

Hart District Council Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy

2022-2027

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Foreward

We are living in unprecedented times amid an on-going shortage of affordable housing, compounded by a pandemic and all the associated pressures arising from these issues. In such times, planning suitable service provision going forward and supporting service users is increasingly difficult to deliver. At Hart we strive to continue providing high quality services despite the challenges we face and take pride in providing a responsive and person-centred approach which has been shown through the Council's approach to dealing with the difficulties of recent times.

Affordability is a key issue in the district and rising house prices and rent levels place increasing pressures on households which has led to many people approaching the Council for advice and support and finding themselves facing homelessness.

Since the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act in 2018 the Council has successfully assisted many households and prevented homelessness for many. Hart has accessed and utilised Government funding to provide services where they were needed most and to target support for rough sleepers and homeless families.

I am very pleased to support this Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy which sets out the Council's approach for preventing and tackling homelessness and in the district. It aims to build upon services already being provided and to work with our local stakeholders to continue to build upon our successes and make positive differences to peoples' lives.

Councillor Stuart Bailey

Portfolio Holder for Community

Hart District Council

Introduction

Under the Homelessness Act 2002, all housing authorities must carry out a review of homelessness in their area and publish a homelessness strategy which sets out what it plans to do to prevent homelessness and rough sleeping.

This strategy has been developed following a review of homelessness in Hart which has included a desktop review of national and local data, discussions with colleagues involved in delivering the statutory homelessness service, engagement with partners who deliver local services that homeless people access, talking to those who have been homeless and experienced Hart's homelessness service and an assessment of resources that can be targeted towards tackling homelessness in the future.

The Council established a Members Task and Finish Group to assist in the strategy development.

Aims

The strategy has been shaped in partnership with a range of stakeholders and colleagues from statutory and voluntary agencies, who have been engaged through a range of meetings, workshops and online surveys. Their help has assisted the Council develop a strategy that will tackle homelessness by taking a multi-agency approach.

Several key issues and actions have been identified that will enable the Council to reduce homelessness and rough sleeping in the district over the life of this plan. The actions have been prioritised in discussions with colleagues, stakeholders' workshops, Member workshops and through a review of best practice in homelessness.

The action plan is available as a separate document and is published on the Council's website.

Reviewing and updating

Progress on the actions identified through this strategy will be reviewed on a quarterly basis by the Housing Solutions Manager and a Community Services Officers' group as well as through the 'Here for Hart' themed workshops.

Elected Members from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee will also monitor performance against the annual Service Plan, through the Service Panel process.

About Hart

Hart is a largely rural district with around half the population of the district living within the two main urban areas of Fleet and Yateley. There are an estimated 35,500 homes in the district with 30% of the population living in rural areas. The Office of National Statistics (ONS) June 2020 mid-year population estimates a population of 97,608, and the ONS projected population for Hart by the end of the term of this strategy in 2027 is 100,220. Hart has an ageing population.

There is a high demand for all types of housing, with the ONS (2021) recording that in 2019, 80% of the population were owner-occupiers (40% owned outright and 40% owned with mortgage), 13% were living in private rented accommodation and 7% living in rented affordable homes.

Hart is a desirable place to live but this comes at a high price with the average house price in Hart being £415,000 (ONS - Sept 2020) which means that to afford to buy a property of that price there is a ratio of 10 x average earnings. Property prices seen within the rural areas of Hart can be significantly more.

Rental levels in the district are also very high with households requiring an income of £17,140 to afford £500 a month to rent just a room in a house, and £27,430 to afford to rent a 1 bed flat at £800 a month. Private rented family sized accommodation is in the region of £1,250 a month for a 3 bed and £1,700 a month for a 4 bed or larger home, which require incomes of £42,860 and £58,290 respectively. With the average annual income for residents of Hart at £41,419 with an annual lower quartile income for the district of £27,829 (ONS - Sept 2020) private renting is not an affordable or long-term option for many local people without assistance.

Average Rents and Required Income Levels in Hart		
Property Type/Size	Average Rent	Required Income (pa)
Room	£500	£17,140
Studio	£675	£23,140
1 bed	£800	£27,430
2 bed	£950	£32,570
3 bed	£1250	£42,860
4+ bed	£1700	£58,290

Source: ONS (Sept 2020)

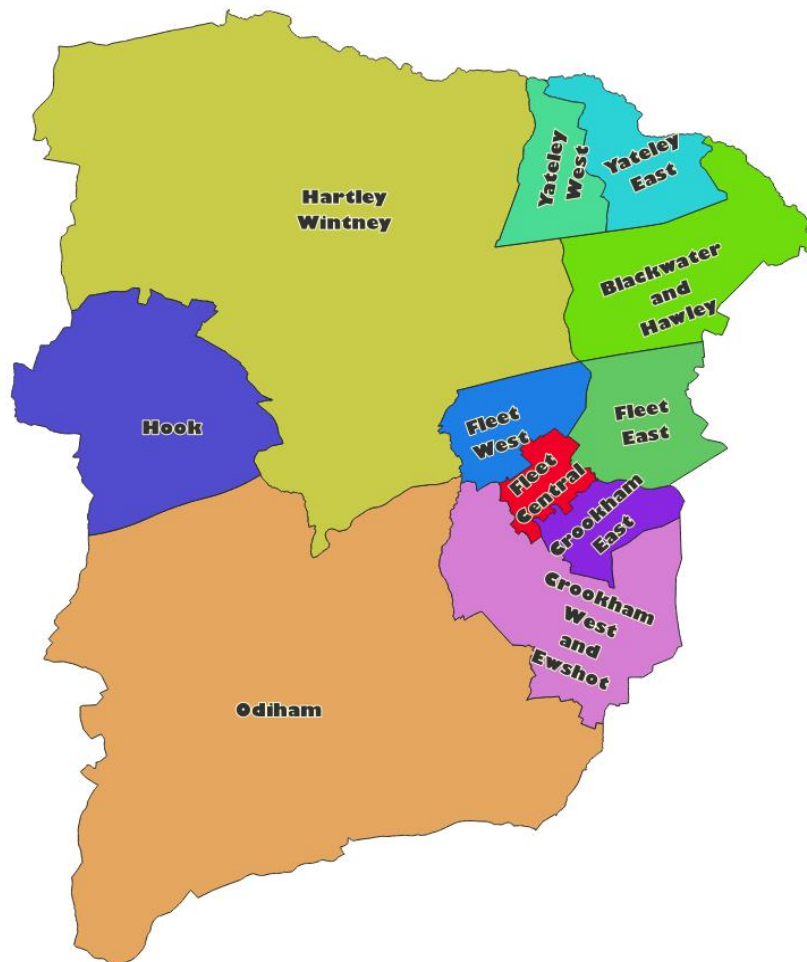
One of the Council's key corporate priorities is to support the delivery of affordable housing in the district. The Council does not own its own housing stock; it was transferred to a housing association in 1994 and it works closely with housing

associations, or Registered Providers (RP's), working in partnership to enable the delivery of affordable housing in the district.

This can be affordable home ownership, like shared ownership, or rented affordable housing. As of November 2021, there were 507 people on the Help to Buy Agent 3 register for shared ownership housing, and the average annual household income of an applicant registered for a shared ownership property is £38,056, with average savings of £24,125.

The demand for rented affordable housing exceeds supply with 1,468 people on the Council's housing register for rented housing as of April 2021 and only 198 properties being available to let last year (2020-21).

Map of Hart District showing all Wards



Council Priorities

The Council's Corporate Plan is currently being reviewed and updated. It will identify key strategic priorities providing a golden thread through to the Homelessness Strategy. The new Corporate Plan priorities will feed through into this strategy action plan through the officer working group.

The Corporate Plan 2017-2022 sets out the following strategic priorities and key actions for the Council.

Hart District Council Corporate Plan 2017-2022 strategic priorities:

- A Thriving Local Economy
- A Clean, Green and Safe Environment
- Healthy Communities and People
- An Efficient and Effective Council

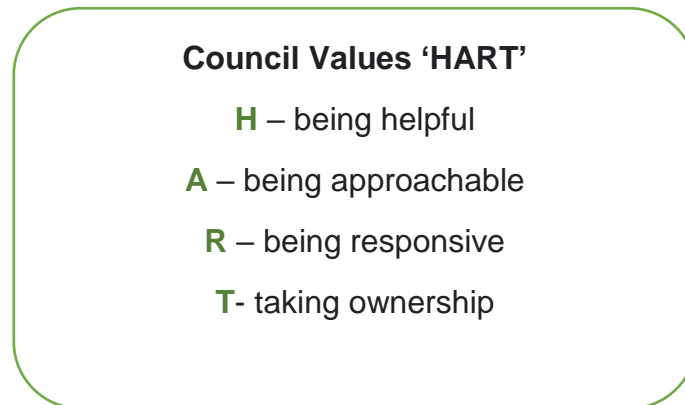
The Council has adopted a new long-term Vision to 2040.

The Vision for Hart: "To become the best place to live, work and enjoy". It provides a clear direction for Hart and will shape the council and working environment. It will help to improve the Council's use of resources and align its strategies to reach the outcomes Harts communities deserve. The priorities identified within the Vision will be aligned with the corporate plan, service plans and projects.

"The place to live" priority identifies the need to improve affordability so families can stay close together and so key workers can afford to live in Hart and help our communities flourish.

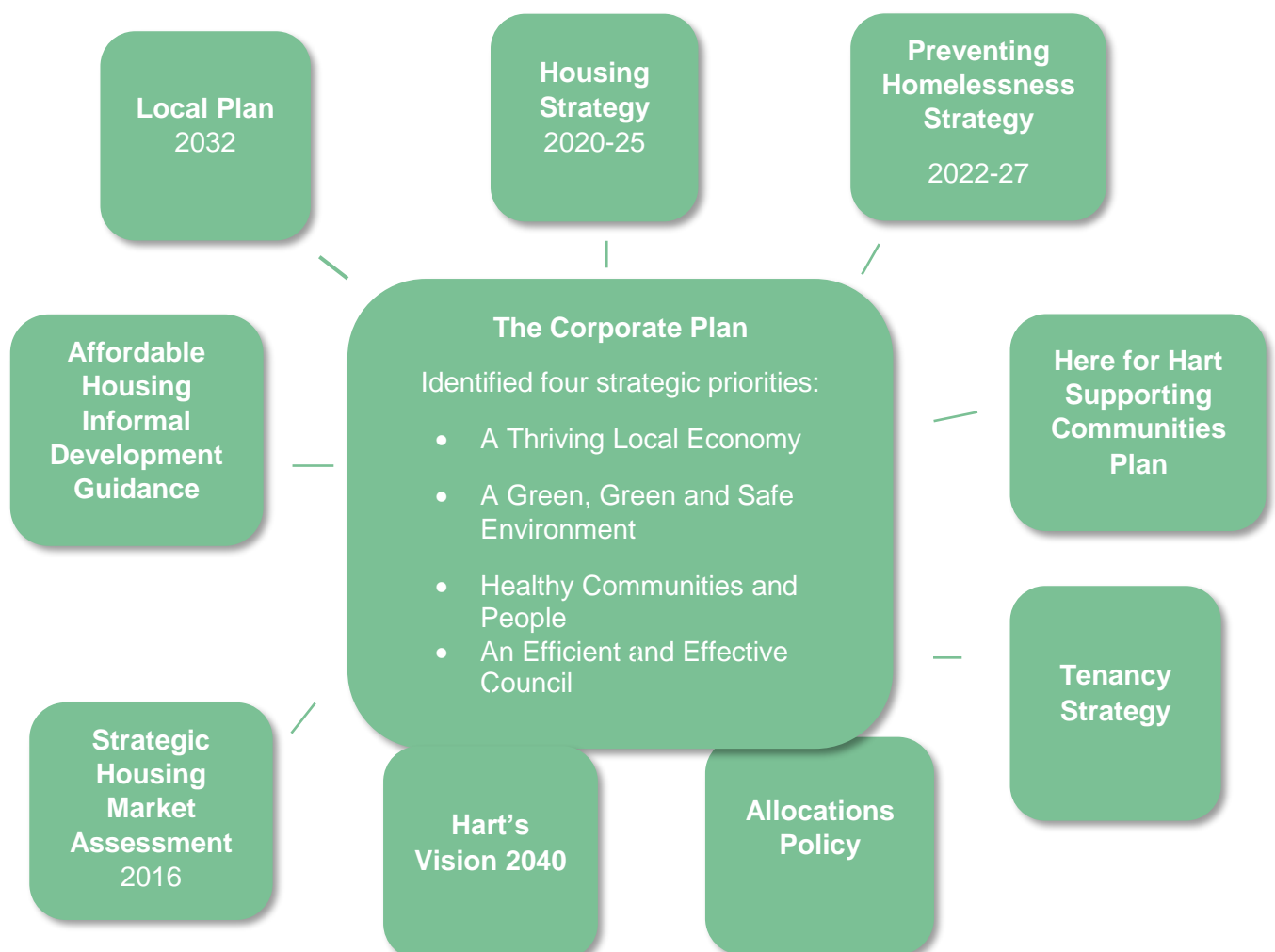
Council Values

The Council Values shape the day-to-day way the Council and its staff operate and help ensure that all staff are consistently aware of how their role contributes to the achievement of corporate aims and objectives, creating shared values in their delivery.



Links to other Council Strategies and Plans

The Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy links into the aims and actions set out in other strategies that sit within the Communities Team, as well as strategies and policies that sit under Place, such as the Local Plan. The objectives of the Council seen through wider corporate policies, including the Corporate Plan also have influence on this strategy.



Homelessness and Its Causes

What is homelessness?

In simple terms homelessness means not having a home. A home is not simply a building. Although most people associate homelessness with rough sleeping, that is far from the whole story. There are many circumstances where a person may have a roof over their head but are still homeless.

People may be homeless if:

- They are staying with family or friends “sofa surfing”
- They are staying in temporary accommodation including a hostel, night shelter or bed and breakfast
- They are at risk of violence or abuse in the home, or threats of violence or abuse
- They are living in unsafe or poor conditions that affect their health
- They have no legal right to stay in the property
- They are living apart from family because they don't have somewhere they can live together
- They are being evicted or the house is being repossessed

Achievements From the Previous Strategy

Through continued work to deliver improvements within the service and on-going collaboration with partner organisations, Hart's Housing Team have delivered many of the actions identified in the 2016-2021 Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy.

Key achievements include:

- Taking the learning from the Government funded 'trailblazer' project and embedding them into the homelessness service.
- The adoption of 'No First Night Out', keeping people from sleeping rough on the streets of Hart.
- Shifting the focus of the service towards a person-centred approach, adopting the principles of creating a psychologically informed environment for the delivery of services.
- A move towards a whole service approach, aimed at tackling the wider causes (and results) of homelessness including support in accessing other services and employment services.
- Delivery of the skills café, helping clients get job ready.
- Working with VIVID housing association to provide digital inclusion services.
- Improved signposting and links between agencies providing support and advice, through the development of the county wide duty to refer protocol.
- Targeted work with landlords in the private sector to improve access to good quality, well-managed private rented accommodation. Delivery of online training courses to local landlords
- Working with households adversely affected by the benefit cap.

Challenges

Hart is a relatively affluent and largely rural area where the cost of renting and buying a home is very high. Many support services and specialist accommodation are located outside the district and accessing good quality, affordable, suitable homes is a real challenge.

Some of the key challenges identified through our work with stakeholders and internal teams include:

- A need for more suitable and affordable short-term, supported, emergency and longer-term housing.
- A need for support and advice services targeted at specific service users e.g., young people, people with complex support needs.
- A need to publicise the homelessness, housing advice and rough sleeping services wider, to increase accessibility
- A need to continue to develop links with other agencies to provide a wrap-around service for service users who have more than a simple need for "bricks and mortar"

(Diagram to be added here when available - not ready ahead of publication for Overview and Scrutiny).

Homelessness and the Pandemic

In March 2020, central Government announced its 'everyone in' policy, which focussed on making sure everyone who was rough sleeping was brought inside for the duration of the Covid-19 pandemic. The ambition of this policy was to protect the health of rough sleepers and to prevent wider transmission of the virus.

A local cell was convened by Hampshire County Council to coordinate the effort across Hampshire, and through this process each rough sleeper was offered accommodation.

This was an extraordinarily busy time for the Housing Solutions Team, dealing with requests for support, seeking accommodation and making sure that support was in place to make sure accommodation that was sourced was sustainable. There were other challenges facing the team during this time. The challenge of shared living associated with temporary accommodation meant social distancing was hard to maintain (or enforce). Whilst the Council's temporary accommodation gave people their own front door, the ability to access supported accommodation for single people became impossible. Additionally, huge numbers of hotels were closed and only those supporting the 'everyone in' effort were allowed to remain open.

In addition, a fear of sharing accommodation emerged. A significant number of approaches were made for help where housing situations had broken down. This was most common where a lodger was asked to leave because of fear of sharing a home during the pandemic, or where a lodger worked in a high-risk environment and was seen to be a threat to the health of the main household (e.g., was a social care worker). National data shows that during the pandemic, the most common triggers for homelessness were no longer being able to stay with friends and family.

Hart provided temporary accommodation for 36 people during this time under the 'everyone in' policy, and made placements in local hotels, most often the Travelodge.

Additionally, there were other issues seen that service users were approaching the council for support with:

- Increased reports of domestic abuse during lockdown (exacerbated by the stay-at-home requirement).
- Loss of employment, resulting in an increase in affordability issues (and subsequent rent and mortgage arrears).
- Debt, as furlough meant 20% less income for households on an already tight budget.
- Inability to access second-hand furniture and white goods for new tenancies as the Lions store was closed.

Central Government imposed an eviction ban during the pandemic, and this did protect most people from losing their homes. However, the ban ended at the end of May 2021, and this will undoubtedly have an impact on the number of people turning to the council for help, although the full result of this has not yet been seen. Courts are full and possession actions will take some time.

The pandemic is not over at the time this strategy was published and there are still big concerns for some of our residents.

Key issues yet to be resolved include:

- Poverty
- Loss of employment as the furlough scheme ends and businesses stop receiving government support.
- Debt - Hart Citizens Advice have reported a 45% rise in requests for help with dealing with debt.
- Rent arrears - the government has recognised this to be an emerging issue and in November 2021 awarded each local authority an additional grant to assist with tackling rent arrears.
- Homelessness as pent-up possession action proceeds through the courts.

The Council is pleased to report that all those brought in under the Government's 'everyone in' policy, have been moved on to sustainable longer term housing solutions.

Prevention Work and Early Intervention

The Council prides itself on preventing significant levels of homelessness, through early intervention work.

Some of the key successes include:

- Development of a 'Duty to Refer' protocol across Hampshire, including training partner agencies on its use and value, resulting in early awareness of potential homelessness.
- Implementation of a 'No Second Night Out' policy in 2018 and a 'No First Night Out' Policy in 2020. The No Second Night Out policy meant that nobody needed to spend a second night out on the streets in Hart; this was soon pushed forward, to mean that nobody needs to spend even one night sleeping rough, due to active and responsive outreach
- Implementation of a pre-court action protocol (with an annual refresh), enabling all housing associations to notify the Council of any early possession action.
- Homelessness outreach service provided directly by the Housing Solutions Team, to prevent vulnerable tenancies from breaking down, pending service users engaging with other support providers.

- Landlord liaison service - providing quick interventions for tenancy issues when flagged by a private sector landlord.
- Promotion of the severe weather emergency protocol (SWEPE), to prevent rough sleeping in winter.
- Access to the Hardship Fund for essential purchases to enable independent living.
- Tailored supported accommodation was secured to address the complex needs of service users, on a personalised case by case basis
- Creation of Here for Hart and launch of the Here for Hart Supporting Communities Plan which brings together in one place information about the Council's priorities, partnerships and projects which tackle social and health inequalities, nurture supportive and inclusive communities, and support communities to recover from the impacts of the pandemic.

What is Homelessness Prevention Work?

The Housing Solutions team will talk to people as early as possible about their housing options. Where there is a threat of homelessness, the team work hard to prevent it from happening.

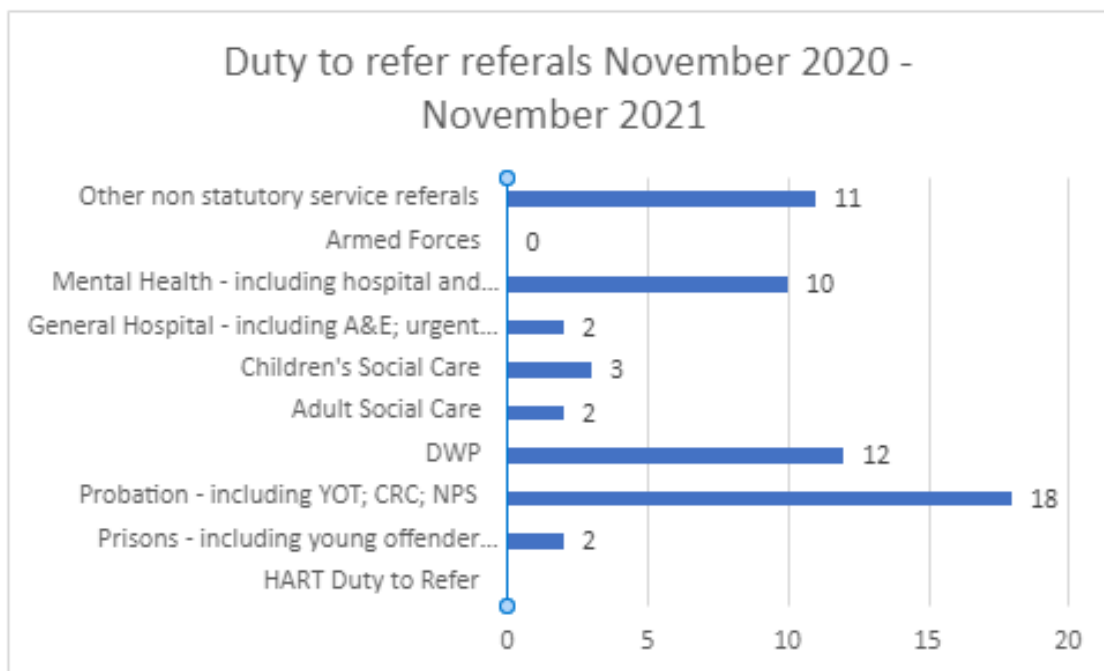
This will include:

- Home visits.
- Working with service users to create Personalised Housing Plans with agreed steps to prevent or relieve homelessness.
- Checking validity of notices (and often enabling longer stays before people need to leave accommodation).
- Negotiation with landlords, parents, family and friends to enable people to stay in their current accommodation.
- Use of discretionary housing payments to address difficulties with rent payments.
- Use of Government housing and/or COVID-19 support funding.
- Provision of money and debt advice.
- Additional wraparound help including access to the Hart Employment and Skills Hub, referral to other support services such as mental health or referral to the Supporting Families Programme administered by the Children's Services Team.

Referrals to the Housing Solutions Service from Other Agencies

The Homelessness Reduction Act (2018) introduced a new duty to refer. This was a duty on other agencies to send a referral to the Housing Solutions Team when they were working with a service user who was threatened with homelessness. This duty provides additional opportunities for homelessness prevention and early intervention.

Hart led on developing a county wide approach and referral process, as it welcomed this new opportunity for early intervention work. As a snapshot, referrals received during 2020-21 are set out below.



The graph shows that most referrals were received from probation, the Department of Work and Pensions, non-statutory services (e.g. - supported housing, GP wellness clinics), and mental health services.

Homelessness Applications and Decisions

The Council provides a free housing advice service to all residents; this is a statutory requirement. The focus of the service is providing good quality housing advice to enable service users to deal with their own housing situation, and the prevention of homelessness. Where a service user is facing homelessness or is already homeless, they will make what is known as a 'homelessness application'. Each application must be assessed, and a formal decision issued in writing.

The total number of homelessness applications and decisions made every year in Hart over the last 4 years is shown in the chart below.

Year	Total No. of Approaches to Service	No. Prevented	No. Relieved	Not Homeless	Homeless Main Duty	Housing Advice Only (doesn't meet Government triggers)
2018/19	285	67	51	9	35	123
2019/20	213	62	55	4	21	71
2020/21	498	31	47	0	11	393
2021/22 (up to 12.08.21)	274	8	5	0	2	259

The figures are then further broken down into the separate duties the Council holds. These are: Prevention, Relief and Main Duty and those who were found to be “not homeless”.

Prevention - The prevention duty is intended to help a service user find a solution to their housing situation. Prevention duty is accepted if a service user is facing homelessness within 56 days. This duty may end earlier if prevention is successful within this period or may be extended if they are able to stay in their accommodation for longer. If they are made homeless during this period, a relief duty will then be owed. A prevention duty can end if:

- Service user can continue to stay where they are living.
- Service user finds somewhere else to live.
- The Council finds them somewhere else to live (for example a private rented sector tenancy).
- Service user becomes homeless.

The Council works hard to prevent as many people as possible from becoming homeless. This means most service users will either be assisted to remain where they are living or helped to find a private rented tenancy.

Relief - If a service user already has no accommodation, for example, they are sofa surfing, sleeping rough or all efforts to prevent homelessness during the 56-day prevention duty have failed, the Council owes them a **‘relief duty’** for the maximum of 56 days.

The relief duty ends when:

- Accommodation is offered to the service user as a final offer of accommodation - this can be in the private rented sector or a Part 6 offer of social housing.
- The service user finds themselves somewhere else to live with the assistance of the Council.
- The service user refuses a final offer of suitable accommodation
- 56 days has passed, the service user is a non-priority adult, and no further duty is owed.

- The service user is no-longer eligible, or loss of contact /no engagement with the client.

Main Duty - At the end of the 56-day relief duty, if the Council decides a service user is in priority need and not intentionally homeless, the Council is likely to owe them the main housing duty. This decision would not be made until the relief duty ends after 56 days where all efforts to facilitate a housing solution have failed.

The number of service users approaching the Council for assistance with their housing options over the last 4 years has increased by 46%, as shown in the table above. However, the total number of homelessness applications each year were steady for the first two then significantly reduced. This is likely to be attributed to the Covid-19 pandemic and the eviction ban, which resulted in less people being formally at risk of homelessness.

Those service users reaching the main duty stage remain consistently low as the service's primary focus is on prevention and relief work and ensuring we prevent as many service users as possible from becoming homeless.

Analysis of the approaches being made has shown that most service users who approach the Council for assistance do so either before they are threatened with homelessness (at the triage stage) or within 56 days of becoming homeless (the prevention stage). This is the approach the Council would like to maintain. The earlier service users approach us for assistance, the more opportunity there is for us to prevent any homelessness occurring and keep them in their own homes where safe and appropriate to do so.

Personalised Housing Plans

Each service user who approaches the service because they are facing homelessness will have a 'Personalised Housing Plan'. This is produced by the Housing Solutions Team, in partnership with them, and sets out the agreed actions each of the two parties will take over the coming weeks and months. It essentially supports the work on homelessness prevention and provides a tool for leaving no stone unturned in exploring other housing options.

Temporary Accommodation

Hart District Council transferred all its housing stock to a housing association in 1994 as part of a housing stock transfer programme. As such, it does not have access to its own housing stock for use as temporary accommodation, other than one housing scheme it owns at Heathlands Courts in Yateley. Whilst owned by the Council, it is managed and let by Vivid Housing Association. This is the Council's main resource for temporary accommodation and it comprises of 23 x 1- and 2-bedroom flats.

This accommodation helps the Council meet its legal homelessness duties and reduces its reliance on bed and breakfast and other forms of less secure temporary accommodation for residents. Whilst it continues to be an asset for the Council the building and accommodation have some limitations and the flats do not adequately meet the needs of larger households or those who require adapted and accessible accommodation.

There is a review underway of Heathlands Court; with a view to modernising the accommodation provided and making better use of communal areas.

The average length of stay in Heathlands Court is 36 months. The Housing Solutions Team manage exit plans for each resident and generally move on accommodation is into the private rented sector, officers use the time that clients spend in Heathlands Court to manage debts and give a period of stability to ensure successful and sustainable move on.

Bed and Breakfast

Where the Council needs to provide emergency accommodation, it uses bed and breakfast establishments. The use of B&B is kept to a minimum - it is both costly for the Council and inappropriate accommodation for families, except in an absolute emergency.

Below shows some key points in relation to Hart's use of B&B accommodation. The timescales are from November to October as this was when the data was collected.

During the year November 2019 - October 2020:

- 35 households were accommodated in B&B.
- The average length of stay was 13.5 days.
- No families were accommodated in B&B for over 6 weeks in line with Government guidelines.

During the following year, November 2020 - October 2021:

- 24 households were accommodated in B&B.
- The average length of stay was 15 days.
- No families were accommodated in B&B for over 6 weeks in line with Government guidelines.

There have been less people placed into B&B accommodation in 2020-21 but their stays were longer due to the complex nature of some of service users' needs and because of difficulties sourcing suitable (specialist or supported) move on accommodation.

Other Temporary Accommodation Options

Where either Heathlands Court or Bed & Breakfast accommodation is inappropriate or unavailable, the council accesses other forms of short-term accommodation to relieve homelessness.

This can include:

- Refuge accommodation for those fleeing domestic abuse.
- Supported accommodation for those with identified support needs.
- Attempts to access other specialist supported housing schemes across Hampshire and beyond as necessary.
- The Life Project, which is supported accommodation for young mothers and children and pregnant women.

There is limited local provision within Hart so, the Housing Solutions Team must work hard to find suitable alternative options for service users, looking across Hampshire and its borders, and even beyond.

Use of the Private Rented Sector

The Council's Landlord and Tenant Liaison Officer has a proactive relationship with local private sector landlords and private rented housing is used for move-on accommodation for both temporary and permanent housing solutions. In 2019-20, the Council assisted 65 service users into the private rented sector and in 2020-21 this increased to 72.

These private rented sector homes are used either to prevent homelessness, or as a discharge of a homelessness duty owed. The Council assists and supports service users into the private rented sector in several ways:

- Assessment of affordability - looking at income and expenditure, maximising benefit take up, giving employment advice and advising on expenditure and debt.
- Providing Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) to assist with short term affordability issues.
- Assisting with the required rent deposit and rent in advance to secure a home.
- Providing ongoing tenancy support to service users and referring to specialist support services where necessary.
- Liaising with landlords through the duration of the tenancy to ensure the tenancy runs smoothly.

All the above work mean that tenancies are sustainable, and landlords report high levels of satisfaction in working with Hart's Housing Solutions Team.

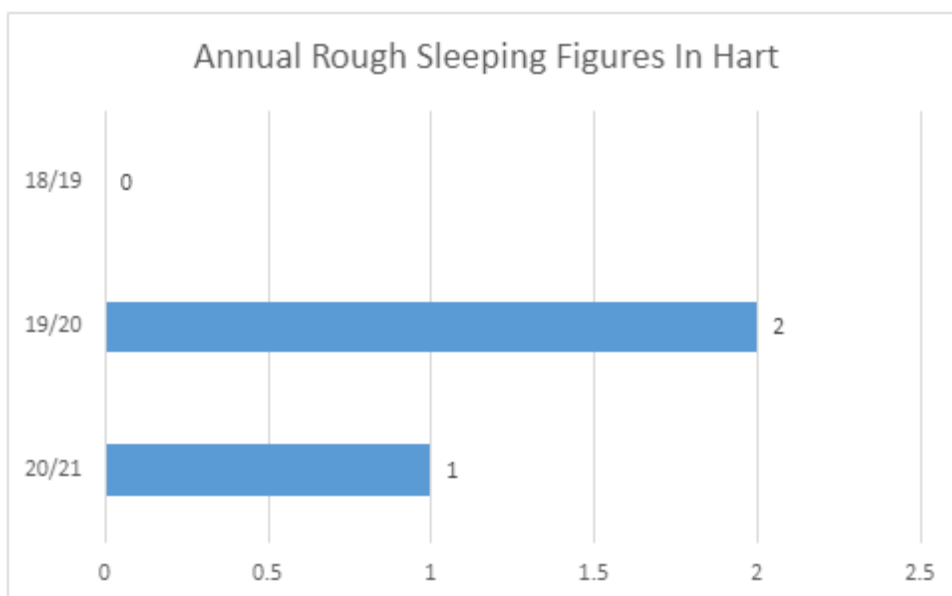
Rough Sleeping

The Government published its rough sleeping strategy in 2018. It sets out the Government's plans to help people who are sleeping rough now and to put in place structures to end rough sleeping for good. The Government's vision is for halving rough sleeping by 2022 and ending it by 2027.

Hart has very low rough sleeping figures but takes the issue very seriously and provides a very reactive outreach service.

Through a joint bid with Rushmoor Borough Council for Rough Sleeping Initiative Funding (RSI) funding was secured to assist with supporting those who are rough sleeping. The bid has been successful over the last three years and has given access to specialised support for those who are the most complex and entrenched in rough sleeping. Hart's Rough Sleeping Action Plan outlines how the Council is working with partners to reduce rough sleeping in the district. It can be seen here: [Hart Ending Rough Sleeping Plan FINAL.pdf](#)

Every local authority is required to carry out a rough sleeper count every year. In Hampshire, this is achieved through an annual estimate. Each authority selects the same night in November and asks all agencies to report rough sleeping on that night. The figures are independently verified. The chart below shows the results of those counts for the last 3 years in Hart.



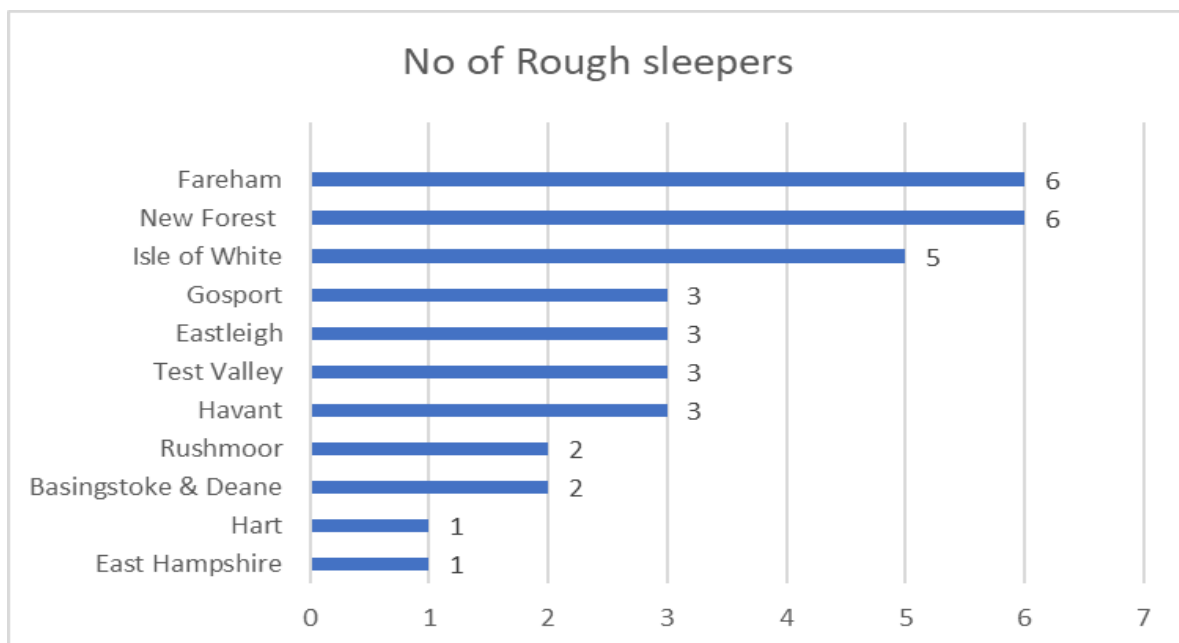
Rough Sleeping levels in Hart remain consistently low. There is a 'No First Night Out' (NFNO) policy in place to support people before they find themselves on the streets. Records show no evidence of any long term of entrenched rough sleepers in Hart; the Council works closely with central Government advisors and frequently respond to data requests from to ensure compliance.

The Council adopts a 'Housing First' approach to tackling homelessness - where the provision of accommodation is pivotal and the support wraps around the individual to ensure they retain the accommodation and move on into independent living.

The Council has excellent links with local community Police force, through the Community Safety Team which allows for an excellent joined up approach towards safeguarding homeless people.

This is further strengthened through the RSI Partnership with Rushmoor Borough Council which supports the teams in meeting the health and social care needs of those experiencing rough sleeping.

The chart below shows the reported levels of rough sleeping across Hampshire as of the November 2021 official snapshot.



Streetlink

Streetlink offers the public a way to report when they see someone sleeping rough, to ensure rough sleepers are connected to the local services and support available to them. It is delivered by Homeless Link. The service is funded by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and is part of Homeless Link, a national charity.

Hart has worked with Streetlink for the last 5 years and over that time has received several referrals. Particularly during winter, there are several social media campaigns to promote the service.

The table below shows the number of referrals made over the last 5 years.

When a referral comes in, a member of the Housing Solutions Team responds by going out to visit the rough sleeper that has been reported to work with them to bring them inside.

Year	Number of referrals to Streetlink
2017/18	3
2018/19	8
2019/20	7
2020-21	16
2021-22	8 to date (10/12/21)

As the table above shows, 2020/21 was a particularly busy year for referrals. This was largely due to the Government's 'Everyone In' campaign - where every rough sleeper was expected to be assisted into accommodation during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Reasons for Homelessness

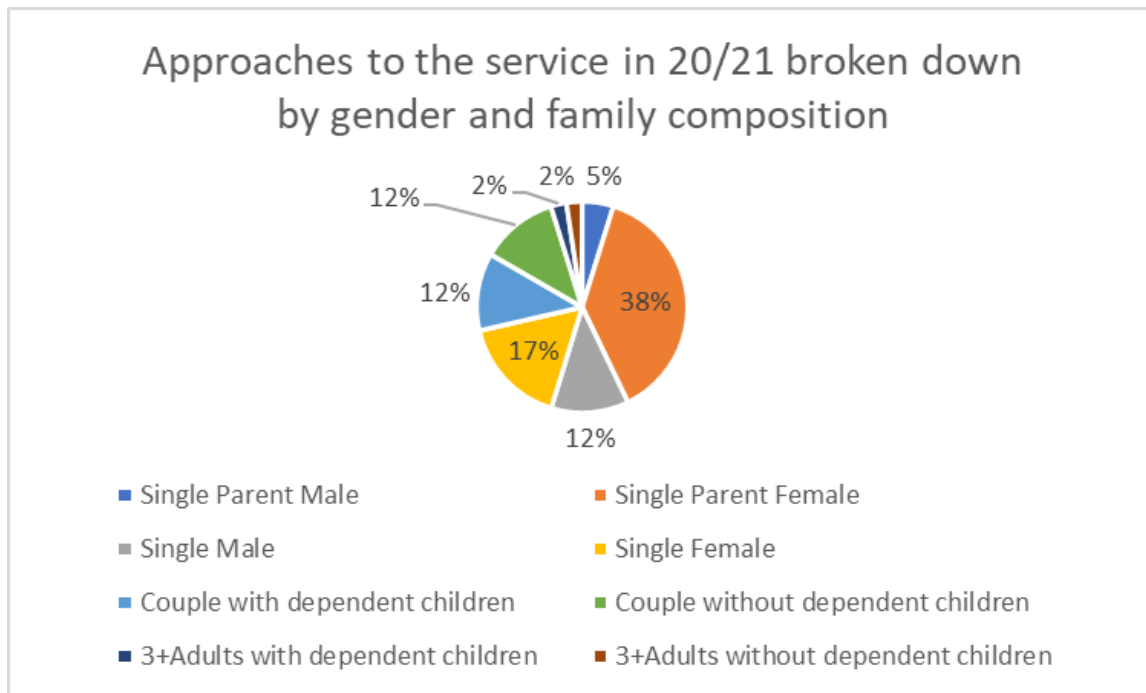
The top three reasons for homelessness in Hart have remained the same for the last 3 years.

These are:

- 'Asked to leave by Friends and Family'
- 'End of Assured Shorthold Tenancy'
- 'Violence or Harassment or Violent relationship breakdown'

Service User Profile

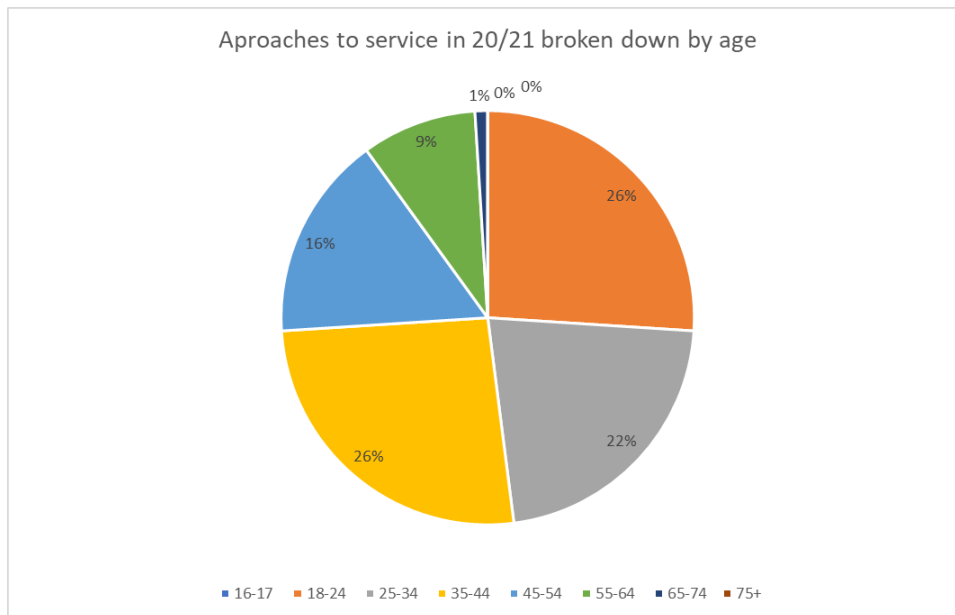
The chart below shows the composition of households using Hart's Homelessness service in 2020/21.



This data shows that most people using the service are single parent women, followed by single females, couples with dependent children and single males. Households of 3 or more adults with or without children make up the smallest numbers of households to use the homelessness service.

This chart shows the age ranges of the main applicants who used the Homelessness service during 2020-21.

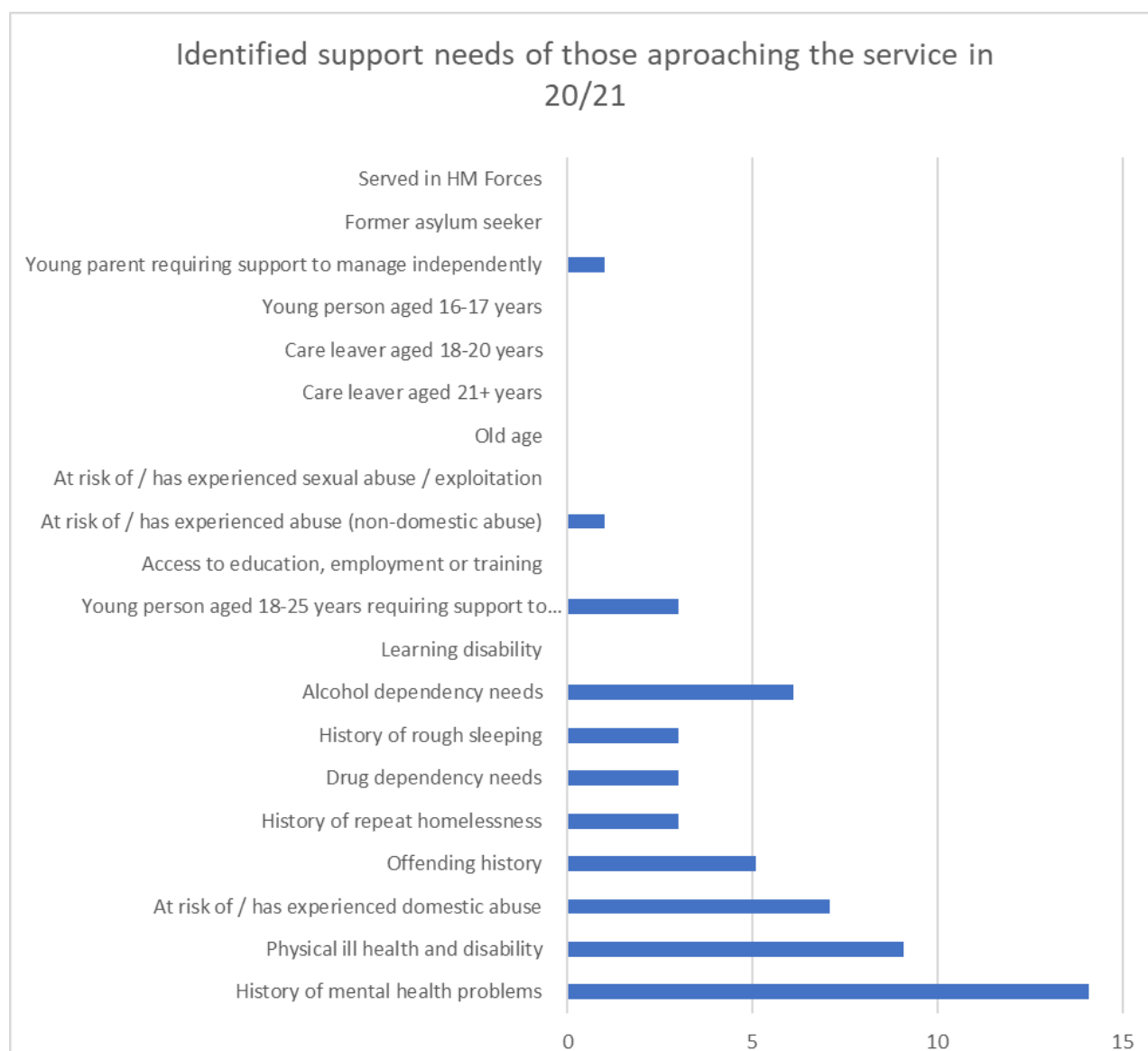
(Taken from Live tables [DetailedLA_2020-21_Revised_dropdowns_fixed.ods](https://live.com/DetailedLA_2020-21_Revised_dropdowns_fixed.ods) (live.com))



This shows that most service users are aged 18-24 and 35-44, followed by 25 to 34-year-olds. People aged 75 and over did not access the service in 2020/21 and only 1% of 65 to 74-year-olds and 9.1% of 55 to 64-year-olds used the service.

In 2020-21, 42% of those who were homeless in Hart had identified support needs. This included 14.1% who had a history of mental health problems, 9.1% physical ill health and disability, followed by 6.1% with alcohol dependency needs and 5.1% with a history of offending.

The chart below shows the range of support needs of all those accessing the service in 2020-21.



From this data, further exploration is needed to understand how accessible the service is for different age groups, household types and for people with different support needs.

Domestic Abuse

Over the last five years, the Council has been the lead authority for a Hampshire wide domestic abuse project, called the Hampshire Making Safe Scheme. The focus of this was providing safe accommodation outside of a refuge setting and the provision of target hardening (security measures) so that residents can feel safe within their own homes. Early intervention and prevention have been provided by dedicated officers in front line health settings such as NHS Emergency Departments and maternity wards.

This scheme provided a model of best practice and was cited as such by the then Ministry of Housing. Much of its learning is reflected in the Domestic Abuse Act, and the projects managed by Hart are now commissioned and managed by Hampshire County Council, with new central Government funding.

Hart continues to be involved and takes the lead role as the Housing representative on the Hampshire Domestic Abuse Partnership and has, during 2021, been active on working groups seeking to implement the Domestic Abuse Act locally and produce the Hampshire Domestic Abuse Strategy. The Council will continue to work with colleagues across Hampshire in delivering new initiatives aimed at supporting our residents who are affected by domestic abuse.

Assisting Asylum Seekers to find Settled Homes

During 2021, the Council took on new projects to provide accommodation for Afghan families fleeing their homes and being relocated to the UK by central Government. As part of a county wide approach, Hart offered 3 homes to Afghan families and at the time of writing, two families have moved in and settled well into their new communities.

We continue to work as a team across Hampshire, helping to provide homes and support to relocating evacuees.

Working with Others - Building a Network of Support

Homelessness can only ever be prevented through partnership working, and Hart has worked hard to forge successful and strong links with a range of agencies who can help officers and service users. This strategy itself is the result of joint work, exploring what more can be done and developing priorities for action.

Hart works closely with the following agencies:

- Hampshire County Council
- Mental Health teams
- Citizens Advice
- Hart Voluntary Action
- Fleet Phoenix
- Prisons
- Housing Associations
- Probation
- Domestic abuse providers
- DWP
- Health colleagues
- Colleagues within other departments at Hart Council

Here for Hart was created in 2021 to provide a robust platform for multi-agency collaboration, ensuring effective joint working to support the community through COVID-19 recovery and beyond. It is the umbrella under which the Council works with partners and communities to help people stay well, feel included in their community, and supported through the challenges they experience.

Consultation

To carry out the review of homelessness, the Council engaged with a range of stakeholders, including service users, to find out their views on current services and ideas for future action. Specifically, stakeholders and service users were asked about:

- Views on current service provision.
- Issues and challenges organisations faced in tackling homelessness with their clients.
- Any gaps people identified in the advice, homelessness and rough sleeping services within Hart.
- What they felt the 4 main priorities should be included within this Strategy.

The main issues identified were:

- The need to provide clear information and signposting to publicise the services available for service users and referrers, including the out of hours service.
- The importance of providing a consistent level of service, being contactable and keeping people informed.
- The importance of building upon existing partnerships and links to develop improved multi-agency working to deliver a holistic approach to service provision.
- Supporting the provision of long-term, good quality affordable housing solutions as well as short-term and emergency housing.
- Providing services for a range of service users including single white men and suitable accommodation for young single women.
- Working with private landlords to make appropriate and supported placements in good quality accommodation.
- Improved data reporting to enable officers to drill down into who is using the service and identify their specific needs.
- Improved data reporting to identify the key cause of homelessness to reduce recurring homelessness in Hart.

- Provide targeted advice and information services specifically for young people.
- Provide accessible, joined up services for people experiencing domestic abuse.
- Utilise appropriate communication for different service users including technology and social media platforms.

Our service users were positive about the service overall and comments included -



Engagement and Consultation has included:

- Workshops and discussions with the Housing Solutions Team.
- Questionnaire for the wider Community Services Team and staff within other departments at the Council.
- Questionnaire for key stakeholders.
- Questionnaire and workshop with local Councillors.
- Telephone survey with service users and temporary accommodation residents, using an independent third party, to encourage people to speak freely
- Face to face discussions with residents at Heathlands Court
- Questionnaire for local private landlords.
- Workshop with stakeholders and partners through the Here for Hart Group.

Resourcing Homelessness Provision in Hart

The housing advice and homelessness service is a statutory function of the local authority and as such is funded through the General Fund. The Council also receives a Homelessness Prevention Grant targeted, as the name suggests, at initiatives that prevent homelessness. The Council uses this to fund a specialist staff member, to support the rent deposit scheme, fund specialist debt provision, spot purchase emergency accommodation and as a flexible prevention fund to achieve targeted individual interventions.

Bidding for Additional Funding

The Council takes every possible opportunity to bid for additional funding to support residents who are in housing difficulties. There have been several recent successes including:

Rough Sleeper Initiative 2020-21 £92,000 (Shared with Rushmoor Borough Council)	Secured funding from MHCLG to continue the Rough Sleeper Initiative (RSI), working in partnership with Rushmoor Borough Council. This project provides specialist support for complex single residents facing homelessness. Funding helps them secure and keep accommodation, as well as providing on-going one to one support.
Homelessness Reduction Act funding 2020-21 £35,000	Secured MHCLG funding to enable Hart to fully implement the Homelessness Reduction Act and contribute to ending rough sleeping by increasing activity to prevent single homelessness. The funding has been used to provide practical support and accommodation for those facing homelessness.
Private rented sector funding 2019-20 £97,000	Secured funding to provide access to private rented sector homes for single households who would otherwise be excluded or difficult to place with a variety of complex need. One off funding.
Cold Weather Fund 2020-21 £5,000	Secured Cold Weather Funding for the Winter period 20-21, to cover the cost of providing emergency accommodation for those who would otherwise sleep rough.

Covid Grant Funding

Over the past year several Covid-19 grants have been awarded to local authorities from central Government. Hart has been able to target a small number of these to

assist the vulnerable who have faced poverty and hardship throughout the pandemic. A hardship fund has been administered by the Housing Solutions Team and has been used for provision of a variety of things from, white goods, assistance with utility bill arrears to school uniform and food parcels.

The Role of Allocations

The overall aim of this strategy and the work of the Housing Solutions Team is to prevent homelessness wherever possible. Where this is not possible, there is a duty to relieve homelessness, through the provision of temporary accommodation. As described earlier, temporary accommodation is largely in the form of Heathlands Court, from which service users move on from into the private rented sector.

It is important that access to permanent social housing is through the housing register. This makes access fair and equitable and based on assessed need and waiting time. There is no direct link between being homeless and securing a permanent housing association property.

Most of those who are homeless will move on to the private rented sector and some will make housing register applications from that accommodation.

From April 2020 to March 2021 a total of 198 households were allocated a home through the Council's Housing Register. These were 136 general needs, 34 older persons and 23 extra-care (for older people) properties.

Approximately 90% of all let's go to new housing register applicants and 8% to applicants seeking a transfer. Very few allocations are made to those who present to the Council as homelessness.

Number of Applicants Registered on Hart's Housing Register (as of 1st April)

	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21
1 bedroom need	740	666	795
2-bedroom need	482	388	410
3-bedroom need	177	152	206
4-bedroom need	60	57	57
TOTAL	1459	1263	1468

Below shows the average waiting times for applicants registered on Hart's Housing Register, broken down by bedroom need. The times stated reflects average waiting times for those placed in Hart's reasonable preference category Band C.

1 bed need = 2 years 3 months

2 bed need = 2 years 6 months

3 bed need = 2 years 10 months

4 bed need = no 4 bed homes let to Band C applicants within the past 12 months

Creating Sustainable Places to Live

Providing good quality, well-designed affordable homes on development sites is a vital part of addressing housing need in the district. Hart draws upon the housing needs information from the housing register to work with housing associations and developers to ensure that new affordable homes are the right mix of size, type and tenure to meet the housing need.

Over the last 5 years Hart has successfully delivered new rented affordable and shared ownership homes for people in the district who cannot afford to buy or rent privately because of the high costs of properties in Hart.

Year	No. of Rented Affordable Homes	No. of Shared Ownership Homes
2016-17	79	70
2017-18	77	67
2018-19	78	50
2019-20	159	46
2020-21	58	92

Summary of Key Areas to Address

The information above highlights key areas to include in the Strategy Delivery Plan/Action Plan including:

- Increasing the understanding of what is needed to live independently; preparation for people to be tenancy ready.
- 'Click before you Evict' campaign to improve Information for landlords, and their tenants, to address issues in advance that could otherwise lead to an eviction.
- Providing advice and support for people experiencing domestic abuse and making their accommodation safe for those who wish to remain in their homes.
- Supporting the Hampshire Domestic Abuse Strategy 2021, review the local offering to survivors of domestic abuse who face homelessness or who need housing advice.
- Keeping up to date with new ideas and best practice relating to homelessness prevention and advice services.
- Drilling down into identifying who approaches the service and how to work with them even more effectively as early as possible.

- Reviewing links with a wide range of agencies who can provide additional services particularly for people with physical ill health and disabilities, substance misuse, a history of offending and mental health support needs and develop further if required.
- Exploring ways to improve networking with harder to access agencies to improve the overall service provision and holistic approach.
- Providing housing and homelessness advice and information specifically for younger people.

Priorities for the Future

From the review of homelessness and rough sleeping and consultation carried out to inform this strategy, 4 key priorities have been identified:

- **Prevention** - having measures in place to prevent homelessness from happening.
- **Intervention** - having targeted support in place for those in crisis.
- **Recovery** - having support in place to help to rebuild lives.
- **Partnerships** - working together to find effective solutions.

Prevention - Having measures in place to prevent homelessness happening

We will:

- Make best use of available data and insight to inform preventative activity.
- Continue to focus on prevention measures to encourage and enable people to access support early to prevent crisis situations.
- Work with a range of agencies to target housing advice and information about homelessness
- Work closely with other councils to share and learn from best practice
- Scope out new initiatives to prevent homelessness.

Intervention - Having targeted support for those in crisis

We will:

- Develop or refresh referral processes with a range of organisations and services to improve information sharing and support provided.
- Work with others to provide suitable support services to assist in times of crisis.
- Develop referral processes and financial services for service users to access financial advice.

Recovery - Having support in place to help to rebuild lives

We will:

- Review the tenancy sustainment support on offer internally and externally to ensure it meets the needs of service users.
- Develop opportunities for clients to access employment, skills and education.
- Ensure there is a good supply of appropriate and affordable accommodation for people accessing the service, particularly young, single people and rough sleepers.

Partnerships - Working together to find effective solutions

We will:

- Explore opportunities for co-location of services.
- Review and develop further working protocols with health services including, hospitals, mental health, learning disability, physical disability, drug and alcohol misuse services.
- Proactively promote the service and raise awareness of what the housing solutions team does with other professionals and the voluntary sector.

Action Plan

The review of homelessness and the subsequent published strategy, gives rise to the creation of a homelessness strategy action plan. This is a plan that sets out a range of actions that will improve the service offering for residents of Hart that find themselves facing homelessness.

The Action Plan is a separate document and can be found on the Council's website.

Further Information and Contact Details

If you require any further information, please contact the Community Services Team:

Email: housing@hart.gov.uk

Telephone: 01252 774420