

Overcoming Homelessness

Annual Report
And
Accounts
2016-17



www.spelthornerentstart.org.uk

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What is Rentstart?

We are a homelessness charity established in 1997, serving the borough of Spelthorne, Surrey. Our mission is to provide access to the private rented sector for local homeless people who have no entitlement to any statutory help. Many of them lack the skills and resources to gain accommodation on their own and we are the only organization in Spelthorne to which they can turn for this service.

Our team works directly with homeless clients and local landlords from an office based in the council building in Staines. The location enables us to maintain close ties to the Housing Department which enhances our ability to work collaboratively.

We collaborate with numerous other local statutory and charitable organizations to ensure the clients get the full range of services they need in order to make other positive life changes from the stability of secure housing.

What do we do?

We help individuals through all stages of homelessness and vulnerable housing. We reach out to the street homeless and those hidden from view and continue to mentor them with training and advice on their path to a stable home life.

Specifically:

- ✓ We work with those who are street homeless, hidden homeless (e.g. living in sheds, cars or sofa-surfing) or at risk of homelessness. We maintain links with our local Council and other statutory and charitable bodies so that those who are in need get an immediate referral to us.



- ✓ We build long-term relationships with private landlords to facilitate sustained availability of suitable accommodation for our clients who can be seen as potentially high risk. We provide a deposit guarantee which pays out in the event of a default in rent payment or property damage and we can, if necessary, provide rent in advance from a reserve fund dedicated to that use. We also provide ongoing support to the landlords by keeping in regular contact which ensures problems are identified and resolved quickly. This backing ensures our landlords feel secure in letting to our clients whom they might otherwise have turned down.
- ✓ We seek out homes appropriate for our clients, which may involve stages of tenancy. For some clients this means supported accommodation that helps them acquire the skills necessary to take on a tenancy of their own.
- ✓ We provide ongoing support to those we house. This might include how to manage their tenancy, how to budget and what their responsibilities as a tenant are. In this way we aim to reduce defaults on payments and a reversion to homelessness. This support also increases the confidence the landlords have in our tenants.



Where we are today

High demand continues for our services to local people threatened with homelessness. We interviewed 275 (up from 258 last year) people during our 2016-17 year and were able to help 89 into housing with the

others receiving advice and guidance. We conducted another 1,743 follow-up contacts with existing clients to give further advice and assistance. This level of demand, coupled with continuing regulatory change, the uncertainty over potential future changes to benefits and legislation and the rising cost of private sector rents in the area means we are constantly challenged to deliver.

We have a small team of paid staff and volunteers who bring a wealth of relevant experience and expertise to the organization. Our Manager has been in place for over ten years and several of our volunteers previously worked for the Citizens Advice Bureau so have a deep understanding of the issues. Our volunteers collectively spend 20+ hours a week working with us which enables us to provide a high quality service with a lower budget. We were delighted that one of our trustees, Carol Parker (nee Davis) was awarded a CBE in the 2016 Queen's Birthday Honours list for, among other reasons, her work for Spelthorne Rentstart.

We place great emphasis on maintaining collaborative working relationships with complementary organizations, in particular our "sister" charity Elmbridge Rentstart and the Spelthorne Housing Department. These relationships ensure we can take advantage of other experience to ensure we operate as effectively and efficiently as possible. We continue to seek to develop new links with other agencies and to fundraise from a wide range of sources.

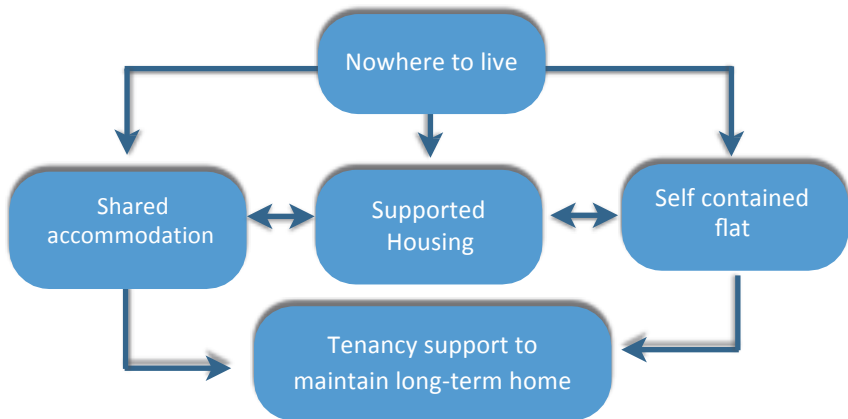
Spelthorne Borough Council has funded us since our inception in 1997 and gave us a significant grant for 2016-17 from Surrey County Council's Homeless Alliance. This has given us some visibility over our future funding position and supports our sustainability.

We continue to be able to offer rent in advance where required from the generous 2015 donation from Thames Homeless Project which was restricted for this use.

The time, commitment and resourcefulness of our team of paid staff, volunteers, committee members and our many supporters ensures we are able to deliver cost effective services to our clients. We extend our thanks to all those who have made such a positive impact this year.

A Client's Journey

The client's journey to a stable and sustainable tenancy is rarely straightforward. There are sometimes setbacks and our ongoing support is vital to ensure successful outcomes. Clients differ in their housing needs and the kind of tenancy they can afford and maintain and may involve more than one move and our ongoing help before they secure a long-term home.



A Client's Story

Sally's Story*

(*name changed to protect identity)

Sally is 45, registered blind, with mental health issues. She was referred to us via Spelthorne Housing Options. Despite being considered 'priority need' under the housing legislation, she was not eligible for assistance due to 'local connection' criteria not being met, as she had not been in the borough for the requisite period as she had recently moved here to live with her fiancée. Sadly, shortly after moving in, Sally's fiancée passed away. As his family were arguing about who should inherit the flat and threatening to throw out her belongings, she did not feel she could remain at the flat.

She was advised by Housing Options to return to her previous borough where she would be eligible for assistance but Sally wished to remain in the area, as during her short time here she had formed a strong support network.

Social Services had been involved but had assessed Sally not to have social care needs as she was deemed to be fully self-caring.

When Sally approached us she was worried, confused and pessimistic about her future. We were able to match Sally with one of our landlords, who was happy to make minor adjustments to the property that would assist Sally to live an independent life. We assisted with a deposit bond and due to the circumstances were able to loan her rent-in-advance. She made regular repayments and has since repaid back the monies we loaned to her at the outset of her tenancy. We continue to offer Sally tenancy support and are pleased to report that she is in a much happier place and is now looking forward to the future.

Who do we help?

Last year we supported over 270 local people who were facing homelessness as well as providing continued support to those we had previously assisted into accommodation and their landlords. Those we help are classified non-priority homeless and are often termed as the "hidden homeless" as they do not always show up on rough sleeper or homeless counts. They move from sofa to sofa, or sleep in sheds or cars. Our clients include ex-offenders, people recovering from drug or alcohol dependency and those with mental health issues. We also see a large number of people struggling with job loss and spiraling debt.

Key Statistics

During the year:	2016-17
Total number of new people seeking help	275
Total number of follow up contacts	1,743
Total number housed	89

Gender

Male	60%
Female	40%

Housing Status

High risk of losing home	19%
Staying with friends/family	39%
Sofa surfing	24%
Street / car homeless	8%
Other	10%

Age of Clients

18 – 24	27%
25 – 39	28%
40 - 59	37%
60 plus	8%

Employment Status

Unemployed	51%
Employed full time	31%
Employed part time	12%
Retired	4%
Student	1%
Other	1%

Our Year 2016-17

Our most important result is that we were able to assist 89 people into accommodation which gave them a secure base from which to take steps towards making positive life changes. Many of the 186 whom we saw but did not directly assist into accommodation were able to use our advice and help to improve their situations themselves. Given that the pressure on the Private Rental Sector is increasing all the time, along with the rent levels, being able to help so many people into housing is an achievement of which we are proud.

Another result is that our tenants are staying in the tenancies for increasing lengths of time which is hugely positive for them in terms of stability and self esteem. The ongoing support from the staff to both tenants and landlords plays a big role in achieving this outcome. While this does impact our deposit bond reserve fund requirements, the upside to the clients more than makes up for that. This also impacts our rent in advance (RIA) fund as normally the RIA is paid back to Rentstart at the end of a tenancy so the amounts are outstanding longer than anticipated which impacts the self-funding of the RIA fund.

Since Rentstart started in 1997, 809 Deposit Guarantees have been issued. During 2016-17 we issued 32 deposit guarantees totally £19,983. As of 31 March 2017 a total of 71 bonds were held with a total value of £44,417.

Our reserve policy ensures that if claims are made we have the funds to cover future claims. By working closely with the tenants and landlords normally issues are aired quickly and steps can be taken to ensure remedies are put in place to reduce the likelihood of claims later.



For the fourth year a winter night shelter was open January to March which accepted referrals from Spelthorne, Runnymede and Elmbridge. 23 of our clients were accepted for a place in the shelter. It was once again in Staines which made it easy for the clients we referred to make use of the facility.



Although Rentstart neither funded this initiative nor managed it, it is a very important resource for us to have available to help those most in need with a short-term solution whilst we work out a longer term solution and we work in collaboration with Transform Housing who manages the shelter to maximize the impact it can have.

A key challenge continues to be the availability of suitable housing at an affordable cost. Fewer and fewer landlords are willing to take on tenants on benefits. In August 2016 the CEO of the National Landlords Association noted that *“the number of landlords letting to tenants in receipt of housing benefit had halved over the past 5 years.”* With the pressures of the rental market landlords have a choice of tenants and perceive that the risk is lower with tenants not relying on benefits. To meet this challenge we have had to become more flexible with our deposit guarantees, extending them beyond our previous 12 month limit and sometimes for the duration of the tenancy. We have also stepped up the support we provide to the landlords to ensure issues are addressed swiftly and that the landlord is comfortable relying on us.

Most private rental accommodation costs more than Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rate, meaning the tenant must come up with the additional rent each month. Of the clients we housed in private rental accommodation, in many cases the rent was above LHA rate.



During 2016-17 significant work was done to replace our Case Management System. With the help of a talented volunteer, we now have a bespoke system based on Access which has made entering data and generating reports much easier for the staff and volunteers. It will greatly simplify the effort to track the results of our efforts to show our accomplishments and provide reports back to funders.



During 2016-17 Spelthorne Rentstart took some key decisions regarding the future structure of the organization.



In 2016 Spelthorne Rentstart conducted talks with Elmbridge Rentstart about the possibility of merging the two organisations. Although there were clearly some advantages to a merger, it was decided the risks outweighed the advantages and a decision was made not to merge at this time.

After operating as a Registered Society under the Co-operative and Community Benefit Societies Act 2014 (and before that a Charitable Industrial and Provident Society) a decision was made to become a Registered Charity as it was felt this would make fund raising easier. Many foundations and trusts will not make grants to any organization not registered with the Charity Commission. Our application was made in March 2017 and although the process was not completed in the 2016-17 year, as of July 2017 Spelthorne Rentstart was a Registered Charity, number 1173709.

Sadly during 2016 long-time trustee Avril Pye decided she could no longer continue acting due to her many other commitments.

Looking Forward 2017-18

Having housed in excess of 1600 people since 1997, demand for our services grows and is not likely to diminish given the housing situation in Spelthorne – heavy pressure on the Private Rental Sector, rising rental costs and reductions/caps on benefits. We anticipate the switch to Universal Credit for benefit payments will cause hardship for our clients due to the waiting period, payments made several weeks in arrears and a potential decrease in overall amount paid.

The Homelessness Reduction Act of 2017 will undoubtedly bring change to the way the Housing Department and Spelthorne Rentstart work when it comes into effect in April 2018. The Housing Department has made it clear they want Rentstart involved in the discussions around the changes and we anticipate that we will continue playing a key role in the homelessness strategy for the Housing Department in the years to come.

Our scheme is free to use for both clients and landlords, so the continuation and stability of our charity requires access to continuing funds now and for the future. An ongoing challenge is fundraising and we hope the change to being a charity will make this easier. Fundraising is a key focus for 2017-18 to ensure sufficient funding ongoing.

We anticipate continuing to improve our social media presence by doing more with Facebook and opening a Twitter account. Not only does it spread the news of what we are doing and the services we offer it enables us to see information from other organisations we might have missed otherwise.

As of this writing, plans are in place for a winter night shelter for Jan – March 2018, once again giving us an option for immediate referral for those most in need. Unfortunately the shelter will be based in Elmbridge which from previous experience (2014, 2015) we know means many of our clients will not make use of it due to the time and expense of getting back and forth to Elmbridge.

An ongoing, but not immediate, concern is the planned move of Spelthorne Borough Council to a different office location. If that location could not offer us the same free office space we have today that would have a major financial impact on our services. This was announced some time ago but there is no timeline or date as of writing.

How You Can Help

There are several ways you can help Spelthorne Rentstart:

- ✓ Consider organizing or participating in a fund raising event – holding a pub quiz, doing a charity walk or having a blue jeans day at work are some easy options
- ✓ Encourage your business or company to make Spelthorne Rentstart their charity of the year
- ✓ Do you have large grant fund-raising experience? We can always use help there!
- ✓ Are you a landlord? Talk to us about the benefits to you of renting to our clients
- ✓ Make a financial donation

We would like to thank all our funders, from local supporters to the larger organisations who support our work.



And of course all the landlords and agents willing to accept our deposit guarantee and work with us and our clients and our very dedicated volunteers.

The Team

The Management Committee

Linda Marshall	Chair/Secretary
Joanne Buckingham	
Abigail Honeywell	
Pauline Nicholson	
Les Oaten	
Carol Parker	
Avril Pye (resigned November 2016)	Minutes Secretary
Beryl Rowe	
Barbara Royston	
Hilary Stokes	Treasurer

Staff

Bryan Pilgrim	Manager
Meena Chahal	Project Officer
Barbara Pilgrim (no relation to Bryan Pilgrim)	Office Co-Ordinator

Volunteers

Sue Clifford	Interviewer
Maureen Hesbrook	Interviewer
Barbara Royston	General Support
Henry Harris	Case Mgt System Development

SPELTHORNE RENTSTART LIMITED (REGISTERED NUMBER:IP28593 R)
A REGISTERED SOCIETY UNDER THE CO-OPERATIVE AND COMMUNITY BENEFIT SOCIETIES ACT 2014

Income and expenditure account for the year ended 31 March 2017

	Restricted Funds		Unrestricted Funds		2017 Total	2016 Total
	THP	Big Lottery Crisis	SBC General Funds	Bond Fund		
	£	£	£	£	£	£
RECEIPTS AND PAYMENTS						
Total Income	-	0	30,964	-	30,964	66,345
Expenditure						
Wages	-	0	53,980	-	53,980	51,272
Pension	-	-	713	-	713	154
Training	-	-	0	-	0	100
Telephone	-	0	589	-	589	681
Post, Stationery & Photocopy	-	0	568	-	568	191
Travel Expenses	-	0	808	-	808	618
Professional and Regulatory Fees	-	-	0	-	0	60
Rent in Advance	4,630	0	-	-	4,630	3,735
Sundry Expenses	-	0	200	-	200	228
Insurance	-	0	553	-	553	535
Consultancy	-	0	904	-	904	2,690
IT Maintenance	-	0	1,962	-	1,962	898
Meeting Rooms	-	-	0	-	0	37
Guaranteed Fund Claims (NET)	-	-	560	-	560	160
Transfer to Bond Fund	3,278	2,775	-	(6,053)	-	-
Provision for RIA Repaid	-	-	(4,295)	-	(4,295)	0
TOTAL EXPENDITURE	7,908	2,775	56,542	(6,053)	61,172	61,359
Surplus for the year	(7,908)	(2,775)	(25,578)	6,053	(30,208)	4,968
Fund balances at 1 April 2016	9,096	2,275	40,531	27,260	79,662	74,676
Fund balances at 31 March 2017	1,188	0	14,953	33,313	49,454	79,662

**SPELTHORNE RENTSTART LIMITED (REGISTERED NUMBER:IP28593 R)
A REGISTERED SOCIETY UNDER THE CO-OPERATIVE AND COMMUNITY BENEFIT
SOCIETIES ACT 2014**

BALANCE SHEET 31 March 2017

	2017	2016
	Total	Total
CURRENT ASSETS		
Cash at Bank and in Hand	49,483	83,985
TOTAL ASSETS	49,483	83,985
LESS CURRENT LIABILITIES	0	(4,295)
	<hr/> 49,483	<hr/> 79,690
CAPITAL AND RESERVES		
Called up Share Capital	29	28
Unrestricted Funds		
Spelthorne B.C. and General Fund	14,953	40,531
Guarantee Bond Fund	33,313	27,260
Restricted Funds	1,188	11,871
TOTAL MEMBERS FUNDS	<hr/> 49,483	<hr/> 79,690



[The Community Link Centre, Knowle Green, Staines, TW18 1XA](#)

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No. 1173709