

Homelessness Review 2021

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY.

1. This review is being undertaken as part of the first stage in updating the district's homelessness strategy. It sets out to provide an up to date picture of the:
 - Current levels of homelessness across Lewes District.
 - Support available to prevent homelessness and those experiencing it.
 - Level of resources available locally to tackle homelessness.

2. It is being undertaken in line with the requirements set out in the Homelessness Act 2002, which places a legal responsibility on local authorities to carry out a review of homelessness in their district and publish a revised homelessness strategy every five years. The review will help shape the councils next strategy by; estimating the demand for homelessness and housing advice services; finding out what currently works well, (as well as what works less well); and by identifying gaps in the current provision of related support and services.

3. The context within which local authorities deliver services to reduce homelessness continues to provide key challenges. Increasing house prices, rising private sector rents and the reduced income many local households have experienced as a result of the pandemic have all had an impact, sustaining the high number of households accessing services and needing to be placed in temporary accommodation. Locally, affordability ratios in the district are at unprecedented levels, rents continue to challenge welfare subsidy caps and the availability of homes in private sector markets continues to be restricted, dis-proportionately so for those on lower incomes. Meanwhile, the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 (HRA 2017), whilst bringing welcome additional protections for those at risk of homelessness, has increased the number of applicants qualifying for assistance, further stretching the resources of local authority housing needs teams. Sections C and D provide full review of the national and local context.

4. The existing homelessness strategy sets out six main objectives, focusing on key aspects of prevention, support and the delivery of high quality services. Section E provides a summary of the progress made in regard to each of its six core objectives, which are:
 - Preventing homelessness.
 - Improving support to vulnerable people.
 - Ensuring accessible and effective homelessness, housing, and advice services.
 - Improving the use and affordability of temporary accommodation.
 - Increasing the provision of affordable housing.
 - Improving monitoring procedures.

5. Section E summarises the wide range of programmes, initiatives and partnerships developed over the past five years, which have made significant contributions to addressing homelessness. Examples include the Rough Sleeper Initiative; the successful adaptation of housing needs services in response to the HRA 2017; and the forging of successful partnerships with local advice agencies, landlords and voluntary support providers.

6. Section F reviews who is accessing the housing needs service, summarises the outcomes of applications for assistance under current homelessness provisions and examines the steps taken to prevent and relieve any associated homelessness. The analysis shows that the demand remains extremely high, but that local services are, in general, operating well and have adjusted to meet the new requirements of the HRA, albeit at a financial cost.
7. The pandemic has had a local impact that very much reflects national trends and the associated policies that have sought to restrict evictions and increase the assistance given to the most vulnerable in society. The impact of these has been to increase the number of single households and reduce the number of households with children, that have been assisted under homelessness duties. However, there is some evidence that a shift towards this trend was already underway and that the implementation of the HRA 2017, was already leading to higher numbers of single vulnerable people being assisted. So, whilst in the short term there is likely to be some re-balancing of the profile of those accessing the service, in the longer term services are likely to face an ongoing level of demand from a more marginalised and challenging customer base.
8. Rates of rough sleeping remain relatively low in the district and services are focussed on addressing the issues of a core group of hard to reach individuals with complex needs. The Rough Sleeper Initiative has delivered consistent services to help keep many individuals off the street, as part of both an ongoing and pandemic response.
9. Section G summarises the resources deployed to address homelessness, including:
 - Corporate plans that set out affordable housing targets – which aim to provide 500 affordable and council homes over the next 3 years.
 - Key services in place that support households that experience homelessness – these comprise of the council’s housing needs service and a range of essential partnerships in place with statutory and voluntary partners.
 - The funding in place to meet the costs of service provision – summarising the sources of funding from grants, rent receivable and core council budgets.
10. Finally, section H provides a summary of the findings and puts forward a number of suggested goals and themes that might be useful in shaping the new strategy. It sets out three key goals, namely, to prevent, intervene and put in place sustainable responses to address homelessness.
11. The views of the public, partners and stakeholders are sought to help shape the forthcoming revision of the Council’s homelessness strategy. A full copy of this review has been published on the Council's website, along with further details of the consultation and how to respond to it. The consultation closes on the 9th August 2021.

A. INTRODUCTION.

A1. Why is this review being undertaken?

- A1.1. This review is being undertaken as part of the first stage in updating the district's homelessness strategy, and sets out to provide an up to date picture of the:
- Current levels of homelessness across Lewes District.
 - Support available to prevent homelessness and those experiencing it.
 - Level of resources available locally to tackle homelessness.
- A1.2. It is being undertaken in line with the requirements set out in the Homelessness Act 2002, which places a legal responsibility on local authorities to carry out a review of homelessness in their district and publish a revised homelessness strategy every five years. The review will help shape the councils next strategy by; estimating the demand for homelessness and housing advice services; finding out what currently works well, (as well as what works less well); and by identifying gaps in the current provision of support and services.
- A1.3. Local statutory and voluntary partners have been asked for their experiences as this review has been undertaken and they will continue to be engaged as the new strategy is drafted.
- A1.4. This review has been published on the Council's web site and further details of the consultation and how to respond to it, can be found at www.lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk. The consultation closes on the 9th August 2021.

B. WHAT DO WE MEAN BY HOMELESSNESS?

B1. Definition

B1.1. Those who present as homeless do not have to be sleeping on the streets or not have a roof over their head at the time they apply for help. Households can also be considered homeless if they are:

- Having to stay with friends or family.
- Staying in a hostel, night shelter or bed and breakfast accommodation.
- At risk of violence or abuse in their home.
- Living in poor or unsafe conditions.
- Leaving a state institution such as a prison or hospital, or the care system and have nowhere to go.

B1.2. This review uses a definition of homelessness that includes both rough sleepers, single people and families that are threatened with, or present as homeless. In short, any household members who find themselves without a safe or secure place to call home.

C. NATIONAL CONTEXT.

C1. Background.

- C1.1. The context within which local authorities must deliver services to reduce homelessness continues to provide key challenges. Increasing house prices, rising private sector rents and the reduced income many local households have experienced as a result of the pandemic have all had an impact, sustaining the high number of households accessing services and needing to be placed in temporary accommodation. Meanwhile, the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 (HRA 2017), whilst bringing welcome additional protections for those at risk of homelessness, has increased the number of applicants qualifying for assistance, further stretching the resources of local authority housing needs teams.
- C1.2. Over the past year, the impact of Covid-19 has, unsurprisingly, had a significant impact on central Government strategy. At a local level, this has resulted in teams re-focusing services through; providing emergency accommodation to rough sleepers as part of the 'Everyone In' initiative; putting in place additional safeguards to help maintain social distancing in temporary accommodation; and delivering remote services as standard. A ban on private rented sector evictions, in place since the first national lockdown, expired at the end of May 2021. Along with the broader economic impacts of the pandemic, this may increase the level of demand on services and the potential impact will need to be carefully monitored in the months ahead.

C2. Homelessness Legislation

- C2.1. Local authorities have a statutory duty to deliver services that set out to prevent homelessness and provide assistance to households who are homeless or threatened with homelessness. The framework for these duties is set out in Part VII of the Housing Act 1996. Key changes to how this framework operates were introduced by the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 (HRA 2017).
- C2.2. Part VII of the 1996 Housing Act contains specific provisions which set out the criteria local authorities must use to determine whether households making homelessness applications are owed a 'main duty'.
- C2.3 The key considerations used to determine this are:
- Priority need – local authorities must provide emergency accommodation if they have reason to believe members of a household applying for assistance have a priority need, defined as where they:
 - Have children who live with them or are pregnant.
 - Are aged 16 or 17.
 - Are a care leaver aged 18 to 20.
 - Are a victim of domestic abuse (from July 2021 on).
 - Are classed as vulnerable - for example because of domestic abuse, old age, physical and learning disabilities or mental health problems.

- Whether an applicant's actions have intentionally caused their homelessness – for example if they left their previous accommodation of their own accord, or deliberately breached their previous terms of tenancy.
- Whether applicants have a genuine 'local connection' to the local authority area to which they are applying, through residence, family connection or employment.

C2.4. Where an applicant is found to be owed a main duty, the local authority must assist them to secure permanent housing, but where not, the local authority is only required to provide preventative advice and assistance. The 1996 Act also includes a duty to provide 'interim accommodation' (section 188) whilst the application is being assessed, and 'temporary accommodation' (section 193) where a household is accepted as qualifying for the main duty.

C2.5. Since being passed, key provisions of the 1996 Act have been amended by:

- The Human Rights Act 1998 / The Equality Act 2010, which requires that housing authority policies and decisions do not amount to unlawful conduct, and that the public sector equality duty is complied with in relation to homelessness administration.
- The Homelessness Act 2002, which introduced the requirement for local authorities to regularly review the levels of homelessness in their areas, and to formulate a homelessness strategy (to which this review contributes).
- The Localism Act of 2011, which gave local authorities the power to end a main housing duty by arranging an offer of suitable accommodation in the private rented sector.

C2.6. However, it is the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 (HRA 2017). that has introduced the most significant recent changes to homelessness legislation. The Act aims to reduce homelessness by improving the quality of housing advice, re-focusing authorities on preventative work and joining up services to provide better support, especially for single people, those leaving prison/hospital and other groups at increased risk of homelessness. The main provision of the Act introduced a range of new duties, to be delivered regardless of whether the applicant has a priority need. These include:

- A new 'prevention duty', requiring local authorities' to take reasonable steps to prevent homelessness for any eligible applicant, who is likely to become homeless within 56 days of applying for help. This can involve assisting them to stay in their current accommodation or helping them find a new place to live.
- A new 'relief duty', which applies to those who are already homeless when they ask the local authority for help. Local authorities must provide support for a minimum of 56 days and help to relieve their homelessness during this time. The relief duty provides the scope for local authorities to provide emergency accommodation for those not assessed as being in priority need.

- A new requirement for local authorities to carry out a holistic assessment of the applicant's housing needs, support needs and the circumstances that led to them becoming homeless. The outcome of the assessment is a 'personal housing plan' which can be used to best determine what help is available and shared with local partner agencies, where appropriate.
- A new 'duty to refer', requiring specified public bodies to notify a local housing authority when the agency encounters someone it thinks may be homeless or is at risk of becoming homeless.

C2.7. All of these new requirements work alongside, rather than replace local authorities' duties under the established framework set out by the 1996 Act.

C3. Rough Sleeping

C3.1. In August 2018, the Government published its Rough Sleeping Strategy, which sets out the Government's plans for ending rough sleeping by 2027. It has three parts:

- Prevention: understanding the issues that lead to rough sleeping and providing timely support for those at risk.
- Intervention: helping those already sleeping rough with swift support tailored to their individual circumstances.
- Recovery: supporting people in finding a new home and rebuilding their lives.

C3.2. Funds to help deliver the strategy are provided under the Rough Sleeper Initiative (RSI). The RSI was first announced in March 2018, with the goal of making an immediate impact by suppressing the rising levels of rough sleeping being experienced across the country, through funding a support service for those verified as sleeping rough and those at high risk of becoming rough sleepers. Separate funds have been provided since 2019, under the Rapid Rehousing Pathway, which offers similar services, but is targeted at individuals with lower levels of support need.

C3.3. The latest round of funding is targeted at providing support to local authorities, charities, and other organisations in around 270 areas and will fund up to 6,000 bed spaces and 2,500 staff. Locally, the RSI first provided support to individuals in Eastbourne and Hastings, but operations have now expanded to cover the whole of East Sussex.

C4. Everyone In

C4.1. Those experiencing homelessness are more vulnerable to COVID-19, due to the higher prevalence of underlying health conditions and respiratory illnesses¹, as well as the higher risks of transmission in shared accommodation settings.

¹ Lewer, D., Braithwaite, I., Bullock, M., Eyre, M.T., White, P.J., Aldridge, R.W. Story, A., Hayward, A.C. (2020). 'COVID-19 among people experiencing homelessness in England: a modelling study'. The Lancet. Volume 8, Issue 12. Pp.1181-1191. DECEMBER 01, 2020. [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanres/article/PIIS2213-2600\(20\)30396-9/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanres/article/PIIS2213-2600(20)30396-9/fulltext)

- C4.2. The urgency of the situation was recognised by Government and on the 26th March 2020, they launched the 'Everyone In' campaign, asking local authorities to immediately take steps to house all rough sleepers. The National audit Office² reports the likely cost of these measures was in the region of £170M, paid for through a mixture of emergency government grants, existing homelessness funding streams, and local authorities' own resources.
- C4.3. The scale of the operation was significant. By mid-April 2020, some 5,400 people had been made an offer of emergency accommodation, and by the end of November, over 33,000 people had received help under the initiative. Of these, over 23,000 people had been supported to move into the private rental sector or another form of settled accommodation, whilst almost 10,000 people remained living in hotels and other emergency homes. The number of people accommodated far exceeded the Government's annual national 'snapshot' of the rough sleeping population, which reported 4,266 rough sleepers in October 2019.
- C4.4. COVID-19 claimed relatively few lives among the rough sleeping population during the first wave of infections. Up to June 2020, just 16 deaths among homeless people had been linked to COVID-19 (ONS). Evidence suggests that the Everyone In programme may have avoided more than 20,000 infections and 266 deaths overall (Lewer et al., 2020).
- C4.5. More recently, additional funds have been announced in the shape of the £15M 'Protect Fund', to support the continued housing of rough sleepers, and extra 'Cold Weather Funds', to help protect the most vulnerable across the winter. Funding has also been secured under the Government's Rough Sleeper Accommodation Programme (RSAP), which will deliver longer term accommodation and support for rough sleepers. However, there is uncertainty about the scale of future Government funding, so it remains to be seen whether local authorities will be able to maintain the current level of support on offer to rough sleepers across the county.

C5. Levels of homelessness – key national trends.

- C5.1. The latest national homelessness statistics cover the three-month reporting period to December 2020³: During this time 65,570 households were assessed under the new HRA duties, and of these 95% (62,250) were owed a statutory homelessness duty. This figure is 9.2% down on the same reporting period in 2019/20. Of those owed a duty, 55% (33,990) were assessed as already being homeless (so owed a relief duty) and 45% (28,260) as being threatened with homelessness (so owed a prevention duty). The number of households living in temporary accommodation at the end of the quarter was 95,370, an 8% increase on the same quarter last year, driven largely by the higher number of single adults being housed.

² National audit Office. 14 January 2021. Investigation into the housing of rough sleepers during the COVID-19 pandemic. <https://www.nao.org.uk/press-release/investigation-into-the-housing-of-rough-sleepers-during-the-covid-19-pandemic/> [Paras. 3.11 to 3.15]

³ MHCLG. 22nd April 2021. Statutory Homelessness Oct to Dec (Q3) 2020: England. [Statutory homelessness in England \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/944212/statutory-homelessness-in-england-q3-2020.pdf) Last accessed on 08/05/21.

- C5.2. These trends are directly linked to the policy response to COVID-19, as a result of more single households being housed as part of the 'Everyone In' campaign, the restrictions on private rented sector evictions, and lengthened notice periods for landlords. Between them, these measures have considerably shifted the balance of those seeking assistance under homelessness legislation, towards single households, and away from households with children.
- C5.3. Friends and family no longer being able to accommodate, the ending of a private sector rented tenancy and domestic abuse, remained the three leading reasons underlying requests for assistance.
- C5.4. Over half of all households owed a duty (32,040 households) identified as having one or more support needs, the most common being a history of mental health problems. A quarter (15,710) of all households owed a duty identified as having this particular support need.
- C5.5. Nine percent of assessments made under the new homelessness duties were a result of referrals from other public bodies under the new 'duty to refer'. The National Probation Service was the most common source of referral.

C6. Homelessness outcomes – key national trends.

- C6.1. Over half (60.4%) of the 30,140 prevention duties that ended between October and December 2020, came to an end because the household secured accommodation for 6 months or more. Of these, a third (6,020), were able to remain in their existing home. Fifteen percent of households whose prevention duty ended were homeless at the end of the 56 days, and therefore owed a subsequent relief duty by the local authority. For the remaining households contact was lost, the application withdrawn, or duty ended because the household refused to co-operate.
- C6.2. Just over 40% of the 41,930 relief duties ended across the quarter came to an end because the household secured accommodation for 6 months or more, whilst just under 40% (15,600) of households did not. The local authority then needed to assess whether a main homelessness duty was owed. Again, for the remaining households contact was lost, the application withdrawn, or duty ended because the household refused to co-operate.
- C6.3. Between October to December 2020, 6,980 households had their main homelessness duty come to an end, down 7.7% when compared to the same period in 2019/20. Of these households, 5,440 or 77.9% accepted an offer of settled accommodation. Of those households whose duties ended without securing accommodation, 240 became intentionally homeless from temporary accommodation and 520 households voluntarily ceased to occupy their temporary accommodation.

D. LOCAL CONTEXT.

D1. Setting and population

- D1.1. Lewes District is located in East Sussex, bordering the City of Brighton & Hove to the South, Wealden District to the East and Mid-Sussex District to the West. In 2019, the population was estimated to be 103,000, a 7.4% increase on the position 10 years earlier. This growth is forecast to continue, with current projections expecting the population to reach 114,000 by 2034⁴. The number of people in Lewes aged 65 and over increased by 23 percent between 2009 and 2019 and this trend is predicted to continue, with the percentage of over-65's set to rise to 31% of the population by 2034. Dependency ratios will increase as a result of the corresponding fall in the working age population. At 92.5%, the main ethnicity of the borough is White British, whilst 3.4% of residents are from Black, Asian and Mixed Ethnic groups and 3.3% made up of other White Ethnicities.
- D1.2. In 2019 there were just under 45,000 households in the district, a number forecast to increase by 15% to 51,000 households, by 2034. Household size is set to fall, with the percentage of single households set to rise to 31% of the population by 2034. There is predicted to be a resultant fall in the percentage of households with children.

D2. Economics & employment

- D2.1. Gross Value Added (GVA)⁵ figures, which measure the increased value that locally produced goods and services add to the economy, placed Lewes at £18,960 per capita, higher than the East Sussex average, but well below the figure for the South-East (£31,783 per capita). That said, GVA has grown for each of the past ten years.
- D2.3. Figures released In May 2021⁶ place the employment rate in Lewes at 77.1% of the working age population. This is higher than the East Sussex average (76.3%), but lower than the average for the South-East (78.3%). Workplace earnings for the district were £535 per week, once again, higher than for East Sussex (£502 per week), but considerably lower than for the South-East (£609 per week) average. Average earnings are a key component of housing affordability.

D3. Deprivation.

- D3.1. Indices of Deprivation, last published by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) in 2019, are the official measure of deprivation for neighbourhoods in England. They provide a snapshot of relative deprivation by looking at a range of factors including income, employment, education, health, barriers to housing and services, living environment and crime. These are combined to for a single index.

⁴ East Sussex County Council (ESCC) population projections – April 2021.

⁵ Gross Value Added Release – [ONS Regional economic activity statistics 1998 - 2019](#).

⁶ Local labour market indicators by local authority - [ONS Labour market regional stats – May 2021](#).

- D3.2. Overall, Lewes ranks as 194 out of a total of 317 local authorities in England and contains no Lower Super Output Areas (or LSOA's – the small areas of geography used by the index) that fall within the 10 percent most deprived in the country. However, it contains two LSOA's (Lewes Castle and Newhaven Valley) in the bottom 20 percent. In 2019, 37 LSOAs, more than half of the total number (62), were more deprived than when the index was last published in 2015⁷.
- D3.3. Almost 3,000 children were living in low-income families across 2019/20. This figure is estimated to account for 13.5 percent of all children in the district, up from 11.6 percent five years ago⁸. This figure is lower than the East Sussex average (16.9%) but slightly higher than the figure for the South-East (13.4%).
- D3.4. As is the case elsewhere, Covid-19 has had a significant impact on economic fortunes, which is reflected in key indicators of deprivation. Figures for April 2021 show that an additional 4,120 more claims are currently being made for Universal Credit (UC) than in March 2020 (up 132%). May 2021 figures for the claimant count, which includes those claiming Job Seekers Allowance and UC claimants seeking work, place unemployment at 5.6% of the working age population. This is lower than the East Sussex average (6.2%), but 1% higher than a year ago.

D4. Housing tenure & supply

- D4.1. The total housing stock of Lewes District numbered 45,858 in 2019, an increase of 2,488 homes (5.8%) over the past ten years, see figure D1. This increase was, largely, driven by new private sector provision (2,245 homes), accompanied by a small increase in the homes delivered by housing associations (317 homes). Local authority stock fell, as a result of homes lost through the Right to Buy (RTB).

Figure D1 – Housing tenure 2009 & 2019.

Year	All	Local Authority	Housing Assoc	Private sector
2009	43,370	3,277	1,314	38,779
2019	45,858	3,203	1,631	41,024

Source - [Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government, Live table 100](#)

- D4.2. An analysis of planning permissions⁹ shows that a further 227 homes were added to the stock in 2020/21, with a further 400 homes expected to be completed during 2021/22. A total of 1,798 homes have been granted planning permission across the district.

⁷ East Sussex in figures – [Indices of Deprivation 2019 briefing – October 2019](#).

⁸ Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), via the [Stat Xplore website](#).

^{6&7} Lewes District Council planning records – covering areas only outside the South Downs National Park.

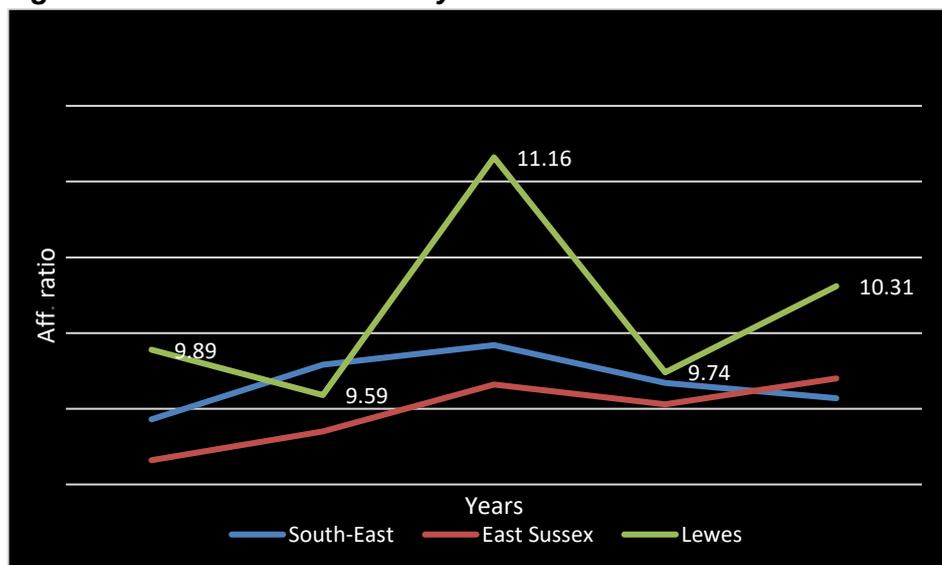
D4.3. Overall, the growth in social housing stock has been small, amounting to a net increase of only 243 homes in the past ten years, once RTB losses are taken into account. However, this picture is changing. planning records¹⁰, show that a further 24 homes were added in 2020/21 and that a further 58 are expected to complete during by March 2022. A total of 436 affordable homes have been granted planning permission at sites across the district.

D4.4. The private rented sector is relatively small in Lewes. At the last census in 2011, it housed around 14.5 percent of households across the district, lower than the percentages for East Sussex average (17.8%) and South-East (16.7%).

D5. Housing costs, demand, and availability.

D5.1 Lewes district has the highest average property prices in East Sussex. Prices have risen consistently in recent years, with the recent surge in market activity pushing up the average cost of a home to £405,000¹¹. Affordability ratios measure the relationship between average property prices and average earnings. By the autumn of 2020, these showed that (see figure D2, below) median property prices were over ten times the local median full-time salary, higher than the ratio for both East Sussex and the South-East as a whole.

Figure D2 – Median affordability ratios 2016 to 2020.



Source –ONS - [Housing affordability in England & Wales 2020 – March 2021](#).

D5.2 Meanwhile, by March 2020, the average rent (all sizes of accommodation) stood at £960¹², a rise of 13 percent over the past five years. A rent of below £700 for a one-bedroom self-contained flat is rare in any part of the District. To remain affordable this would require a household income of £26,000 for those in work, which is above the average of all employees in the district.

¹¹ [Quarterly land prices and transactions – Land Registry – October 2020](#).

¹² [Office of National Statistics - Private rental summary statistics July 2020](#).

D5.3. Despite increases to the cap that Local Housing Allowance (LHA) applies to the amount of welfare benefit payments that can be claimed to cover rent, they continue to restrict access to the private rented sector for those on lower incomes. Figure D3, below, shows that whilst the increased LHA rates are higher than the ONS recorded rents (in all bed sizes bar studio flats), they are much lower than the rents of available rental homes advertised on Rightmove¹³.

Figure D3 – Private rental sector rental costs and vacancies – Lewes District.

	Studio	1-bed	2-bed	3-bed	4-bed+
ONS av. rent - March 2020	£575	£695	£900	£1,150	£1,395
Rightmove rent - May 2021	£575	£920	£1,223	£1,397	£2,400
Local Housing Allowance Cap	£428	£798	£997	£1,196	£1,690
RM search - vacancies	2	11	16	7	1

Source – [ONS Private rental market summary statistics 2020 – release June 2020.](#)

D5.5. The Rightmove search illustrates the low number of private rented sector (PRS) vacancies available across Lewes, returning a total of 37 vacancies across the whole district. Only six of the homes listed were available at rents below the respective LHA rates. A similar search for Eastbourne (a borough with a similar level of total housing stock) returned more than double the number of available homes. The limited size of the PRS market in Lewes is likely to continue to restrict the role it can play in meeting housing needs across the district.

D5.4. The demand for social housing is high and there are currently 1,050 households waiting for homes on the council’s housing register, each of whom meets one or more category of preferential need. The availability of social housing, on the other hand, is restricted in terms of both new supply and the number of existing homes that become available to re-let. During 2019/20 a total of 115¹⁴ council homes were let to new tenants, which represents a stock turnover of just 3.6 percent. Although a further 70 housing association homes were let to those waiting on the housing register, there is a significant discrepancy between the levels of supply and demand.

D5.5. This combination of high house prices and rents, along with restricted housing availability in both the private and social rented housing sectors, presents a real housing challenge to residents of the district. These challenges restrict the housing choices of many households on middle incomes and severely restrict the ability of those on low and unstable incomes to secure housing that meets their needs. These inequalities have a disproportionate impact on young people, single households, and those reliant on welfare benefits.

¹³ Right move search conducted for rental properties across the district – 4th June 2021.

¹⁴ [MCHLG - Local authority statistical housing returns 2019/20.](#)

E. PROGRESS AGAINST OUR EXISTING STRATEGY

E1. Previous objectives.

E1.1. The existing homelessness strategy sets out six main objectives, focusing on key aspects of prevention, support, and the delivery of high quality services. The six objectives are:

- Preventing homelessness
- Improving support to vulnerable people.
- Ensuring accessible and effective homelessness, housing, and advice services.
- Improving the use and affordability of temporary accommodation.
- Increasing the provision of affordable housing.
- Improving monitoring procedures.

E1.2. The remainder of this section provides examples of the progress made in relation to each.

E2. Preventing homelessness.

E2.1. A range of initiatives have been put in place that focus on; taking direct action to prevent homelessness; providing financial assistance to help households meet the cost of rent in advance, deposits and rent arrears; and help raise awareness through the provision of advice and education. Key examples include:

- Securing additional funding under the Government's Rough Sleeper Initiative (RSI) – The RSI was expanded to cover Lewes in 2019, providing a service for the district that helps individuals with entrenched rough sleeping patterns access a multi-disciplinary team of health, social care, substance misuse & housing professionals. The service is an example of national best practice, providing fast-track links to key statutory services and wrap-around support to ensure that former rough sleepers can access appropriate housing and to reduce their chances of repeat homelessness.
- Delivering the Rapid Rehousing Pathway (RRP) - A similar programme to the RSI, but one which focuses on individuals with less complex levels of need. Since 2019 this has assisted 32 rough sleepers across the district.
- Administering Discretionary Housing Payments - These payments are targeted to help households where financial assistance will provide a genuine chance of stopping homelessness occurring, rather than postponing it. In 2019/20, £210,000 was allocated to support 380 households stay in their home, or secure suitable alternative accommodation.
- Working in partnership with local landlords - Incentivising local landlords to make homes available to 'at risk' households, who would otherwise have been placed in temporary accommodation.
- Working in partnership with the YMCA - Providing funding to deliver the schools Homelessness Project, which engages over 2,000 pupils aged 14-16 each year.

- Providing financial support to Lewes HomeLink - Supporting a local charity who have helped hundreds of households facing eviction, by providing loans to cover the cost of rental deposits and rent in advance. The charity then recycles loan repayments to finance support to new households. In 2020/21 the scheme secured homes for 85 households, around half of whom were referred by the housing needs team at Lewes District Council.

E3. Improving support to vulnerable people.

E3.1. A number of initiatives, often delivered in close partnership with other agencies, have targeted support at both individuals and households with additional needs, at the times they need it most. Key examples include:

- Accessing HomeWorks - This short-term housing support service in East Sussex, operated by Southdown Housing Association, is set up to help vulnerable people find and keep safe in affordable accommodation. It focusses on; supporting mental health and wellbeing; coaching life skills and budgeting; assisting with benefit claims to help maximise income; and promoting employment and training opportunities.
- Delivering STEPS - A service commissioned by East Sussex County Council, to provide advice to Lewes residents over the age of 60 who are experiencing housing difficulties. During 2020/21 the service helped over 360 people in the district; get extra help with their tenancy; meet housing costs; access affordable warmth advice; adapt their home; or move to a home better suited their needs.
- Working with Lewes Open Door – This community-based volunteer group supports rough sleepers to help address the underlying causes of their homelessness and encourages them to engage with local statutory partners.
- Putting in place the Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP) – SWEP provides overnight accommodation for rough sleepers during periods of cold temperatures. Provision is usually made through night shelters, operated in partnership with local voluntary groups and churches, but Covid-19 restrictions necessitated a different approach last winter. Using additional Government funding, Lewes District & Eastbourne Borough Councils, secured a number of units of accommodation, which were made available to verified rough sleepers. The funding has now been extended beyond 31st March 2021, providing time to move residents on, into supported housing.
- Putting in place pathways for young people – Agreed pathways are in place to supported housing schemes operated by the YMCA, and to the Newhaven Foyer, a Salvation Army scheme that offers housing to young people aged 16-24, along with support with life-skills, budgeting, careers, training and healthy living. It then supports residents in their move to a permanent home. The service received 65 referrals from LDC's housing needs team during 2020/21.
- Working alongside the county's public health team, Lewes District Council is delivering a new 'wellbeing initiative', deploying dedicated officers to work directly with those at risk of losing their home, or already living in temporary accommodation. The initiative will look to address aspects of wellbeing that may

be preventing individuals from keeping their tenancy, managing their home, or accessing the local jobs market. It will offer a range of coaching programmes, tailored advice sessions and practical workshops to help build the confidence and skills of those taking part.

E4. Delivering accessible and effective housing needs and advice services.

E4.1. Actively reviewing demand and the resources allocated to meeting the resultant needs is key to keeping services accessible. Recent changes to legislation, and the pandemic, have provided very real challenges which have been addressed by:

- Updating policies and processes to deliver new duties introduced by the Homelessness Reduction Act, underpinning an approach that; supports a wider and more vulnerable cohort of applicants; delivers services to those at risk of homelessness earlier than before; and works effectively with partners to develop personal housing plans.
- Keeping the housing needs services accessible during the pandemic – By moving to a telephone-based assessment and contact model to deliver services, whilst maintaining face-to-face contact, where essential. The team have adapted quickly to being based at home and have worked with colleagues in benefits, legal and IT to update forms and processes to support the new way of working. These steps have helped minimise disruption to service users. Where accommodation has been provided to those who were unable to isolate, they have been offered food parcels, provided with equipment to reduce the use of shared kitchens and been supported by agencies and volunteers.
- Providing an outreach service to rough sleepers - Delivered and funded by the Rough Sleeper Initiative, the team carries out proactive outreach work, generally between 4 and 7am. The service identifies people who are rough sleeping and helps them connect with local services, which include referrals to the multi-disciplinary team of health, social care, substance misuse & housing professionals, as appropriate.
- Subscribing to Streetlink – This nationwide service enables members of the public to connect people sleeping rough with the local services that can support them. Concerns reported by the public via their website or a mobile app, will be followed up by the local RSI outreach team, who will locate the individuals concerned and begin to assess their needs.
- Funding local agencies that provide financial and welfare benefit advice– Services include Lewes Citizens Advice Bureaux (CAB), Sussex Community Development Association and Brighton Housing Trust (BHT). The grant to the local CAB includes a £35,000 ring fenced sum to support advice for council tenants and leaseholders, whilst the BHT fund is a fixed term award to support residents transitioning to Universal Credit.

E5. Reducing the use of temporary accommodation.

E5.1. Moving into temporary accommodation is disruptive to households, whilst its provision is costly to the council. As a result, minimising the degree to which it is used is a key feature of our plans, delivered through:

- Reducing the use of hotel / bed & breakfast accommodation with shared facilities – By increasing the use of self-contained, longer term leased and council owned homes to provide temporary accommodation.
- Minimising the use of emergency accommodation for those households with children – By implementing processes to match family households and self-contained accommodation in the first instance. Where this is not possible, steps are taken to move those with children into self-contained accommodation within six weeks. At the end of March 2021 there were no children being housed in shared bed and breakfast accommodation.

E6. Increasing the provision of affordable housing.

E6.1. New affordable housing is key to reducing demand across the district and local planning policies are key to increasing supply. To work towards this goal local plans and policies are in place that:

- Set out supplementary planning guidance (Core Strategy 1 - Affordable Housing) – This stipulates that developments of more than ten homes must provide 40% affordable housing on their developments (or at suitably agreed alternative sites).
- Provide an explanation of how the Council's affordable housing policy, as set out in the Core Strategy 1, is to be implemented. This supplementary Planning Document (SPD)¹⁵ includes advice concerning the standards and size requirements needed across residential sites, to help deliver the affordable housing necessary to meet local needs.
- Encourage the provision of flexible, socially inclusive and adaptable accommodation. The goal here is to help meet the diverse needs of the community and the changing needs of occupants over time.

E6.2. Over the past three years these policies have contributed to the provision of over 180 low-cost rental and shared ownership homes. Although this represents 16% of all dwelling completions between 2016 and 2020, the number is lower than that forecast to meet identified needs, so improving the amount and availability of affordable housing remains a Council priority. An increased focus on supported housing provision is also likely to be a key consideration, given the increasing number of households presenting with multiple and complex needs under the new homelessness duties.

¹⁵Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document – Lewes District Council [272847.pdf \(lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk\)](#)

E7. Improving monitoring procedures.

- E7.1. Having to hand good quality systems to manage cases and provide timely and up to date management information is a key tool, which can help support effective operations and measure the impact of the homelessness strategy.

- E7.2. Over the past three years new systems have been implemented to process applications in line with new HRA duties, whilst new provisions have been put in place to better manage emergency and temporary accommodation placements. Further investment is now planned, to ensure that our systems are fully integrated with Government homelessness reporting mechanisms and help provide more timely management information to our local teams.

F. DELIVERING HOMELESSNESS SERVICES.

F1. Background.

- F1.1. This section reviews who is accessing the housing needs service, summarises the outcomes of any applications made for assistance under current homelessness provisions and examines the steps taken to prevent and relieve any associated homelessness. It also provides a summary of recent rough sleeping trends.
- F1.2. A new system of recording data, the Homelessness Case Level Collection System (H-CLIC)¹⁶, was introduced by the Government in 2018, to help monitor the new prevention, relief and referral duties introduced by the Homelessness Reduction Act. It also records information about the established main housing duty, priority need, as well as the profile characteristics and support needs of applicants and their households.
- F1.3. The data it presents is not generally comparable with earlier data collected by local authorities and, as a result, most of the information set out below refers to the past three years (from April 2018 onwards). Some elements of the 2019/20 H-CLIC data is still awaiting final validation, so has been supplemented with information taken from the council's management information systems. As such, some information may be subject to future amendment as it is uploaded to Government records.
- F1.4. The information relating to rough sleeping is collected separately and has been collated consistently and in the same format over a longer period of time.

F2. Accessing the housing needs service.

- F2.1. During 2020/21, 702 households raised enquiries with the housing needs team, an increase of 23% on the 572 enquiries received the year before. Sixty percent of these enquiries (433) progressed through to a formal homelessness application, with the remaining 40% being either enquiries answered at first point of contact, general enquiries about housing in the local area, or enquiries where no response was received when followed up by the team.
- F2.2. Around 1 in 10 (9%) of the enquiries received were referred by another agency, the majority being made under the new '*duty to refer*'. This arrangement, introduced by the HRA 2017, requires specified public bodies to notify the housing needs team when they encounter someone it thinks may be homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. The National Probation Service, hospitals and prisons were the leading sources of referral.

¹⁶ Homelessness live tables, HCLIC header page – MCHLG, [Live tables on homelessness - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/datasets/homelessness-live-tables)

F3. Prevention & relief duty - assessment outcome.

F3.1. A total of 433 cases received a formal assessment to determine the duty owed by the council. Around two-thirds (65% or 284 households) were found to be owed a duty, whilst just over a quarter (26%) were not. In a further 38 (9%) of cases, households were either awaiting the outcome of enquiries or lost contact with the housing needs team.

F3.2. Of the 284 households owed a duty, 75 were owed a prevention duty, whilst 209 households were found to be homeless at the time of application, so owed a relief duty. Figure F1 (below) shows how these results compare against previous years.

Figure F1 – Duty assessment outcomes April 2018 to March 2021.

Duty owed	2018/19*	2019/20*	2020/21**
Threatened with homelessness - prevention duty owed	135	92	75
Homeless at time of application - relief duty owed	145	221	209
Not threatened with homelessness - no duty owed	8	51	111

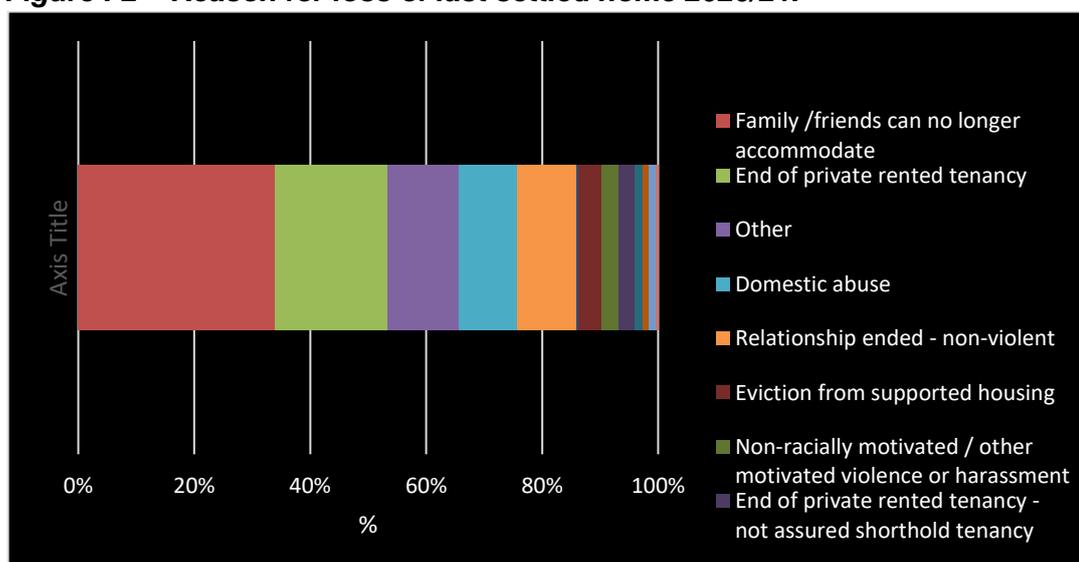
*Source – H-CLIC live homelessness tables.

** Source - Lewes CX Homelessness Information System.

F3.3. Despite an increase in enquiries, the number and percentage of households found to be owed a prevention and relief duty fell, (84% to 72%), when compared to the previous year. This pattern reflected national trends, resulting in an accompanying increase in the number of households found not to be threatened with homelessness.

F3.4. Family or friends no longer willing or able to accommodate, was the leading reason those owed a duty lost their last settled home. It was cited by 91 (34%) of the 267 households across the year, whilst the end / forthcoming end of an assured shorthold tenancy (AST) was the next most common reason, reported by 52 (19%) households. Domestic abuse and non-violent relationship breakdown were the other leading reasons given. The full list is set out in figure F2, below.

Figure F2 – Reason for loss of last settled home 2020/21.



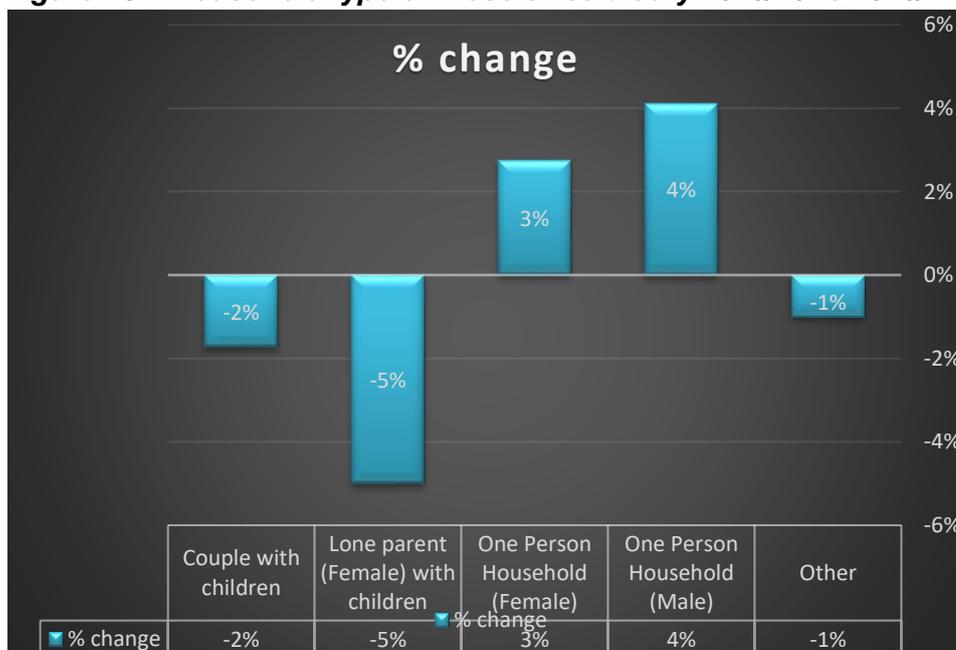
Source - Lewes CX Homelessness Information System.

- F3.5. Compared to the previous year, there was a 6% reduction in the numbers citing an end to their private rented sector tenancy as the main reason for seeking assistance. This trend is also apparent when figures are analysed showing the last settled accommodation of those seeking help, which showed a 6% reduction in applications from those who has been living in the private rented sector, compared to 2019/20.
- F3.6. These trends are consistent with the nationally reported impact of Government policies to mitigate the effect of Covid-19, which introduced rules to restrict private rented sector evictions and funded local authorities to house rough sleepers under the 'everyone in' initiative. These measures have reduced levels of private rented sector evictions and shifted the balance of those assisted by local authorities from families with children to single households.
- F3.7. Increased levels of applications from those losing their homes due to family breakdowns and because they can no longer be accommodated by family & friends are also apparent. These could be indicative of rising family pressures being exasperated by lockdown.

F4. Characteristics of those owed a prevention or relief duty.

F4.1. The impact of changes resulting from the pandemic is also reflected in the profile characteristics of those assisted under homelessness provisions. During 2020/21 the focus on housing those at risk of rough sleeping and restrictions on evictions, resulted in a six percent increase in single households provided with prevention or relief duty, whilst the percentage of households with children fell by seven percent (see figure F3).

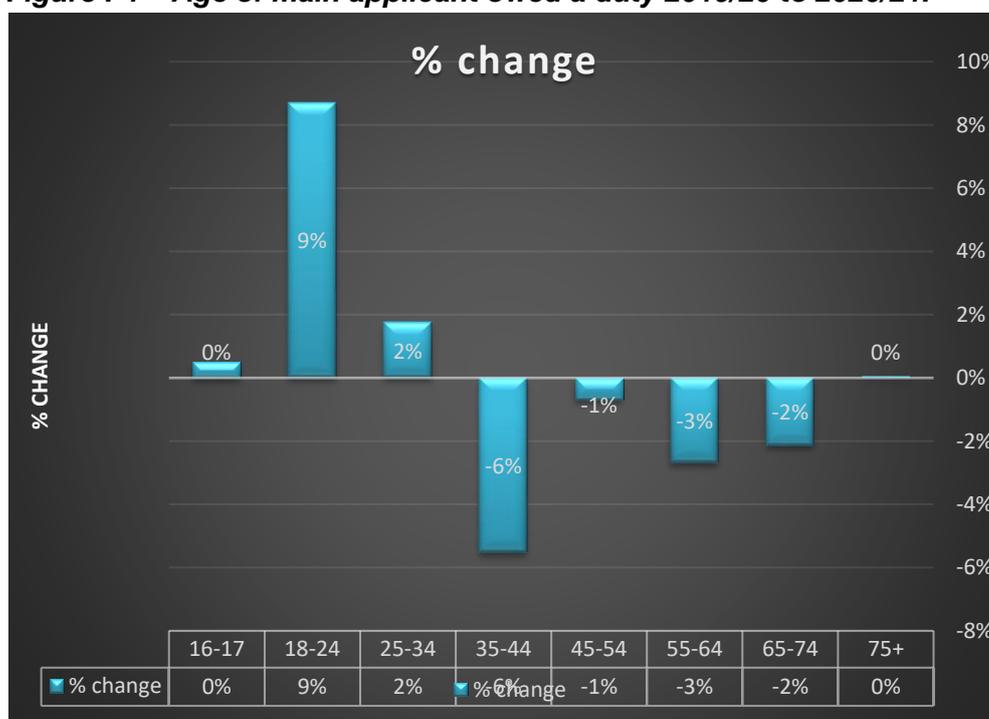
Figure F3 – Household type of those owed a duty 2019/20 to 2020/21.



Source - Lewes CX Homelessness Information System.

F4.2. The age profile of those owed a duty in 2020/21 was younger than the year before. This was characterised by a 9 percent increase of 18–24-year olds assessed as being owed a prevention or relief duty, whilst the percentage of 35–44-year olds who were owed a duty fell by 6% (see figure F4). This trend is indicative of the shift from households with children to single people.

Figure F4 – Age of main applicant owed a duty 2019/20 to 2020/21.



Source - Lewes CX Homelessness Information System.

F4.3. The percentage of main applicants registered as unemployed increased by 14%, whilst the percentage who were long term sick or disabled fell, reflective perhaps, of the changing age profile of those provided with a duty. All households were in receipt of one or more benefits to assist with their living costs, with Universal Credit, Disability Living Allowance and Employment Support Allowance being the most commonly claimed.

F4.4. There were no significant changes in terms of gender, with 45% of those owed a duty being female and 55% male. Ninety-five percent of those who provided ethnicity information described themselves as White British, whilst 95% who provided nationality information classified themselves as being UK nationals. Both of these figures are consistent with previous years.

F5. Support needs of those owed a prevention or relief duty.

F5.1. Just under half (46%) of households owed a duty were assessed as having one or more support needs. This is a slight fall compared to the previous year, likely as a result of the younger age profile of those assisted under the duties – see table F5.

Figure F5 – Households with support needs 2018/19 to 2020/21.

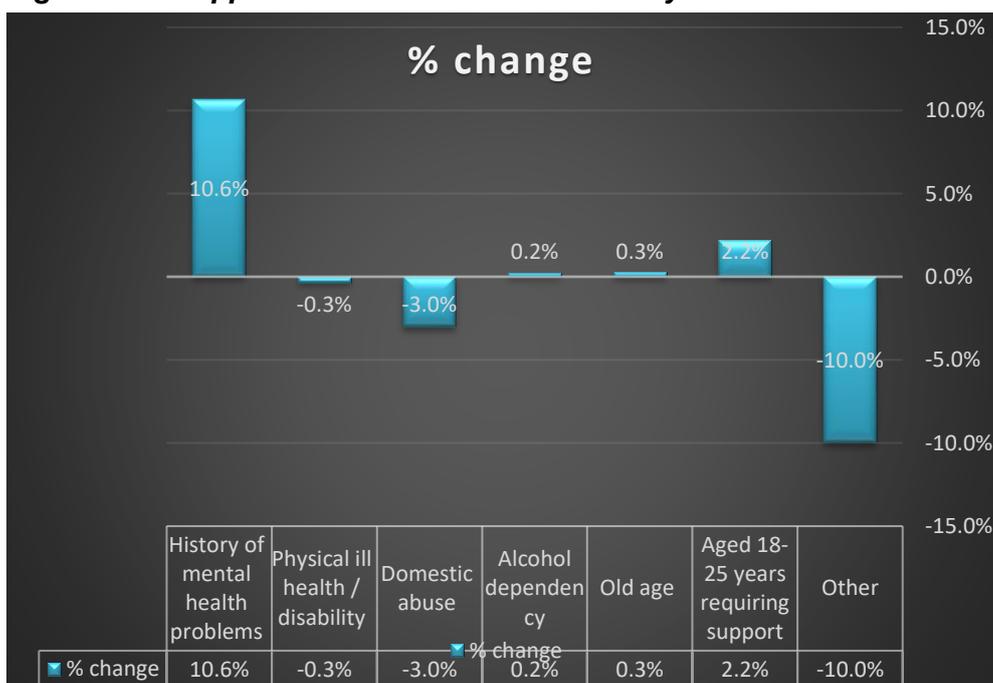
	Support needs	No needs	Total	% with supp. need
2018/19	94	186	280	34%
2019/20	155	158	313	50%
2020/21	132	152	284	46%

Source - Lewes CX Homelessness Information System.

F5.2. A history of mental health problems remained the most common reason for requiring support, accounting for almost 40% of those identified as having support needs. Physical ill health and disability (16%), then domestic abuse (7%) were the other leading reasons. Alcohol dependency and young people needing support also featured in the top five .

F5.3. The top three reasons remain unchanged from the previous year, though there has been a significant increase (+10%) in those identifying mental health as a support need, as can be seen in figure F6, below.

Figure F6 – Support needs of those owed a duty 2019/20 to 2020/21.



Source – H-CLIC data & Lewes CX Homelessness Information System.

F5.4. Compared to the previous year, having a history of mental health problems is the only support need to show a significant increase. Amongst the other leading reasons, the percentage identifying alcohol dependency, old age and young people requiring assistance remained steady. The percentage of those requiring support because of domestic abuse and a range of other reasons, including exploitation, learning disability, and leaving care, all fell. As is the case with a number of indicators, these patterns reflect the increased numbers of single households and those at risk of rough sleeping accessing services in the past year.

F5.5. There is evidence that the housing needs team was already seeing an increase in the numbers of vulnerable individuals with multiple and complex needs (MCN), accessing services before the pandemic. This is illustrated by the fact that the percentage of those owed a prevention or relief with support needs increased from 33%, to 45%, between 2018/19 & 2019/20. The implementation of the new prevention and relief duties is a likely driver for this trend and services have had to be adjusted to cope with the additional demands this has brought.

F6. Prevention duties ended.

- F6.1. The number of households whose prevention duty ends, in any given period, is used to measure the level of activity undertaken under this duty. During 2020/21 this duty ended for 62 households in Lewes, with the preventative activities undertaken by the housing needs team successfully securing accommodation for more than half (52%) of those seeking help – see figure F7, below. This is slightly below the national average and broadly the same as figure for Lewes reported in 2019/20, when preventative activities secured homes for 56% of those seeking help. These activities reduce the social costs of homelessness and hardship that these households would face and significantly reduced the associated financial costs to the Council.
- F6.2. Of those receiving help, nine households were able to stay in their existing home, further minimising the disruption, social and financial cost.

Figure F7 – Prevention duties ended by reason 2020/21.

	No. 2020/21	% 2020/21
Secured accommodations for 6 months +	32	52%
Homeless	12	19%
Contact lost	8	13%
No further prev. action (56 days lapsed)	4	6%
Withdrew / deceased	3	5%
No longer eligible	0	0%
Refused accommodation	1	2%
Refused to co-operate	2	3%
Total	62	100%

Source –CX Homelessness Information System.

- F6.3. Around one in five (19%) of households whose duty ended became homeless and progressed to be assessed under the relief or main homelessness duty, a significant reduction on 2019/20, when 31% of those whose prevention duty ended became homeless. In the remaining cases households either lost contact with the team, withdrew their application, or refused to co-operate with help offered.
- F6.4. Of the 32 households successfully securing accommodation, the majority (84%) did so in the private rented sector (see figure F8, below), an increase on the previous year, which reflects the housing needs team’s increased focus on partnership working with private sector landlords.

Figure F8 – Accommodation secured at end of prevention duty 2019/20 to 2020/21.

	No. 2019/20	% 2019/20	No. 2020/21	% 2020/21
Social rented sector	10	29%	3	9%
Private rented sector	22	65%	27	84%
Staying with family	0	0%	2	6%
Staying with friends	0	0%	0	0%
Owner-occupier	0	0%	0	0%
Other	0	0%	0	0%
Not known	2	6%	0	0%

Source –CX Homelessness Information System.

- F6.5. This is reflected in the breakdown of the main preventative activities undertaken to help, which can be seen in figure F9, below. This shows the percentage of accommodation that the housing needs team helped applicants secure, increased from 35% in 2019/20 to 53% in 2020/21.

Figure F9 –Prevention activity that secured accommodation for households 2020/21.

	No. 2019/20	% 2019/20	No. 2020/21	% 2020/21
Accommodation secured by local authority	3	9%	9	28%
Secured accommodation found by applicant - with £	12	35%	3	9%
Secured accommodation found by applicant - no £	0	0%	14	44%
Negotiated stop eviction / possession	2	6%	0	0%
Negotiated return to family / friend	8	24%	1	3%
Supported housing provided	1	3%	2	6%
Discretionary Housing Payment given	1	3%	0	0%
Other financial payments	0	0%	0	0%
Other	7	21%	3	9%

Source –CX Homelessness Information System.

F7. Relief duties ended.

- F7.1. The number of households whose relief duty ends, in any given period, is used to measure the level of activity undertaken under this duty. During 2020/21 this duty ended for 147 households in Lewes, with the activities undertaken by the housing needs team successfully securing accommodation and preventing homelessness for two fifths (39%) of those seeking help – see figure F10, below. This is in line with the national average and is a large increase on the figure for Lewes reported in 2019/20, when activities secured accommodation for just over a quarter (26%) of those seeking assistance.
- F7.2. As is the case with preventative measures, these activities have helped reduce the social costs of hardship that households face and significantly reduce the associated financial costs to the Council.

Figure F10 – Relief duties ended by reason 2020/21.

	No. 2020/21	% 2020/21
Secured accommodation for 6+ months	57	39%
No further relief action (56 days elapsed)	53	36%
Contact lost	21	14%
Withdrew application / applicant deceased	11	7%
Refused final accommodation	0	0%
Intentionally homeless from accommodation provided	2	1%
Local connection referral accepted by other LA	0	0%
No longer eligible	3	2%
Notice served due to refusal to cooperate	0	0%
Not known	0	0%

Source –CX Homelessness Information System.

- F7.3. Thirty-six percent of households whose duty ended became homeless and progressed to be assessed under the main duty, a reduction on 2019/20, when 56% of those whose relief duty ended became homeless. In the remaining cases households either lost contact with the team, withdrew their application, or refused to co-operate with the help offered.
- F7.4. Of the 57 households successfully helped to secure accommodation, around half (29) moved into private rented sector homes, whilst 16 households moved into social rented housing, including ten who moved into supported housing schemes – figure F11, below.

Figure F11 – Accommodation secured at end of relief duty 2019/20 to 2020/21.

	No. 2019/20	% 2019/20	No. 2020/21	% 2020/21
Social rented sector	9	24%	16	28%
Private rented sector	23	62%	29	50%
Staying with family	1	3%	0	0%
Staying with friends	0	0%	0	0%
Owner-occupier	0	0%	0	0%
Other	1	3%	0	0%
Not known	3	8%	12	22%

Source –CX Homelessness Information System.

- F7.5. Directly finding applicants suitable private and social rented sector housing (in 22 cases) and helping secure accommodation identified by applicants themselves (in 25 cases), were the main activities that helped relieve homelessness – see figure F12, below. Maintaining close links with private landlords and the targeted use of financial incentives to help support placements have been key to this success.

Figure F12 – Relief activity that secured accomm. for households 2020/21.

	No. 2019/20	% 2019/20	No. 2020/21	% 2020/21
Accommodation secured by local authority	9	24%	22	39%
Secured acc. found by app. – with £ help	8	22%	14	25%
Secured acc. found by app. – no £ help	12	32%	11	19%
Other activity to secure accommodation	2	5%	8	9%
No activity	3	8%	2	4%

Source –CX Homelessness Information System.

F8. Main duty assessments.

F8.1. The number of main duty assessments undertaken has fluctuated over the past three years. Assessments more than doubled from 40 cases in 2018/19 to 98 in 2019/20, but fell back to 70 last year, in line with national trends – see figure F13, below.

Figure F13 – Main duty assessment & outcomes 2018/19 to 2020/21.

	No. 18/19	% 18/19	No. 19/20	% 19/20	No. 20/21	% 20/21
Homeless (accepted)	35	88%	71	72%	28	40%
Homeless + priority + intentionally	2	5%	8	8%	6	9%
Homeless + no priority	3	8%	18	18%	32	46%
Not homeless	0	0%	1	1%	4	6%
Total	40	100%	98	100%	70	100%

Source –CX Homelessness Information System.

F8.2. The percentage of households accepted under the main duty assessment has fallen consistently over the past three years, almost certainly as a result of the increasing numbers of single households coming through the system, due to the implementation of the HRA 2017 and more recently, the pandemic. Single households are less likely to qualify as a priority than families as children are the key drivers of priority need.

F8.3. Despite this, Having dependent children remained the most common reason for households being accepted as having a priority need in 2020/21, followed by mental health issues, then ill health – see figure F14, below.

Figure F14 – Priority need of those accepted under the main duty 2020/21.

Household includes dependent children	12	43%
Mental health problems	4	14%
Physical disability / ill health	4	14%
Other vulnerability reason	3	11%
Learning difficulty	1	4%
Has been in custody or on remand	1	4%
Domestic violence / threat of domestic violence	1	4%
Household includes a pregnant woman	1	4%
Homeless due to fire, flood or other emergency	1	4%
Total	28	100%

Source –CX Homelessness Information System.

F9. Main duties ended.

F9.1. The number of main duties that ended fell significantly in 2020/21, which reflects the lower numbers of households being assessed as having a main duty, as well as a restriction on lettings activity introduced after April 2020, to help reduce the local impact of Covid-19. The majority of households for whom the main duty ended were housed in a council, or other socially rented home, with only 1 in 10 accepting an offer of accommodation in the private rented sector – figure F15.

Figure F15 – Accommodation at end of main duty 2019/20 to 2020/21.

	No. 2019/20	% 2019/21	No. 2020/21	% 20120/21
Accepted a social housing offer	76	90%	19	86%
Accepted a Private Rented Sector offer	2	2%	2	9%
Applicant withdrew or lost contact	1	1%	1	5%
Ceased to be eligible	2	2%	0	0%
Ceased to occupy temporary acc.	3	4%	0	0%
Refused suitable private rent sector offer	0	0%	0	0%
Total	84	100%	22	100%

Source –CX Homelessness Information System.

F10. Use of temporary accommodation.

F10.1. At the end of March 2021 there were a total of 86 households in temporary accommodation (TA), a slight reduction in the number at the end of June 2020 – see figure F16, below.

Figure F16 – Households in temporary accommodation at the end of quarter.

	Jun-20	Sep-20	Dec-20	Mar-21
Private sector leased (self-contained)	15	12	19	18
Nightly paid (self-contained)	27	30	22	21
Local authority stock (self-contained)	33	35	31	32
Bed and breakfast hotels (shared)	15	17	11	15
Hostels & refuges (shard)	1	1	0	0
Other (shared / self-contained)	0	0	0	0
Totals	91	95	83	86
Percentage self-contained	82%	81%	87%	83%
Percentage shared	18%	19%	13%	17%

Source –CX Homelessness Information System * MCHLC homelessness live tables.

F10.2. Since the end of the first quarter in 2019/20 the use of shared accommodation has remained steady, though a look at the longer term trend shows that it has fallen by 10% since June 2019, when 28% of the accommodation provided was shared. This fall is largely attributable to increasing the use of existing local authority self-contained homes as TA, in line with the Council's strategic objectives.

F10.3. Over the past year (since September 2019) the number of single households housed in TA has increased (26% to 34%), whilst the number of those with children decreased (68% to 59%). Again, this is reflective of the changing pattern of assistance given under homelessness legislation as a result of Covid-19.

F11. Rough sleeping.

F11.1. The number of rough sleepers in Lewes District has been consistently low compared with other areas, with the Government’s annual count of rough sleepers registering numbers in single figures for each of the past five years – see figure F17, below.

Figure F17. Annual rough sleeper count.

Year (Oct)	Count
2015	9
2016	3
2017	1
2018	9
2019	1
2020	8

Source – MCHLG – Homelessness lice tables.

F11.2. The Rough Sleeping Initiative (RSI) continues to provide ongoing support, carrying out proactive outreach work that:

- Identifies those who are rough sleeping.
- Helps rough sleepers to connect with local services.
- Supports individuals to reconnect with their home authority if appropriate.

F11.3. Additional engagement sessions are undertaken throughout the week, with targeted interventions supported by a dedicated team of multi-disciplinary specialists. The RSI has supported 35 verified rough sleepers across the Lewes District since March 2020, including 25 former rough sleepers who have been accommodated in emergency accommodation as part of the Government ‘Everyone In’ response to Covid-19.

F11.4. A similar initiative, the Rapid Rehousing Pathway, which is focussed on rough sleepers with less complex needs, has secured accommodation for 22 rough sleepers in privately rented, social and supported housing since 2019.

G. RESOURCES TO TACKLE HOMELESSNESS.

G1. Corporate plans & housing delivery

G1.1. The Corporate Plan sets out the District Council's priorities over a four year period, including key aspirations to increase the supply of housing and help reduce housing need and homelessness across the district. There are six priorities, namely:

- Support the provision of social, affordable, sustainable, energy and resource efficient, climate resilient housing, delivering for our residents more effectively.
- Build more rented council homes in the district, including in our villages, and provide homes which support independent living.
- Use our planning system to support affordable housing delivery.
- Increase housing in the district through innovation including modular housing and developing infill sites.
- Reduce the reliance on temporary and emergency accommodation.

G1.2. The plan sets out a number of associated goals, including the:

- Provision of 200 new council houses and 300 new affordable homes.
- Opening up of quality housing options for low to middle income residents.
- Delivery of accessible housing for those with physical and additional support needs.

G1.3. A total of 24 affordable homes were added in 2020/21 and delivery is forecast to accelerate this year, with a further 58 homes scheduled to be completed before the end of March 2022. A total of 436¹⁷ affordable homes currently have planning permission across the district.

G1.4. A number of supported housing units, commissioned via the County Council's Supported Housing Framework, are available for households nominated by the Lewes District, including the young persons' foyer scheme, operated by the Salvation Army in Newhaven. Increases in the numbers of vulnerable single households now being assessed under homelessness duties are likely to see the future demand for this, and similar types of accommodation, increase.

G2. Support to prevent and mitigate the impact of homelessness.

G2.1. A range of services, projects and programmes continue to put in place provisions to help prevent homelessness and support those households in need of help and assistance.

¹⁷ All figures relate to LDC planning authority areas which exclude the South Down National Park Authority.

G.2.2. These comprise of many of the statutory and voluntary services summarised in the review of existing activities set out in section E (above), the key elements of which include:

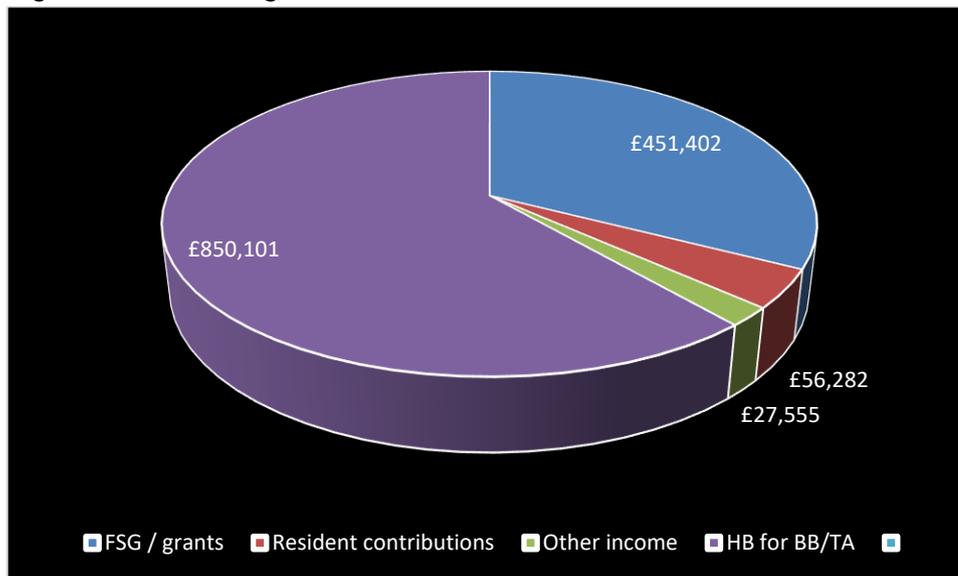
- Maintaining a comprehensive housing needs service - The service will continue to lead the Council's homelessness operations, through teams that; deliver strategic projects and partnerships; undertake statutory prevention, relief, and main duty assessment; and manage all aspects of temporary accommodation. These teams will continue to focus their efforts on preventing homelessness and reducing the disruption that it causes where it occurs. The service will continue to adapt delivery to the changing levels of demand it faces and work closely with teams and partners to seek longer term solutions to meeting housing need.
- Forging partnerships with other key statutory agencies – Working closely with nearby local authorities to share information about shared challenges and co-ordinate work plans, including via the East Sussex Housing Officers Group, will continue to form an essential means of planning strategy.
- Securing funding together – Working with partners in this way provides a solid platform from which joint bids for funding can be made to central Government. Recent examples include successful bids to extend the Rough Sleeper Initiative (RSI), and Rapid Rehousing Pathway (RRP) programmes. Funding has also been secured to provide move-on accommodation for up to three houses in Lewes District as part of the Government's Rough Sleeper Accommodation Programme.
- Delivering financial support and advice services – Directly supporting households by targeting Discretionary Housing Payments at those who experience a shortfall between the costs of their rent and welfare housing payments, is a key preventative tool that will continue to be deployed. Funding advice services, including those provided by the Citizens Advice Bureau and Brighton Housing Trust, as well as supporting the loan schemes provided by Lewes Homelink offers further means of support to local households.
- Working with agencies who support those experiencing housing difficulties – These include floating support providers, such as Homeworks and providers of move-on accommodation, such as the Salvation Army and YMCA.
- Working with private landlords – A dedicate, role is now in place within the housing needs team, to take this work forward and help design a new strategy for targeting financial support that can help drive up the number of placements made.

G3. How homelessness services are funded.

G3.1. In 2020/21 the core housing needs service cost £1.67M to run, with the largest items of expenditure being the payments made for temporary accommodation and the staff teams in place to deliver statutory homelessness services and manage temporary accommodation.

G3.2. This expenditure is funded from a number of different income sources, as shown in figure G1 (below), which together provided an income of £1.39M.

Figure G1 – Housing needs income 2020/21.



G3.3. This income comprised of:

- Rental income of £850k, including housing benefit subsidies claimed back from the Government. The income received covers some, but not all of the cost of the temporary accommodation provided and taking steps to maximize what we claimed back from Government, collect from residents, and reduce the cost of temporary accommodation, are key to reducing service costs overall.
- Flexible Support Grant (FSG) - A further £451k was met by FSG payments received from central Government. These funds are provided to help local authorities meet their statutory duties and provide the additional tools put in place to prevent and relive homelessness, such as rents in advance and deposit payments, advice and education services.
- Contributions paid by residents towards the cost of service charges that are not eligible for housing benefits.

G3.4. The resultant gap between income and expenditure, approximately £280k, was met by funding from core council budgets.

G3.5. Additional funding, bid for over the past year, includes a share of the £2.1m funding secured to deliver the RSI across the county until March 2022, and £390,000 awarded to provide move-on accommodation for rough sleepers across the district.

H. STRATEGIC INSIGHTS.

H1. Summary & key themes.

H.1.1. This review set out to provide an up to date picture of the:

- Current levels of homelessness across Lewes District.
- Support available to prevent homelessness and those experiencing it.
- Level of resources made available locally to tackle homelessness.

H1.2. The review of the local context and analysis of recent trends demonstrates that the demand for services remains extremely high and is likely to remain so into the foreseeable future. It also demonstrates that local housing needs and support services are operating well to meet demand and have successfully adjusted to meet the needs of the HRA 2017, albeit at a financial cost. Partnerships are an essential element of addressing the needs of homeless households across the district, and draw in the dedicated efforts of a wide range of statutory and voluntary agency partners, who for the most part work well together.

H1.3. Over the past year, analysis of how the housing needs service has been operating indicates that the pandemic has had a local impact that very much reflects national trends and the associated policies that have sought to restrict evictions and increase the assistance given to the most vulnerable in society. The impact of these has been to increase the number of single households and reduce the number of households with children, that have been assisted under homelessness duties.

H1.4. However, there is evidence that a shift towards this trend was already underway and that implementation of the new prevention and relief duties, was already leading to higher numbers of single and vulnerable people with multiple complex needs, using services before the pandemic. So, whilst in the short term there is likely to be some re-balancing of the profile of those accessing the service, the trend is unlikely to fully reverse. As such, strategic approaches need to take account of the likelihood that services will face an ongoing level of demand from a more marginalised and challenging customer base. The emphasis on having in place high quality services that seek to prevent homelessness occurring, and relieve it swiftly where it occurs, will need to be maintained to address this.

H1.6. This is taking place against a background where, affordability ratios in the district are running at unprecedented levels, rents continue to challenge welfare subsidy caps, and the size and availability of homes in private sector continues to be restricted, disproportionately so for those on lower incomes. To address this deploying sustainable measures that can address homelessness by promoting access to homes and stepping up the delivery more affordable housing, will become even more essential.

H1.7. The gap between housing need and the supply of affordable low-cost housing lies at the heart of the longer-term issue, and until this is addressed many low-income households will continue to rely on insecure housing options and the pressure on homelessness services is likely to be maintained.

H2. Strategic response.

H2.1. This final section of the review puts forward a number of suggested goals and measures that might be useful in shaping the new strategy. There are three key goals, namely, to prevent, intervene and put in place sustainable responses to address homelessness.

GOAL 1 – PREVENTION – THROUGH:

- Delivering housing needs services offering timely assessments & intervention.
- Targeting value for money financial support to landlords.
- Targeting financial support for tenants (DHP, deposit & rent in advance).
- Supporting education & awareness initiatives for young people & care leavers.
- Accessing advice & practical support (employment, training, budgeting & skills).
- Targeting prevention to risk groups (floating, intensive & wellbeing support).
- Identifying individuals with multiple complex needs and delivering tailored support.

GOAL 2 – INTERVENTION – THROUGH:

- Delivering housing needs services offering timely assessments & intervention.
- Targeting value for money financial support to landlords.
- Targeting financial support for tenants (DHP, deposit & rent in advance).
- Accessing advice & practical support (employment, training, budgeting & skills).
- Agreeing targeted pathways for at risk groups (RSI; prison; care leavers; hospital).
- Identifying individuals with multiple complex needs and delivering tailored support.
- Value for money emergency and temporary accommodation.

GOAL 3 – SUSTAINABLE RESPONSES – THROUGH:

- Maintaining clear profile records to check who is using housing needs services.
- Accelerating the delivery of affordable homes through new provision.
- Maximising re-housing opportunities in the PRS.
- Allocations that balance the needs of homeless and housing register applicants.
- Commissioning a suitable supply of move-on and supported housing.
- Putting in place the support at risk groups need (floating, intensive & wellbeing & life skills) to sustain their transition to independence.

H2.2. Each of these goals would be supported by a series of cross cutting themes that seek to put in place:

- Effective collaborations with statutory, agency and voluntary partners.
- High quality, value for money services that make the most of available funding.
- Skilled and well trained staff.

H2.3. The views of the public, partners and stakeholders are sought to help shape the forthcoming revision of the Council's homelessness strategy.