

# HOMELESSNESS & ROUGH SLEEPING STRATEGY

2023 – 2027



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**Welcome to our Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy, which sets out how we, along with our partners intend to meet its priorities and future actions for preventing and tackling homelessness over the next five years.**

Homelessness has a devastating impact on individuals and families. Not having a home makes it harder for people to maintain health and well-being, education and employment and contribute more widely to society.

Our Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy sets out how we along with our partners intend to tackle these modern-day scourges.

Tackling homelessness and at its most extreme Rough Sleeping is the central aim of our strategy. It requires a cross-sector response, to ensure the right advice and support is provided at the right time, with opportunities to intervene early and prevent homelessness in the long-term.

We are committed to preventing homelessness at the earliest opportunity and to work with our partners to develop

focused and innovative solutions for those facing homelessness and rough sleeping locally.

I commend this plan to the community with its radical solutions to the evils of homelessness and rough sleeping

**Councillor Bill Cawley**  
(Portfolio Holder for Communities)



# INTRODUCTION

**This strategy has been developed at a time of significant pressures, including the recovery from the pandemic, the war in Ukraine and large increases in the cost of living. This is set against a backdrop of an increasingly unaffordable housing market and national increases in homelessness levels. The challenges are significant and it is important to have a strategic response to tackling homelessness.**

It is widely recognised that homelessness, in its wider social and economic causes and consequences, is a cross-cutting issue, they cannot be tackled by one agency alone and providing a home does not address these factors. A cross sector response is required to effectively prevent and respond to homelessness, and at its extreme, rough sleeping. The Council will continue to develop working relationships with partners to collaboratively work together to address the underlying causes of homelessness and meet the wider support needs that people experience, alongside developing clear pathways between services. Through this strategy we want to build upon partnerships to ensure a multi-disciplinary approach to meet the complex and multiple needs that some homeless individuals present with, enable early intervention and prevent homelessness in the long-term.

This strategy sets out a clear and

ambitious plan to improve our response to homelessness and is developed in consultation with a wide range of partner agencies. The success of its delivery will require the involvement of all organisations to meet our vision.

The Authority works collaboratively to improve and develop responses to homelessness and commission homelessness services. This includes work with Local Authorities across Staffordshire and the Derbyshire Homelessness Officers Group's (DHOG). The response to the pandemic has led to a wider recognition of the intrinsic link between homelessness and health and crystallised the impact that a joint and collaborative approach can have. The combined efforts of all partners ultimately saved lives.

The response included:

- Establishing a Keeping Everyone In Service (KEIS) to continue to provide accommodation and support to clients with severe and multiple deprivation.
- Staffordshire wide Covid19 self-isolation protocol for people with No Fixed Abode
- Development of emergency cold weather provision, with multi-agency support available on site.

Other achievements and successes include:

- Joint commissioning on an integrated IT solution to meet the requirements of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.

- Between 2018-2022 dealt with over 2300 service approaches, 990 homeless applications, successfully preventing and relieving homelessness for 609 households.

- Successful Domestic Abuse funding bids to support across North Staffordshire: refuge provision and dispersed accommodation, Children & Young Persons Support Worker, and Domestic Abuse Housing Advocate role.

- Successful Rough Sleeper Initiative funding bid to provide outreach services across Derbyshire and Staffordshire Moorlands.

- Joint commissioning of an Out of Hours service.

- Joint commissioning of Call B4U Serve to prevent homelessness from the private rented sector.

- Successful Rough Sleeper Accommodation Programme funding bid to provide supported accommodation for rough sleepers, or those at risk of rough sleeping in the District.

These achievements provide a solid platform to meet the ambitions set out in this strategy.

# UNDERSTANDING HOMELESSNESS:

## HOMELESSNESS FIGURES AND CHALLENGES

A [homelessness data review report](#) is available on our website. The review provides information which has been used to inform and develop the strategy.

■ For home ownership, the average house price is 6.57 times the average salary.

■ 8.01% social housing stock compared with 16.6% nationally.

■ In 2021/22 less than 150 Housing Association properties were allocated through Home Options, 31.8% of which relate to over 55 years accommodation.

■ Private rented sector rehoming has declined and is a challenge for households on low incomes or in receipt of benefits, with a shortfall of 20-31% between median rent prices and Local Housing Allowance rates in the private rented sector. £76.03 -£171.49pcm.

■ 17.2% or 128 Home Options applicants assessed as having an Emergency or Urgent housing need (Band A & B).

■ 9.5% or 71 Home Options applicants have a priority banding associated with homelessness.

■ In 2021/22, 167 households were homeless (owed a relief duty) or threatened with homelessness (owed a prevention duty).

■ 22% households homeless due to loss private rented tenancy in 2021/22.

■ 22% homeless due to being asked to leave by family/friends.

■ 19% households homeless due to domestic abuse.

■ Single homeless people represent over 50% homeless approaches (54-60%), compared with 32-41% of families.

■ Wide and varied support needs, 50.9% homeless applicants have additional support needs.

■ Mental Health is the most prevalent support need, with 20.4% of homeless households having a mental health support need.

■ Other prevailing support needs include physical ill health, domestic abuse, drug dependency, alcohol dependency.

■ 23 verified rough sleepers during 2021 Predominantly single males, many have multiple and complex support needs.

■ In 2021/22, 74 households had their homelessness prevented, 33 households had their homelessness relieved.

#### CRISIS INTERVENTION:

The loss of accommodation can be the factor that drives a household (predominantly single people) to address their housing and support needs and approach the Council. It is more difficult to assist households when they are actually homeless, they can have limited housing options available resulting in increased use of temporary accommodation. Households facing crisis are more likely to experience negative impacts on their mental health and emotional wellbeing, ability to maintain education and employment. Encouraging households to present at the earliest opportunity will reduce the pressures associated with crisis-based intervention and increase the opportunity to prevent homelessness from occurring.

#### MANAGING EXPECTATIONS:

Customer expectations of what the Housing Advice Service provides can exceed the statutory function; this can cause challenges in relation to prevention activities and offers of suitable accommodation; particularly where households have unrealistic expectations of the availability of particular types of housing in particular areas. The Housing Advice Service works closely with households experiencing homelessness to manage those expectations and empower households to address their housing and support needs.

#### UNDERSTANDING HOMELESSNESS:

#### SOCIAL HOUSING:

There is limited availability of social housing, in particular 1 bed general needs and larger 4 bed housing. Registered Providers may have different lettings criteria, and requirements, including affordability assessments requiring that a household is able to afford the rent. They may also require that a household is ready to take on a tenancy and has the necessary support in place to maintain the tenancy. Households facing homelessness, with previous rent arrears and tenancy breaches, can find it difficult to access social housing.

#### WELFARE REFORM:

Changes in welfare benefits places pressures in finding suitable, affordable properties for households on a low income.

#### PRIVATE RENTED SECTOR:

The loss of private sector accommodation is one of the main causes of homelessness within the District. The private rented sector plays a vital role; from preventing homelessness from this tenure and rehoming households.

Local Housing Allowance rates present a challenge to accessing private rented properties for low income households. There is disparity between median rent prices and local housing allowance rates which makes

private renting unaffordable. It is particularly challenging for single people under 35 years subject to the Shared Accommodation Room rate.

Landlords may require high initial upfront payments for rent in advance and deposit, credit and reference checks and guarantors. Increasing mortgage costs will inform decisions to sell or increase rents.

#### COST OF LIVING:

It is anticipated that people will find it increasingly difficult to meet their housing costs. Significantly higher numbers of households renting privately, socially and with mortgages are anticipated to approach the Council for housing and homelessness assistance.

# VISION

## ‘WORKING COLLABORATIVELY TO PREVENT AND REDUCE HOMELESSNESS’

Through this Strategy we aim to:

- Respond to homelessness by ensuring individuals have prompt access to housing advice, homes and tailored support.
- Replicate best practice and innovation in response to homelessness and prevention.
- Commission and develop services and improve collaboration wherever possible.
- Prevent homelessness across the whole system by intervening earlier and developing individual solutions.
- Increase the range of affordable housing options available.
- Develop a better understanding of the causes of homelessness through improved data capture.



## MEETING OUR VISION

This Strategy sets out an ambitious plan for improving our response to homelessness. The scale and complexity of the challenges over the lifetime of this strategy cannot be under-estimated; these challenges include the recovery from the pandemic, high increases in the cost of living, national increases in homelessness and rough sleeping – set against an increasingly unaffordable housing market.

Through the delivery of the Strategy we will work closely with partners to develop our approach to responding to homelessness that focuses on preventing homelessness at the earliest opportunity, while providing a prompt housing response. We will work to embed homelessness prevention approaches across all public services. To meet the vision and aims of the strategy there is a need to transform service delivery through the following principles:

## COLLABORATION

A collaborative partnership approach is fundamental to being able to effectively tackle homelessness. This Strategy has been developed to tackle the underlying causes of homelessness and create effective pathways out of homelessness. We are clear that all agencies have a key role and responsibility to prevent homelessness. We will work with partners to ensure that the factors that lead to homelessness can be better understood and identified, with effective pathways into preventative services in place, and clear and accessible referral mechanisms. We aim to embed this approach, significantly reducing crisis presentations and ensuring effective homelessness prevention interventions, partnerships and pathways are in place.

## A PERSONALISED APPROACH

People experiencing homelessness are individuals and have different and unique circumstances and needs. Through this Strategy we intend to deliver solutions that are tailored to the individual needs of people. Our approach is to recognise the strengths and assets that individuals have, and we will build upon these strengths, empowering individuals, and ensuring a trauma informed approach.

# STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

This Strategy will meet the vision and aims through the delivery of four clear priorities:

## **PRIORITY 1** Create and develop robust partnerships to address homelessness and tenancy sustainment

- Embed homeless prevention across services and the wider system
- Develop local authority approaches to the delivery of housing advice and homelessness services

## **PRIORITY 2** Prevent and Respond to Homelessness through Early Intervention and Personalised Solutions

- Intervene earlier to ensure opportunities for homeless prevention are maximised with effective and targeted tools in place
- Commit to improving the prevention toolkit

## **PRIORITY 3** End Rough Sleeping and Repeat Homelessness

- Deliver a multi-agency, trauma informed approach to meet the multiple and complex needs of individuals through multidisciplinary interventions
- Develop targeted rough sleeping prevention services and rapid accommodation and support
- Prevent repeat homelessness through individually tailored accommodation and support options

## **PRIORITY 4** Develop Sustainable Supported and Settled Housing Solutions

- Develop and maintain the standards and management of supported housing provision to meet the needs of homeless people
- Increase affordable housing options available to both prevent and relieve homelessness
- Improve the Private Sector Landlord Offer and access to affordable, quality, private sector homes to respond to homelessness
- Ensure an adequate supply of temporary accommodation and minimise the use of B&B accommodation.

The strategy sets out how these strategic priorities will be delivered.

## PRIORITY 1:

### **Create and develop robust partnerships to address homelessness and tenancy sustainment**

In order to be able to meet the vision of this Strategy we intend to develop a clear Homelessness Charter for partner agencies to be sign up to. The Charter will set out our vision for homelessness and ask partner agencies to sign up to this and make a pledge as to what they can do to help us achieve the vision. Building upon this we will explore the feasibility of developing a commitment from partners to collaborate to prevent homelessness in order to embed homeless prevention across public services. In the meantime we will review Council webpage information to ensure that information is clear and easily accessible and supports timely and quality duty to refer referrals.

We know that there are currently missed opportunities across the system to prevent homelessness; a wide range of agencies have opportunities to reduce housing crisis amongst the clients that they work with. We can achieve this by working in a more joined up way to identify those individuals that are at a greater risk of homelessness. By working to identify the triggers for homelessness and ensuring that agencies can recognise the indicators of housing stress, we can ensure that partner agencies are equipped to prevent homelessness and make appropriate timely referrals.

It is widely recognised that there are strong correlations between homelessness and physical and mental health conditions, alongside significantly reduced life expectancy- the pandemic has crystallised the links between health and homelessness. We will work to understand the baseline health position of the homeless population by undertaking Homeless Link's Health Needs Audit.

We will seek to improve access to health services for people experiencing homelessness to address both immediate and longer term needs, while recognising that people experiencing homelessness may not find it easy to access wider mainstream services. Often individuals with complex and multiple needs fail to attend appointments at specific locations and times, or engage with the necessary services. Staffordshire Moorlands District Council is part of a two tier local authority system, Staffordshire County Council has responsibilities for services that have a direct impact on homelessness including domestic abuse, adult social care, substance misuse and children's services. Partnership working with Staffordshire County Council is important to ensure that services are accessible to those experiencing homelessness and that individual outcomes are improved.

We will work closely with social housing and supported housing providers to end evictions into homelessness through the development of pre-eviction protocols and encourage social landlords to sign up to the principles of Homes for Cathy.

There is opportunity to develop approaches to how the Council delivers their housing advice and homelessness services, including learning from, sharing, and replicating best practice and innovation.

## What we will do to create and develop robust partnerships to address homelessness and tenancy sustainment

- Develop the Staffordshire Moorlands Homelessness Forum to support delivery of the Strategy.

- Develop a Homelessness Charter for partner agencies to sign up to.

- Assess the feasibility of a Commitment to Collaborate in order to embed homeless prevention across public services.

- Identify the key triggers for homelessness and work with partners to ensure that they are equipped to prevent homelessness and/or make timely referrals where necessary.

- Review Council webpage information to ensure that information is clear and easily accessible and supports timely and quality duty to refer referrals.

- Understand the baseline health position of the homeless population by undertaking Homeless Link's Health Needs Audit.

- Work with Staffordshire County Council to influence and inform the commissioning and delivery of mental health, substance misuse, adult social care and children's services to ensure they are accessible and meet the needs of clients experiencing homelessness with complex and multiple needs.

- Encourage social housing providers to become a member of Homes for Cathy.

- Develop local authority approaches to the delivery of housing advice and homelessness services.

- In partnership with social housing providers develop a pre-eviction protocol.

- Develop a supported housing pre-eviction protocol in partnership with providers.

## PRIORITY 2:

### **Prevent and Respond to Homelessness through Early Intervention and Personalised Solutions**

We have had significant success in both preventing and relieving homelessness following the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. By acting quicker and earlier to identify problems alongside the provision of high quality advice, assistance, and advocacy, we will ensure people have the best chance of staying in their home.

Alongside our intention to promote the earliest possible prevention by embedding homelessness prevention awareness and information through a multi layered, whole system, partnership approach, we are committed to ensuring the Housing Advice service works with households prior to the statutory 56-day threat of homelessness. We will work with people at the earliest possible point to ensure that opportunities for prevention are maximised, this will include undertaking an awareness raising campaign encouraging people to seek help at the earliest point.

In order to ensure that we are able to deliver personalised housing solutions we will develop an integrated homelessness and wellbeing assessment which will identify the wider support and wellbeing areas that people need help with alongside understanding their strengths and aspirations.

We will continue to work with partners to develop and deliver effective, targeted, and consistent homelessness prevention services targeted at the main causes of homelessness – in particular we will undertake research into the causes of family evictions in order to gain an in depth insight into this area and develop targeted interventions accordingly.

We will work with key partners to ensure that a range of joint protocols are in place to prevent homelessness and create clear pathways out of homelessness.

It is anticipated that increases in the cost of living, together with the ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic will lead to people finding it increasingly difficult to meet their housing costs. We will ensure that a range of measures are in place to prevent homelessness linked to the wider economy, increases in the cost of living, and the recovery from the pandemic. We will work in partnership to ensure adequate services are in place to improve people's financial capability, including accessing education, employment and training. We will also ensure that there are targeted interventions to support both tenants and landlords in order to minimise evictions from the private rented sector.

Following the enactment of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 we will continue to work closely with Staffordshire County Council

to meet the requirements of the Act, and ensure that for those experiencing domestic abuse there are a range of options and

choice available to assist them in having a safe home to live in.

## What we will do to prevent and respond to homelessness through early intervention and personalised solutions

- Consider research projects into the impacts of wider social issues on homelessness where shared partnership approaches are central to resolving them. Prioritise projects and seek resources for these based on impact and extent of existing research.

- Commit to working to prevent homelessness prior to 56 days, and where funding allows develop a specialist early intervention project

- Undertake an awareness raising campaign focusing on homeless prevention, encouraging individuals to seek help at the earliest point

- Develop an integrated homelessness and wellbeing assessment

- Work with Staffordshire County Council to meet the requirements of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, including ensuring that there is a range of housing options, choice and information available to those experiencing domestic abuse.

- Ensure a range of measures are in place to prevent homelessness linked to the wider economy and increases in the cost of living.

- Work with partners to ensure access to services to improve customer's financial capability, including access to education, training, and employment

- Undertake research into the nature and extent of family evictions and develop targeted preventative tools accordingly.

- Work to maximise preventions from the private rented sector through targeted interventions.

- In partnership with social housing providers develop a pre-eviction protocol.

- Develop a supported housing pre-eviction protocol in partnership with providers.

- Develop a prison release protocol.

- Work with partners to review the North Staffordshire hospital discharge protocol.

- Work with partners to review the 16/17 year old joint protocol with Children's services.

## PRIORITY 3:

### End Rough Sleeping and Repeat Homelessness

Rough sleeping is harmful to both individuals and communities. We will deliver a reduction in rough sleeping and address the multiple harms it brings to individuals and communities through rapid intervention to offer a route off the street, improving health and wellbeing, and tackling street activity associated with rough sleeping.

If we are to minimise the considerable harm caused by rough sleeping, the most important thing we can do is prevent it from happening in the first place. However, we can't do this in isolation, rather, we need to ensure that the right support is in place from other key agencies, including health services, adult social care, prison, probation, police, the care system and the Job Centre working together to support the most vulnerable, with services in place that prevent people ending up in crisis. We will identify the key triggers that lead to rough sleeping, and work with partner agencies to ensure that these key triggers and risk factors are identified, and referrals are made. We will also ensure that effective preventative work is targeted at groups who have a greater likelihood of experiencing homelessness and rough sleeping.

We will provide rapid intervention for rough sleepers which will offer a route off of the streets, through ongoing provision of an assertive outreach service, that works effectively and rapidly with those new to the streets – alongside supporting more entrenched rough sleepers into accommodation and support and providing supported reconnections to those from out of area.

We will create a clear pathway from the streets into accommodation options with support. We will also work with partners to create specialist winter provision, building upon the success of the Mount Cook project.

While rough sleeping is the most visible form of homelessness, and one that creates the greatest risk of harm, rough sleeping levels are low; however there has been over recent years an increase in the number of individuals with complex and multiple needs who have a history of repeat homelessness.

For many people experiencing homelessness is not just a housing issue, it is closely linked with complex and chaotic life experiences, often having their roots in entrenched disadvantage, and leaving people socially and economically excluded. We cannot successfully tackle homelessness and rough sleeping without addressing the multiple needs of clients, and to do this we must work in partnership. The Housing Advice

service attend multi-agency Vulnerability Hub and Rough Sleeper Action Group meetings, bringing together a range of partner agencies to share information, improve joint working and develop risk management and action planning to support rough sleepers to address their needs and move off the street.

We are committed to working to develop trauma-informed approaches to delivering homelessness services.

The current rough sleeping and complex needs services across Staffordshire Moorlands and Derbyshire are funded through Rough Sleeper Initiative (RSI) funding from central Government which is only confirmed until 2025. Over the first two years of this strategy we will assess the impact and outcomes of the RSI funded projects, working to secure future ongoing funding for these essential services which are critical to our aim to end rough sleeping.

While rough sleeping is the most visible form of homelessness, the COVID-19 pandemic has revealed the extent of hidden homelessness individuals living in insecure accommodation, vulnerably housed and/or sofa surfing. We will undertake research to understand the nature and scale of hidden homelessness and develop targeted interventions.

## What we will do to end rough sleeping and repeat homelessness

- Embed a targeted prevention approach to prevent the flow of new rough sleepers on to the street.
- Explore how we can provide a rapid offer of off the street so no-one has to spend a second night on the streets.
- Plan and develop specialist winter provision for future winters, and where possible avoid the use of hotels.
- Develop a supported reconnection policy to support rough sleepers to return safely to their home areas.
- Assess the impact and outcomes of the RSI funded projects, and develop a business case to secure future funding.
- Develop specialist education, employment, and training opportunities for those with a complex history of homelessness and rough sleeping.
- Gather evidence and consider research projects into the extent of dual diagnosis within the homelessness population in order to create an evidence base to work with commissioners to create new service pathways.
- Gather evidence and consider research projects to understand the nature and scale of hidden homelessness
- Invest in staff training in trauma informed psychological approaches, interviewing and listening skills.



# PRIORITY 4:

## Develop Sustainable Supported and Settled Housing Solutions

We want to maximise every mechanism to increase the number of affordable housing options available to both prevent and relieve homelessness ensuring long-term solutions. A range of accommodation options are needed across the social, affordable private and supported sector to cater for a wide range of housing needs.

We will work with social housing providers to increase the provision of appropriate and affordable social housing to meet identified need.

The private rented sector plays an increasingly critical role in meeting the housing needs of those who are experiencing homelessness or threatened with homelessness. There are clear opportunities to increase access to the private rented sector through the development of an attractive and comprehensive Private Sector Landlord Offer. Alongside this we will explore the feasibility of developing a private sector leasing scheme.

Supported housing has an important role to play in meeting the housing and support needs of clients who are not ready to live independently. We are seeing a rise in providers using the exempt accommodation rules. Supported housing must provide quality accommodation with good support. We will advocate at a national level for

minimum higher standards in the regulation of supported accommodation. Locally we will develop a Charter of Rights and Responsibilities for exempt accommodation. To ensure that supported housing provision is able to meet our customers' increasingly complex and multiple needs, we will undertake a needs assessment of housing related support services, to understand the current and future needs of our residents.

We will continue to work closely with Staffordshire County Council to develop provision for those experiencing domestic abuse, including safe accommodation, refuge provision and support.

Where homelessness cannot be prevented, temporary accommodation is an essential part of a household's journey out of homelessness. There has been an increase in the use of temporary accommodation, including increases in the use of bed & breakfast accommodation, this is partly linked to the response to the pandemic. By ensuring a continued focus on early intervention and prevention work we aim to reduce the flow of new placements into temporary accommodation. However, we need to ensure that we have a sufficient supply of temporary accommodation to meet demand, of the right type and in the right place. This will be essential to avoid the use of B&B.

## What we will do to develop sustainable supported and settled housing solutions

- 1 Work towards increasing the provision of appropriate, affordable social housing
- 2 Following consultation with private landlords develop a comprehensive and attractive landlord offer
- 3 Explore opportunities to develop a private sector leasing scheme
- 4 Advocate for higher standards in the regulation of supported housing at a national level
- 5 Develop a charter of rights and quality standards for exempt supported accommodation
- 6 Undertake a needs assessment of housing related support supported accommodation.
- 7 Work with Staffordshire County Council to develop provision for domestic abuse, including safe accommodation, refuge provision and support.
- 8 Carry out a review of the use of temporary and interim accommodation, identifying future need and an options appraisal for future delivery arrangement including the option of nightly paid emergency accommodation.

# DELIVERING THE STRATEGY

The strategic priorities within the Strategy will be delivered and monitored through an action plan, which will expand on the commitments and actions set out in this strategy. The action plan will be reviewed annually so that it is responsive to emerging needs, alongside policy and legislative changes.

This will be led by the Council, but will require the active involvement of our partners recognising that resolving homelessness goes beyond the provision of housing alone and we need to continue to work closely with our partners to ensure that we have the insight, expertise, services, provision, resources and partnerships to deliver the Strategy. The Homelessness Forum will monitor and evaluate the plan.

Key performance monitoring information relating to homelessness and temporary accommodation provision is provided on a monthly basis and feeds into the Councils Corporate Plan.

The plans set out within this Strategy are ambitious, however with the commitment of our key partners and a proactive and flexible approach we can respond to the evolving needs of people within the District, as we continue on the journey to providing timely, suitable and innovative responses to homelessness.



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