



Helping to rebuild lives in the community

By overcoming homelessness



# Spelthorne Rentstart Annual Report and Accounts 2022 - 2023

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## Who are Rentstart

We are a local homelessness charity established in 1997. Our services cover the borough of Spelthorne, Surrey.

Our **mission** is to help people find and secure suitable accommodation so that they can rebuild their lives.

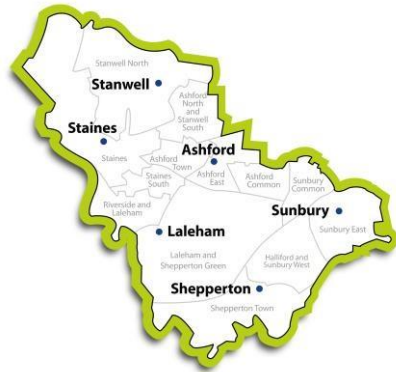
We assist single people and childless couples who are homeless or at risk of homelessness to gain access to the Private Rented Sector (PRS). The people we help are deemed to be non-priority for social housing and we provide them with support to obtain and sustain a secure tenancy in the PRS. Many of them may lack the skills and resources to access accommodation without our support.

We work closely with the Spelthorne Housing Options Team to assist them in meeting the requirements of the Homelessness Reduction Act (2017) by housing mutual clients in the PRS.

We offer a holistic service through our collaboration with numerous other organisations. The clients receive tailored support to make positive life changes from the stability of secure housing. This allows the break down of the barriers that have been holding people back, so that they can fulfil their potential.

# Our Work

We help individuals through all stages of vulnerable housing and homelessness.



- We work with those who are street homeless, the hidden homeless (living in sheds, cars or sofa-surfing) and those at risk of homelessness.
- Our links to a wide range of statutory and charitable bodies mean those in need can be referred to us and we can refer clients who need additional help and support to the best fit services for their requirements.
- Our close ties to the Spelthorne Borough Council Housing Options Team means those approaching them for assistance have an immediate introduction to us – as our Offices are also in the Council building.
- We can assist with benefit applications and the resolution of any related issues.
- We build strong long-term relationships with private landlords to facilitate sustained availability of suitable accommodation for our clients. We offer both clients and landlords free advice and support to help maintain and sustain the tenancy.
- The core service is a deposit guarantee scheme which pays out in the event of a default or damage and means a cash deposit is not required from the client. Also, if necessary, we can provide immediate rent in advance payments to help secure the property as soon as possible.
- In the 2022-23 year we gave advice and assistance to 316 local people who were facing homelessness. In addition, we provided continued support to many of those we had previously assisted and their landlords with a total of 3803 follow on contacts.

# Our Year 2022-23

Looking back this has been another exciting but challenging year with the end of the pandemic and cost of living increases having an adverse physical and mental impact. We are finding that our clients are increasingly relying on food banks and those that were housed into safe and stable housing are now struggling to pay the increased rents and bills and expect that figure to increase this year. Our service is more vital than ever.

Our achievements included:

- Directly assisted **71** clients into accommodation giving them a secure base from which to take steps towards making positive life changes.
- Assisted **245** additional clients with advice and guidance so they could independently take steps to improve their situation.
- Supported a total of **316** clients.
- Helped **125** clients renew their tenancies.

Given the success of the previous year's Rentstart 'Extra' project with funding from the National Lottery Community Fund to support clients with multiple and complex needs, we launched the 5 year 'Extra Care' project also funded by The National Lottery Communities Fund on 1st October 2022.

# Extra Care Project

The 'Extra Care' Project (project) launched on 1 October 2022 and is a continuation of the Extra project with the addition of a rental guarantee scheme for a six-bedroom House in Multiple Occupation (HMO).



The project adopts a multiagency approach, with the aim of encouraging self-reliance and resilience, so that individuals are able to maintain their tenancies and improve their life opportunities.

The project partners up with statutory and non-statutory agencies with the aim of providing a tailored service based on the needs of the individual client. Through adopting a holistic approach, the project leverages on the expertise outside of the core service, e.g. mental health or addiction services, to offer the best support possible to the client, so that these individuals are able to succeed in their lives and tenancies to achieve independent living and successfully re-integrate with the wider community.

## Tenancy Support Officer

Welcome to our new team member Kristina Mickute who joined the project in November 2022. Kristina has a good level of prior knowledge working with similar clients and has been working closely with the former Extra and new Extra Care clients to build relationships and offer respectful and timely engagement that fits in with the persons own perceptions of their needs. Through this new post, we have managed to increase the number of instances of multi-agency working from first presentation. This is hugely beneficial to all parties, as joint working and shared information increase the chances of finding and securing suitable accommodation appropriate to the individuals needs and then maintaining it in the longer term.

## What They Say About Us

Clients:

“I found the Rentstart service through a good friend , he was going through the same thing as me looking for a place to stay and Rentstart saved the day”



**Remi Clement**  
**Client**

“Brilliant people to deal with so helpful and reassuring, dealt with the situation so well...a thousand thank you’s doesn’t seem enough. Superb!”

**John Foster**  
**Client**

Rentstart were fantastic in their support, Kristina found a number of properties and helped me with budgeting. I am now happy in a flat found by Rentstart. Rentstart also helped sort out my council tax and available to assist if needed.

**Matt Booker**  
**Client**

I have had to use the food bank on four separate occasions last year via Rentstart they are really good and very accommodating plus always helpful.

**Daniel hill**  
**Client**

## Landlords:

Without access to the PRS we would not be able to house our clients. We are able to offer rent guarantee and property management alongside our continued tenancy support for the duration of the tenancy. Here's what our landlords say about us:

"We have been working with Spelthorne Rentstart for around 3 years now, they have been considerably helpful and kind when we have needed advice or any guidance with tenants. The charitable service they provide is remarkable with housing people and providing a service for people who would otherwise be homeless.

Bryan, Kristina and Kerry are always professional; they responded to telephone calls and emails almost immediately which results in great communication.

They work great as a team, as we have found if one staff member isn't available the other will have a knowledge of the client/tenant we are considering for possible housing.

Spelthorne Rentstart provide a stepping stone, for numerous people, at a challenging time helping people get their lives back on track. It's always a pleasure to work with the team, and would highly recommend them to anyone working in this field."

**Rees Brothers-William & Jaynie Landlord**

"There are two people who have been of considerable help to me.

Bryan Pilgrim, who I have known for a few years: in problems with tenants he has been kind, and appreciates that there are times landlords may be in the right: yet he is also kind with tenants, and gets them to see where they may make some adjustments. He assiduously takes before and after photos and videos of properties. This is so useful as he is basically neutral, and he keeps these on file for future reference.

Meena Chahal is a more recent contact: I actually came to her office and was delighted with her knowledge and professionalism. Meena was instrumental in finding a new tenant for one of my properties, and then liaising with the previous landlord; she helped right up to Check-In, and often talks with the tenant since. I hope this arrangement continues. It is not easy for landlords to consider some applicants without this back-up."

**Andrea Scott-Wilson Landlord**

# Our Clients and Their Stories

The client's journey to a stable and sustainable tenancy can be straightforward or more complex. Clients differ in their housing needs and the kind of tenancy they can afford and maintain and it may involve more than one move and our ongoing help before they secure a sustainable long-term home.

The following case studies highlight the diversity of routes into homelessness on the project.

## Case Study X

Client X came to us having resided at the same property for 24 years. His landlord had served him with a section 21 notice to leave, as he was retiring and wished to sell the property. The Client approached the council for alternative housing but they did not have anything suitable and advised him to stay in the property until the landlord had obtained a court order. A failure to remain at the property would deem him 'intentionally homeless' and would mean that he would forfeit any future assistance from the council.



X has a learning disability and was in receipt of ESA and had no savings. Most fundamentally, he did not have a social worker or any support network. He was extremely worried and anxious that he would be made street homeless. We were able to source suitable accommodation which he moved into just before Christmas.

Once safely housed, we assisted with applying for Universal Credit and setting up direct payments to the landlord to remove the burden from the client. We also set up council tax payments and amenities for him. We are supporting the client with his Personal Independence Payment application and continue to work intensely with him to make sure that his tenancy succeeds.



## Case Study Y

Client Y approached us whilst staying in a Refuge in Barnet, North London where she had reached the maximum stay allowed and had been asked to leave. She ended up in there following years of domestic violence. She said she was attacked a few times in the refuge and did not feel safe. The worst incident being a fractured neck and being hospitalised for several weeks and has more recently been diagnosed with breast cancer.

Understandably, she wished to be housed with only females. Despite our best efforts we were unable to source any such rooms – she is under 35 so only entitled to a room. Eventually, we were able to house her with a lovely couple where she feels safe and secure. Finally, Y has a stable base and is working with us to develop life skills to move on in her life.

## Case Study Z

Client Z contacted us following a period of homelessness of over two years following a relationship breakdown of 9 years due to emotional and physical abuse. He had been trying to find somewhere to live since, but had had no luck. He was informed that social housing was a two year wait even though he is classed as a vulnerable adult and had submitted medical evidence – he is transgender, suffers from anxiety and depression and borderline personality disorder. Client Z could not take medication due to his transition. Indeed, he was given the option to do one or the other and told us categorically that his transition came first. We were pleased to house the client in a one-bedroom flat. Our wrap around service included assistance with cannabis smoking and his debts. He was referred to Christians Against Poverty (CAP) and Step Change for debt advice. CAP attended his property and went through all the documents and a debt repayment plan was set up. He was offered assistance with his cannabis use but wanted to see if he could manage to wean himself off on his own first. Overall, he is doing well and engaging with the project.

## Rent in Advance

Landlords in the PRS require one month's rent in advance (RIA) paid before the tenancy starts. Many of our clients will be reliant on Housing Benefit or UC to pay rent, but these benefits are paid a month in arrears. Our client group generally have no savings and no access to financial resources such as family or loans and are therefore unable to pay the RIA required to move into PRS housing.

We are able to loan our clients the RIA and look to reclaim it from the final HB/UC payment at the end of their tenancy. Once repaid, we can then use it to pay RIA for future clients. This process means that one donation/grant will benefit many people as it's paid back and used again.

In support of this upfront expenditure, we received grants from Cllr K. Grant, Cllr J. Doran, Cllr S. Doran, Cllr J. Button, Cllr S. Dunn, Cllr R. Dunn and Cllr B. Spoor. Thank you!

## Donations

As well as monetary donations we work with our partners to create a nice home environment for our clients by providing cutlery, saucepans, fridges and beds.

**Thank you to Jacobs UK Ltd, Royal Institute of British Architects**



## Our Partners

We place great emphasis on maintaining collaborative working relationships with statutory and voluntary organisations to offer bespoke expert advice to clients in their time. These include:

Spelthorne Borough Council	National Lottery Community Fund
Staines Job Centre Plus	Staines Probation
Look Ahead	Transform Housing
Manna Food Bank	Community Food Bank St. Saviour's
Stanwell Food Bank	Christians Against Poverty
Surrey Reuse Network	i-access
Mind Matters	Metropolitan Thames Valley Housing
Step Change	National Debtline
Catalyst – Welcome Project	Rape and Sexual Abuse Support Centre
Amber Homeless Project	Just a Helping Hand
A2 Dominion	SSAFA The armed Forces Charity
Royal Holloway University of London	Veterans Aid
Citizens Advice Runnymede & Spelthorne	Sanctuary Refuge
Talking Therapies	North Surrey Volunteering Services

## Looking Forward

Having housed over 2,250 people since 1997, there continues to be a strong demand for our services which is unlikely to diminish given high inflation and the rising cost of living and rental costs in Spelthorne – heavy pressure on the PRS with reductions and caps on benefits. Although there is significant housing development in Staines/Spelthorne, it is generally higher end stock that our clients won't be able to afford. Unfortunately, the Local Housing Allowance rates, which governs the amount of benefit paid towards rent, is not keeping up with the average rental in the PRS making it increasingly difficult for our client group to access accommodation without our financial assistance.

Rentstart is free to use for both clients and landlords, so the continuation and stability of our charity requires fundraising to be a key objective for 2022-23 and beyond.

Our reputation means that we can continue to use the deposit guarantee bond which is a very cost-effective way of helping clients into tenancies.

# Thank You

Our work would not have been possible without the considerable support from the PRS, Spelthorne Borough council, our supporters, funders and our volunteers.

Thank you to The National Lottery Community Fund for awarding a five year grant to continue and build upon our Extra project to assist clients with multiple and complex needs to make real and lasting change in the community.

As always, thank you to Spelthorne Borough Council for their tremendous support in all areas - their generous grant, free accommodation in their offices, training and access to pots of funding throughout the year.

We could not help nearly as many people without the landlords who are willing to accept our deposit guarantee and work with our clients. A huge thank you to our remarkable volunteers. We simply could not operate at the level we do without their dedication and support.

“We hoped coming out of the pandemic and lockdown would make things easier for us. The last year has proved to be very challenging with the cost of living crisis, and the economic effects of the mini-budget coming through.

Rentstart have risen to the challenge again by both supporting their existing landlords and also looking at new ways to source accommodation. With this and the addition of a new member of the team they have continued to have good outcomes and increased support for their customers.”

**Ken Emerson**  
**Spelthorne Borough Council**  
**Team Manager: Housing Options**





# The Team

## Trustees

Hilary Stokes  
Martha Love  
Abigail Honeywell  
Linda Marshall  
Jean Pinkerton OBE  
Ligia Santos

Chair/ Treasurer  
  
Secretary

## Staff

Bryan Pilgrim  
Meena Chahal  
Kristina Mikute

Chief Operating Officer  
Project Manager  
Tenancy Support Officer

## Volunteers

Sue Clifford  
Maureen Hesbrook  
Jean Pinkerton OBE  
Sue Evans  
Kerry Trevor

Interviewer  
Interviewer  
Interviewer  
Interviewer  
Admin/Client Support



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