment of Weybridge Hall to include 6 rented homes and PA Housing’s provision of 6 short-stay units within its East Molesey redevelopment scheme. The upturn in new affordable housing should help, but I’m clear that preventing homelessness in the first place will help manage demand. I will come onto that later.</p> <p>For information, Appendix 1 comprises the latest forecast for affordable housing delivery until March 2020.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changes to SEARCH Moves choice-based lettings scheme Housing Allocations Policy <p>Cabinet received a report considering changes to the above, the most significant being a move away from a common housing allocations policy across the partnership and a return to the Council having a local policy, with the Council having greater control over who is prioritised for social housing. I expect the new arrangements to go live from September.</p>
<p>Key achievements</p>	<p>I am particularly pleased to have supported officers in their successful efforts in securing funding from the DWP to help support the employment of two benefit cap coaches on a fixed -term basis to work with households affected by the reduced cap which came into place last November. The coaches’ main aim is to help households come off the cap, either through employment or securing an exemption from the cap. We have a flagship in place to assist 50 households off the cap this year and as well as relieving hardship, their interventions can prevent homelessness as well. Over forty households have been helped off the cap through the coaches’ work over the last 9 months.</p> <p>Our Rental Support Scheme which helps households at risk of homelessness to access private-rented tenancies continues to deliver, despite a challenging market. Last year, the team helped support 36 households into tenancies. Likewise, our Private Sector Housing Team oversaw 87 households having major adaptations to their homes to allow disabled residents to live independently. The Housing Service is made up of various teams which do a lot of good work and it is easy to overlook this when looking at more strategic issues. I have played little part but like to feel that like all housing</p>

	<p>matters the staff know that I fully appreciate and back all their efforts.</p> <p>The changes I proposed to the Affordable and Housing Panel now reporting directly to the Cabinet will speed matters up. It has also strengthened the way the panel can do things and given it more powers.</p>
<p>Key challenges</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preparing for the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 <p>As reported to Cabinet last week, this Act significantly increases the duties on the Council in terms of preventing and relieving homelessness. The measures are expected to come into force in April 2018, and will lead to greater workloads for the Housing Options Team. Work is underway to review and revise roles within the Team ahead of the changes going live and I will work with the Head of Service and colleagues to make sure they have the resources necessary to meet our increased responsibilities.</p> <p>Whilst we should receive some “new burdens” funding from Government to help, the Council has separately been awarded a total of £753,000 over two years via Flexible Homeless Support Grant. It will help the Council to meet the additional costs associated with temporary accommodation and fund a range of preventative measures on an interim basis, designed to limit demand for TA. The Cabinet report sets out plans for the funding, both to expand the Housing Options Team but also to fund the work of partner agencies.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Private sector housing – enforcement policies and tackling rogue landlords <p>The Government is introducing a raft of measures throughout the year to crack down on rogue landlords. Officers will be reviewing our policies and procedures to make best use of the new powers that are given to us. Whilst problems are rare, we want to be able to deter bad practice and prevent exploitation. I expect to bring a report to Cabinet before the end of 2017.</p>
<p>Areas for action</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Updating the Housing & Homelessness Strategy <p>The current strategy runs from 2015-19, but the intention is to refresh the document by the end of 2017, to capture the priorities of the current administration and reflect the changes in the policy and legal framework in the intervening period.</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Universal Credit rollout (phase 2) <p>The next key local event is the proposed roll-out of UC to all new eligible working-age benefit claims in Elmbridge in August 2018. This will see a significant scaling up in UC claims and the Council will work with partners to help inform and prepare residents for the changes that result.</p>
<p>Forward planning and next projects etc.</p>	<p>Within the department everything is being done – in addition to the regular work of the department in meeting the increasing demand for social rented housing (numbers are increasing every week) – to work to meet our housing priorities.</p> <p>Unlike many other departments, housing is unique in that daily it deals with vulnerable people in need, it really is a social service and cannot be treated like a business.</p> <p>The setting up of an arm’s length company to work with our current housing department will enable us to plan, build and manage social housing under our control.</p> <p>I believe that with the support of all councillors, housing in Elmbridge for those in need has a great future.</p> <p>I welcome all suggestions etc. how this can be achieved and I also ask all councillors to assist us in our work and determination in achieving our goals.</p> <p>I am grateful to the Affordable and Social Housing Working Group for all their hard work under the guidance of their Chairman James Browne.</p> <p>Thank you for giving me the opportunity to explain the current situation in housing. I also thank staff for updating me on various matters and facts and figures.</p> <p>If Members want more details please contact me. I am willing to try to answer any questions at the meeting or to provide answers of a more detailed nature afterwards.</p>