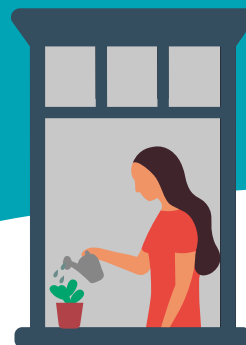
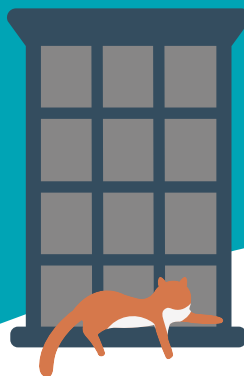


# Homeless and Rough Sleeper Strategy

2020 – 2025



# Foreword

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**Homelessness has devastating impacts on individuals and families. Not having a home makes it harder for people to stay healthy, succeed at work, participate in education and contribute more widely to society.**

Homelessness is often a symptom of a number of wider social and economic factors which can impact on an individual or household. Simply providing someone with a house does not address these factors. Tackling homelessness and at its extreme rough sleeping requires a cross-sector response and Stafford Borough Council has built excellent working relationships with partners from across health, police and probation services, housing, voluntary and third sectors that enable households to be resilient in maintaining safe and stable homes and preventing homelessness in the long-term.

Stafford Borough Council is committed to preventing homelessness at the earliest opportunity and was awarded Gold Standard for Homeless Prevention by the National Practitioners Support Service in 2017, recognising the strong partnerships and corporate commitment to preventing homelessness. The role of our partners is critical and we recognise all their work in providing accommodation, supporting residents and sustaining tenancies; it is with our partners that we have managed to achieve the success we have through innovating and launching many ground breaking initiatives to support some of the most vulnerable people in our Borough.

Since the last Homeless Strategy, numbers of rough sleepers have more than halved in Stafford Borough. Rough Sleeper Funding has been used to establish the now nationally recognised role of Community Matron for the Homeless who addresses the health and social care needs of rough sleepers, or those at risk of rough sleeping. Pioneering partnerships with

mental health services has allowed this role to continue and expand through the addition of a dual diagnosis worker, recognising the mental health and complex nature of many rough sleepers with multiple addictions. Innovative solutions for rough sleeping have been widely celebrated and attracted senior ministerial visits to illustrate the commitment to supporting all our residents in the borough, through the dedication of the Housing Options Service, along with partners, in Stafford to ensure that everyone can have a roof over their heads for the long term.

Moving forward, we are committed to preventing homelessness at the earliest opportunity and to work with our partners to develop focused creative and innovative solutions for those facing homelessness and rough sleeping in the Borough. This could not be achieved without building sufficient new homes, of all types and tenures, in the Borough to meet our developing need. This Homelessness and Rough Sleeping strategy sets the way forward and outlines the challenges we will be addressing along the way.

Councillor Jeremy Pert  
Cabinet Member for Community and Health

# The Housing Context

Stafford Borough Council is the local housing authority with the statutory function of providing housing advice and assistance and preventing and relieving homelessness. The Health and Housing Team comprises of Housing Options, Housing Standards and Health and Wellbeing who work closely to deliver joint outcomes to improve housing and health for residents in Stafford Borough.

In 2006, the Council's housing stock was transferred to Stafford and Rural Homes who are the main provider of social housing in the Borough, owning approximately 80% of the social housing stock. Stafford and Rural Homes have recently merged with Housing Plus; the stock transfer organisation for South Staffordshire and part of Shropshire, providing homes and care services across these areas.

In Stafford Borough there are approximately 8,100 social housing properties, with the delivery of new affordable homes exceeding the Local Plan targets in recent years.

The private rented sector in Stafford plays an increasingly important role in meeting housing need and preventing and relieving homelessness, accounting for approximately 13% of overall housing stock in the Borough.

Since the last homelessness strategy was published, a private sector access scheme has been developed, in partnership with private landlords to help people into this sector and to encourage private landlords to engage with the service.

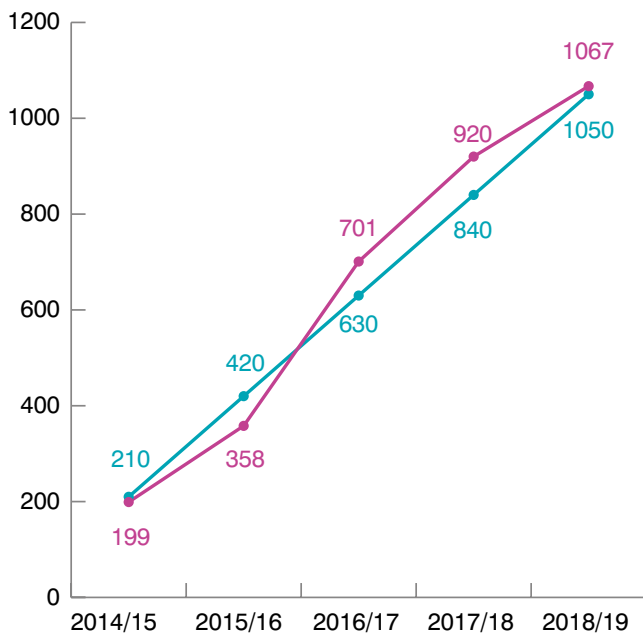
It is not lack of general needs accommodation that has been the driving force behind homelessness in Stafford.

It is recognised that households were either losing tenancies, or unable to access accommodation, due to unaddressed support needs. In 2018/2019, half of individuals approaching the housing options service as homeless, or threatened with homelessness, presented with at least one support need.

The graph below demonstrates a breakdown of the wide and varied support needs of individuals approaching, with 17% stating that they have a history of mental health problems.

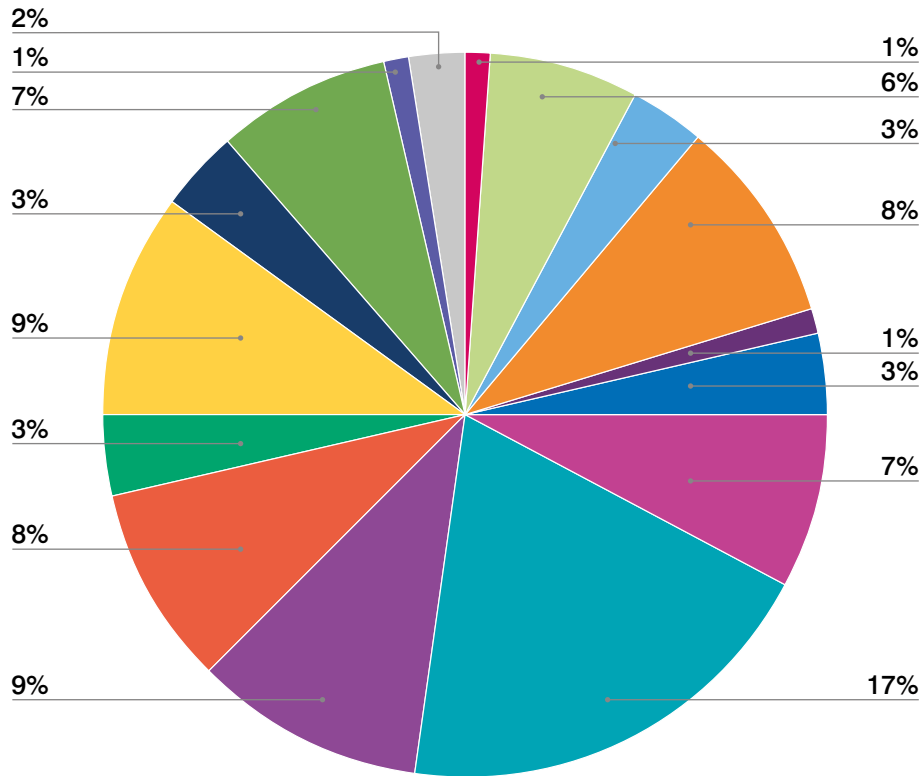
In this context, mental health problems include individuals lacking instrumental activities of daily living such as companionship, managing finance, medication and communicating with others.

## Affordable Housing Completions



■ Cumulative Target  
■ Cumulative Actual

## Support Needs of Homeless Applicants



1% Access to education, employment or training

6% Alcohol dependency needs

3% At risk of/has experienced abuse (non-domestic)

8% At risk of/has experienced domestic abuse

1% At risk of/has experienced sexual abuse/exploitation

3% Care leaver

7% Drug dependency needs

17% History of mental health problems

9% History of repeat homelessness

8% History of rough sleeping

3% Learning disability

9% Offending history

3% Old age

7% Physical ill health and disability

1% Young parent requiring support to manage independently

2% Young person aged 18-25 years requiring support to manage independently

# Stafford Housing Context

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### Stafford is the least affordable district in Staffordshire

for home ownership, with average house prices 6.7 times average salary



Ministry of Defence

### Stafford is a military town

and home to a Ministry of Defence base at Beaconside Barracks;



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### Shortfall of up to 21%

between lower quartile rent prices and local housing allowance rates in the private rented sector;

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### The University of Staffordshire relocated to Stoke-on-Trent (2016)

reducing the demand for student accommodation and increasing the supply of houses in multiple occupation.



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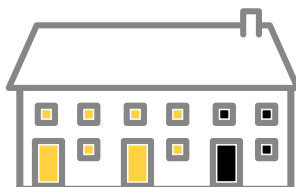
### Employment rates are high

at 8.3% above national average.



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Although supply of housing hasn't been the driving cause behind homelessness, there are emerging challenges that need to be addressed.



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### Long term empty homes

equate to approximately 1% of dwelling stock

There are increasing waiting times for certain sizes of social property, especially one bedroom self-contained flats and, local housing allowance hasn't kept up with private rents, making much of that sector unaffordable for people on a low income.

In relation to the support issues already detailed, there is a continuing need for supported accommodation for people with higher level needs.

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### People aged 65 and over

are forecast to increase by 35% by 2040, making this the fastest growing group in the Borough;



A challenge for the housing service is that many people are presenting with significant needs, but those needs are not high enough to trigger statutory intervention from other services within the Borough.

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# Challenges

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Identifying and understanding the challenges to resolving homelessness is crucial to the delivery of the revised strategy and the future delivery of the Housing Options Service to support this. Stafford Borough Council works closely with partners from a wide range of organisation to provide insight and, where possible, solutions to the key challenges outlined below:

## Crisis Based Intervention

The loss of accommodation is often the tangible factor that drives an individual or household to address their housing and support needs. In 2018/2019, 60% of homeless applications were dealt with once the household had no legal right to occupy their property or where it was no longer reasonable for them to continue to live there. At this point, it is more difficult to assist households to remain in their home and provide a planned approach to address their wider support needs that may have resulted in the loss of accommodation. In such situations, households can have limited housing options available resulting in increased use of emergency accommodation.

Households facing crisis are more likely to experience negative impacts on their mental health and emotional wellbeing, education achievements, ability to maintain and sustain employment and puts pressure on personal and family relationships. Encouraging households to present at the earliest opportunity will reduce the pressures associated with crisis-based intervention.

## Support Provision

In the last 4 years there has been a loss of supported accommodation and floating support in the Borough, including the loss of a specialist provision for young people and pregnant women. Close partnership working with Midland Heart has resulted in Eagle House, a 32 bed unit of supported accommodation for single homeless remaining open for individuals with low support needs.

There is no accommodation in Stafford for individuals with multiple and complex needs at risk of or experiencing homelessness.

The provision of floating support to individuals with medium to high level support needs have been withdrawn as part of the process of refocusing public expenditure. This has presented challenges as these services provided regular support within the community to enable households to maintain their tenancies. Where support needs are not addressed, they become more complex and intertwined which can result in the loss of accommodation and greater long term costs at point of crisis.

Against this backdrop has been the successful opening in 2016 of Forward House, a Woman's Refuge providing twelve purpose built apartments for families fleeing domestic abuse. This outstanding provision is designed to enable families with high level needs to be accommodated.

## Welfare Reform

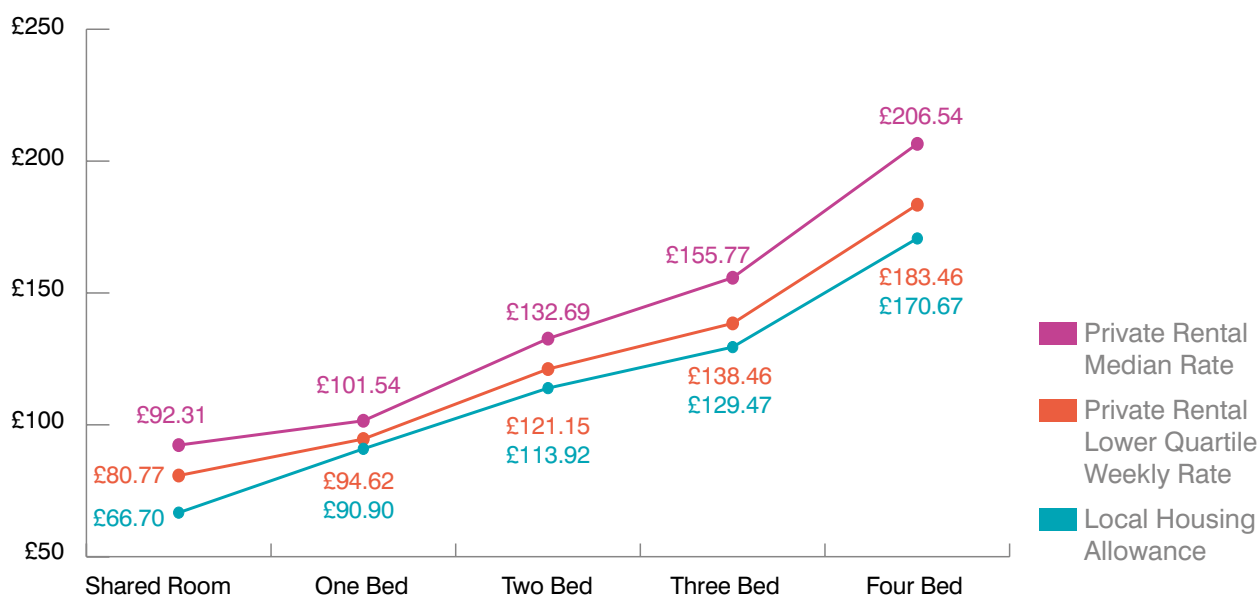
Changes in welfare benefits places pressures in finding suitable, affordable properties for households on a low income.

Universal Credit roll-out commenced in Stafford in November 2018 and affects those who are experiencing a change of circumstances.

In 2018/2019 this amounted to 277 homeless applicants (53% of homeless applicants) who would have been required to transition onto the new benefit following an offer of accommodation. Transition onto a new benefit, at a time when you are dealing with the challenges of having been homeless, is particularly difficult.

The under-occupancy charge and the benefit cap remain a challenge in Stafford Borough with considerable demand for one bedroom self-contained accommodation.

## Disparity Between Local Housing Allowances and Private Rental Rates, February 2020



## Managing Expectations

Customer expectations of what the Housing Options Service provides can exceed the statutory function as a Local Housing Authority; this in turn can cause challenges in relation to prevention activities and offers of suitable accommodation; particularly where households have unrealistic expectations of particular types of social housing in particular areas. The Housing Options Service work closely with households experiencing homelessness, along with partners, to manage those expectations and empower households to address their housing and support needs in the social or private rented sector, reflecting the available properties within the Borough.

## Private Rented Sector

Local Housing Allowance presents a challenge to accessing private rented properties for low income households in Stafford. For single people (under 35) there is a 21% disparity between lower quartile rent prices and local housing allowance rates which makes private renting unaffordable, particularly for young

people on a low income. The graph above demonstrates average rent compared to local housing allowance rate for different property sizes.

## Social Housing

Stafford Borough Council has strong working partnerships with local Housing Associations, who provide safe and secure homes for households. Each Housing Association operating in the Borough have different lettings criteria, with most having requirements that a household is ready to take on a tenancy and has the necessary support in place for them to maintain that tenancy. They will only let to households who are able to afford the rent. Households who are facing homelessness, for a variety of complicated factors including previous rent arrears and tenancy breaches, can find it difficult to access social housing which in turn results in an overreliance on the private rented sector. Relying on the private rented sector has a cyclical impact on homelessness, with the loss of private sector accommodation being one of the main causes of homelessness within the Borough.



# Our Priorities

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The Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy has six key priorities to address the challenges identified above. These priorities have emerged from a detailed evidence review on homelessness and housing and have been refined following consultation with a wide range of partners and the public.

The key priorities reflect the holistic nature of housing services in Stafford Borough - recognising that housing and support needs are intrinsically linked, whilst not losing sight of our statutory function as a local housing authority, to provide housing advice and assistance and to take reasonable steps to secure, or obtain, accommodation for households who are homeless or threatened with homelessness.

All priorities are focused on addressing the underlying causes of homelessness and preventing homelessness at the earliest opportunity, ultimately reducing the use of emergency accommodation and numbers of repeat cases accessing the housing options service.

The priorities are:

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**1 | Early Help and Prevention**

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**2 | Empowerment**

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**3 | Rough Sleeper Pathway**

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**4 | Robust Partnerships**

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**5 | Expanding Housing Options**

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**6 | Sustainment**

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# 1

## Key Priority 1

# Early Help and Prevention

Early help and Prevention is a commitment to working with partners to further understand the root causes of homelessness and upstream prevention to the earliest possible opportunity.

Homelessness has a detrimental impact not just on a person's ability to secure accommodation but also on a person's physical and mental health, finances, relationships and emotional wellbeing and employment. Upstreaming homeless prevention reduces the significant impact of homelessness on an individual and, in addition, reduces pressures on partner agencies across all sectors.

Early intervention is embedded within Stafford Borough, it is recognised within our Corporate Business Objectives and this has been demonstrated by the achievement of the Housing Options Team in being awarded Gold Standard for Homeless Prevention. Since 2015, when the last homelessness strategy was written, Stafford Borough Council has seen increasing numbers of homeless preventions both from the Housing Options Team and partners.

The graph below shows partnership homeless prevention by different interventions. Citizens Advice provides independent housing and legal advice as well as budgeting support in the Borough, all helping to prevent homelessness where possible. The self-assessment tool is an advice portal on Stafford Boroughs website, where people can get immediate housing advice specific to their situation. Discretionary Housing Payments are a critical tool in preventing homelessness to help people who claim housing benefit or get the housing element of universal credit and are struggling to pay the rent to get an additional payment to cover the rent where a household has a short term shortfall. In addition, the Sanctuary Scheme, provides practical safety measures to prevent homelessness among victims of domestic abuse, allowing victims to remain in their home where it is safe for them to do so.

Homeless prevention has become firmly embedded within the statutory function of the Housing Options Service as a direct result of changes in government policy and the introduction of the Homeless Reduction Act 2017. Stafford Borough Council welcomes this legislation and has been championing this approach for some time. The Housing Options Service is

pragmatic and evolved to address new challenges facing homelessness.

The Housing Options Service has worked to prevent homelessness as far upstream as possible by upskilling and working closely with the community and in particular the faith sector, recognising such organisations can often pick up on the pressures a household faces at a very early stage. The importance of early intervention is reflected in the Housing Options Service's response to the new Duty to Refer which has been expanded to include all partner agencies within the Borough ensuring the Service is easily accessible for the public and professionals.

The main causes of homelessness in Stafford Borough are eviction from a private sector tenancy (mostly due to Landlords selling their properties), family/ friend eviction and loss of accommodation as a result of domestic abuse. The Housing Options Service are committed to addressing the causes of homelessness, for example, by promoting healthy relationships through joint working with providers of domestic abuse support services and through wider Councils programmes that include delivering workshops in local schools.

The Housing Options Service work closely with the Housing Standards Team (who form part of the wider Health and Housing Team) to develop relationships with private sector landlords; providing opportunity for new tenancies and improving standards of accommodation in the sector. Both teams support the delivery of the well-attended Private Sector Landlord Forum which provides information and guidance to private sector landlords within the Borough and is run in conjunction with the National Landlords Association (NLA).

The Housing Options Service is committed to continually improving its understanding of the core drivers behind homelessness within Stafford Borough through data and information sharing with partners, with a specific focus on young people and care leavers to address the early causes of homelessness. Building a comprehensive understanding of the

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drivers behind homelessness allows the Service to target early interventions at individuals and households who are most likely to be at risk of homelessness.

Appropriate support, received at the earliest opportunity can enable households to either remain in their home, where it is safe and reasonable to do so, or to undertake a planned move before homelessness occurs - allowing the household, along with Housing Options Officers and relevant partners to explore alternative and innovative solutions to prevent homelessness, often through mediation and dispute resolution.

The Homeless Forum, chaired by Stafford Borough Council, provides an opportunity for cross-sector partners to promote early help and intervention for those at risk of homelessness. Emerging changes, including the Homeless Reduction Act and Universal Credit Roll-Out have been a focus for the Homeless Forum, providing opportunities for upskilling amongst partners to identify early causes of homelessness and the strengthening of referral pathways.

Stafford Borough Council supports a number of projects that help to prevent or address the causes of homelessness including:

- › Homeless Education in Schools which shows students the reality of homelessness and how easy it can be to lose a tenancy. This homelessness module is part of a wider education in schools programme which considers issues around healthy relationships, drug and alcohol misuse and budgeting - all of which are essential in maintaining a successful tenancy;
- › Commissioned early intervention for alcohol and substance misuse and mental health outreach services in targeted areas;
- › Sanctuary Scheme to enable victims of domestic abuse to remain in their own home where it is safe for them to do so;
- › Discretionary Housing Payment provides households experiencing financial difficulty with temporary relief whilst they take steps to resolve their situation, this is linked to referrals to Building Better Opportunities, getting people on the journey towards training or work;

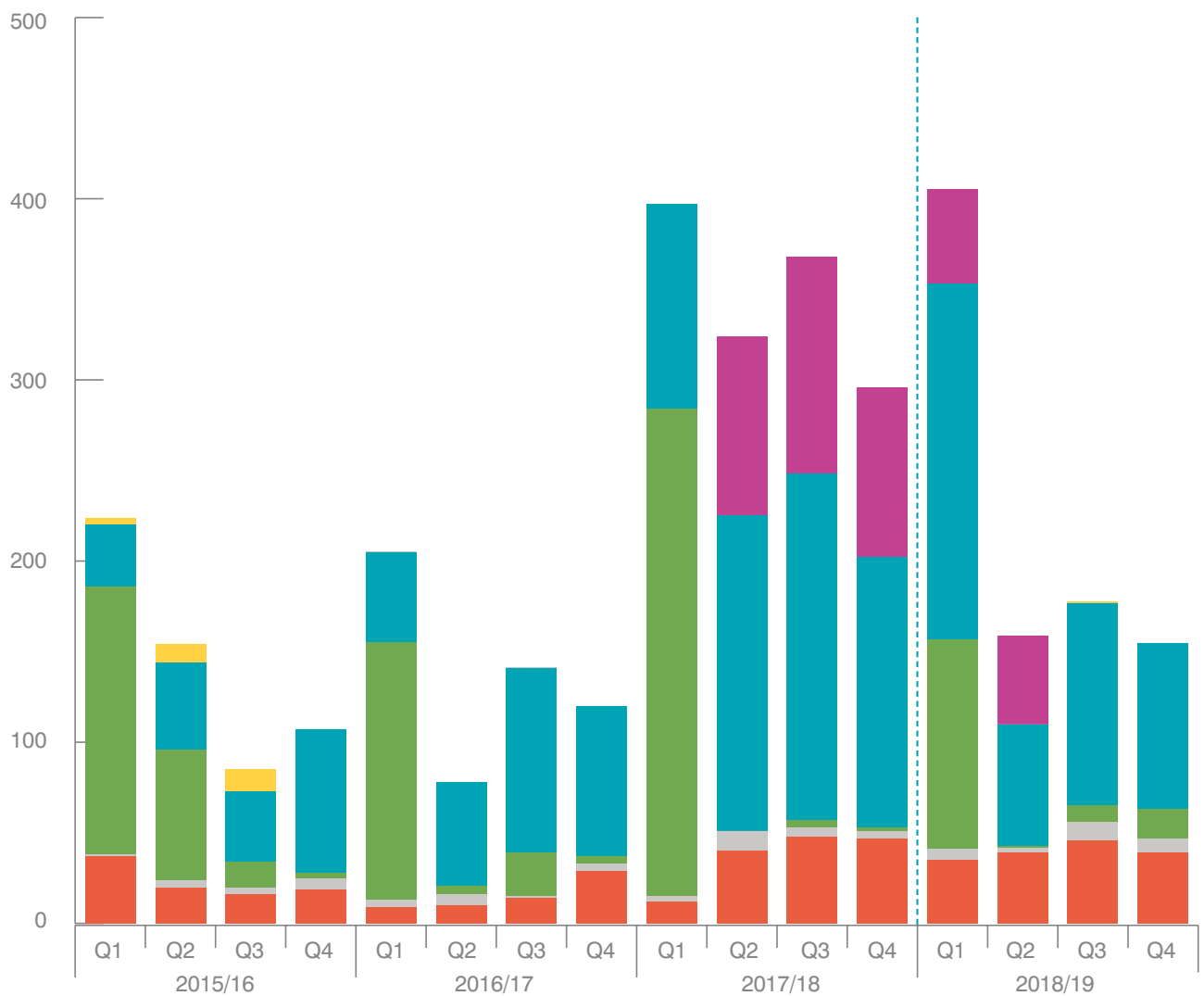
- › Funding for Citizens Advice Prevention and Advice Service;
- › 'Resolve' provides early preventative services for drug and alcohol misuse;
- › Foodbank Forum that coordinates local foodbanks within the area, sharing food and best practice around support and advice.
- › Healthy relationships workshops in local schools.

## Actions

- › Maintain an accessible and approachable housing options service, responsive to customer needs ranging from outreach work to promoting the Housing Options Self-Assessment Tool;
- › Ensure partners and other agencies refer people at risk of being homeless at the earliest opportunity in line with the Duty to Refer;
- › The voluntary sector is essential in preventing and relieving homelessness. Ensure their contribution is recognised and they have all the tools and skills they need to assist the council in fulfilling this critical role.
- › Review joint working protocols in line with legislative and policy changes, particularly in relation to Armed Forces and Prison Leavers;
- › Improve data sharing to target homeless preventions, particularly in relation to young people and care leavers.
- › Explore further training opportunities for mediation and dispute resolution for the Housing Options Team as part of a commitment to enabling households to remain in their current accommodation where possible;
- › Early prevention incentives to be included within the Allocation Policy that promotes the use of planned moves as opposed to homeless crisis intervention.
- › Evaluate and where successful recommission homeless prevention projects in line with evidenced need.

## Homeless Preventions by Type of Action

- Housing Options Officer
- Sanctuary Scheme
- Discretionary Housing Payment
- Citizens Advice Bureau
- Rough Sleeper Outreach
- Self Assessment Tool
- - - Change in CAB Reporting



# 2

## Key Priority 2

# Empowerment

Empowerment is a commitment to improving the resilience of households experiencing homelessness and to enable personal responsibility for housing and support needs.

The Housing Options team have the skills and interventions to prevent and relieve homelessness; however, in order to secure sustainable housing, it is vital that individuals and families work with the team to help improve their own situation. This can be challenging when people are experiencing highly stressful, crisis situations and may have a distrust of public services. By encouraging personal responsibility and empowering an individual, better results will be achieved, not just in preventing homelessness, but also in sustaining a tenancy and ending the cycle of repeat homelessness.

Encouraging personal responsibility for housing is about recognising that maintaining a tenancy, including rent payments, looking after a property and gatekeeping against difficult visitors is essential. This is particularly challenging when households have complex and intertwined support needs.

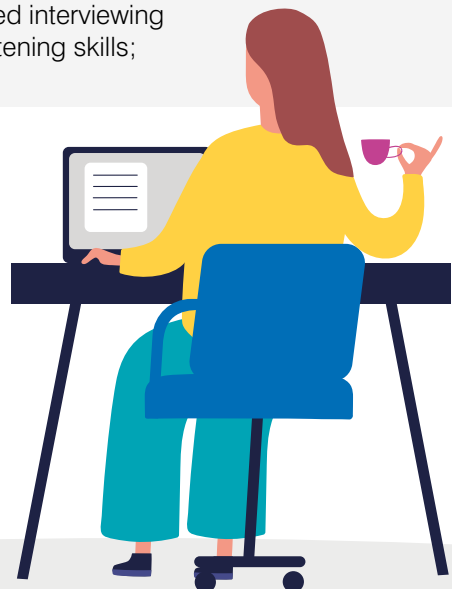
In 2018/2019, nearly half of homeless applicants approaching the service had unaddressed support needs that impacted on their ability to secure long-term accommodation, these included mental health problems, drug and alcohol misuse and outstanding rent arrears and debt issues. Whilst these needs remain unaddressed, the cycle of homelessness continues - with people often finding that their complex support needs exclude them from the services that they need the most to help them. In addition, individuals with support needs are less likely to engage with services, as demonstrated in 2018/2019, where 20% of homeless applications were closed due to lack of engagement, despite continued efforts from the Housing Options Officers.

The Housing Options Team are dedicated to providing an approachable, accessible housing options service that encourages personal resilience - enabling people to address challenges and have the skills to resolve a housing or support crisis should it occur again. This is not something achieved through Housing Options alone but requires a cross-sector response, from both statutory and community organisations.

Households assessed as homeless are issued with their own tailored Personalised Housing Plan that provides clear steps to address their housing and support needs, involving relevant partner agencies where appropriate.

### Actions

- › Commitment to providing a flexible, supportive face-to-face appointment service for households who are homeless or at risk of homelessness or present with a complex housing need;
- › Targeted assistance for those who need more support in taking steps outlined in their Personalised Housing Plan;
- › Use of the online Self-Assessment Tool as a means of empowering households to address their own housing issues;
- › Review Stafford Borough Council's Housing Options webpage to ensure that information is clear and easily accessible;
- › Invest in staff training in psychologically informed interviewing and listening skills;



# 3

## Key Priority 3

# Rough Sleeper Pathway

The Rough Sleeper Pathway is a commitment to clear processes to enable rough sleepers to access support and sustainable accommodation.

Rough sleeping is the most severe and visible form of homelessness, often the manifestation of complex support needs that, unless addressed, will impact on an individual's ability to access and sustain housing.

Although the number of rough sleepers in Stafford is small, rough sleeping is the most complex and resource intensive part of the service. In 2018/2019, 70% of rough sleepers presented with symptoms of dual diagnosis (substance misuse and mental health related support needs), with the result that they were often being passed between multiple public sector agencies and finding it difficult to access main stream support. Intertwined and complex needs become the controlling factors in an individual's life and without resolving these it is difficult for housing to be the priority, resulting in challenges in maintaining a long-term tenancy and accessing general housing services.

There has been significant success in tackling rough sleeping in Stafford, with official figures being halved since 2016 with low numbers of rough sleeper sustained into 2019.

In summer of 2016, unofficial estimates put the number of people rough sleeping over 40 in the Borough. By November 2016, the official estimate recorded 15 people rough sleeping in the Borough.

In 2017, the figure had halved to 7 rough sleeping and in 2018, this level of 7 was sustained; only one person at the 2017 estimate was still on the streets the following year.

Early indications of the 2019 figure suggest this has further reduced.

Low levels of rough sleepers has not been achieved by Stafford Borough Council alone, instead it has been the result of a number of partnerships and commitments from agencies within the Borough, including rough-sleeper grant funded projects. The Housing Options Service works closely with the Vulnerabilities Hub in order to maintain an accurate and detailed list of people known to agencies to be rough sleeping, or at risk of rough sleeping, with information shared regarding support needs. Having

such a detailed knowledge of rough sleepers in the area on a weekly basis enables an individually targeted Rough Sleeper Pathway to be developed.

Stafford Borough Council has taken a proactive approach to tackling rough sleeping by utilising funding opportunities to develop projects targeted at addressing both the housing and wider support needs of entrenched rough sleepers, including being a pilot authority for Housing First and having a rapid response for individuals accessing emergency weather provisions.

The Community Matron for the Homeless, initially funded through the Rough Sleeper Initiative, has attracted national recognition for specialist health and social care for individuals who are rough sleeping, or at risk of rough sleeping, promoting social inclusion and tenancy sustainment.

There have been recognised cross-sector benefits to this role which has since been funded by the Midlands Partnership Foundation Trust (MPFT). This strong partnership has made it possible to appoint a Rough Sleeper Initiative Dual Diagnosis Worker who enables access to housing for individuals with substance misuse and mental health problems.

Addressing an individual's wider support needs can make it easier to access housing but for some people, particularly those who may be institutionalised with complex needs, this isn't enough and there is still a requirement for accommodation based support.

Working with partners such as the Community Matron for the Homeless, has upskilled the Housing Options Service, highlighting the importance of rapid response and system change approaches for rough sleepers. In order to support this systems change approach, Stafford Borough Council have developed the Inclusion Team which is a weekly multi-agency drop-in for rough sleepers to address specific needs on the spot, without the requirement to attend separate appointments.

The Inclusion Team is attended by key partners such as mental health, substance misuse, job centre plus and probation, and provides rough sleepers with a

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single support plan enabling a cross-sector response to housing and support needs. There has been significant strategic and operational support for the Inclusion Team, from all agencies, including Stafford and Rural Homes who have taken proactive steps to house rough sleepers who have a single support package in place.

Building on this approach, the Housing Options Service has recently collaborated with MEAM (Making Every Adult Matter) recognising the requirements of a cross-sector systems change approach for the most vulnerable in Stafford.

Supporting the work of the Inclusion Team, the Housing Options Service organise partnership outreach initiatives such as fortnightly walkabouts with the local policing team.

The rapport and knowledge of the local policing team and assertive outreach approach has provided greater understanding of rough sleepers and has helped address wider issues of community safety and street begging.

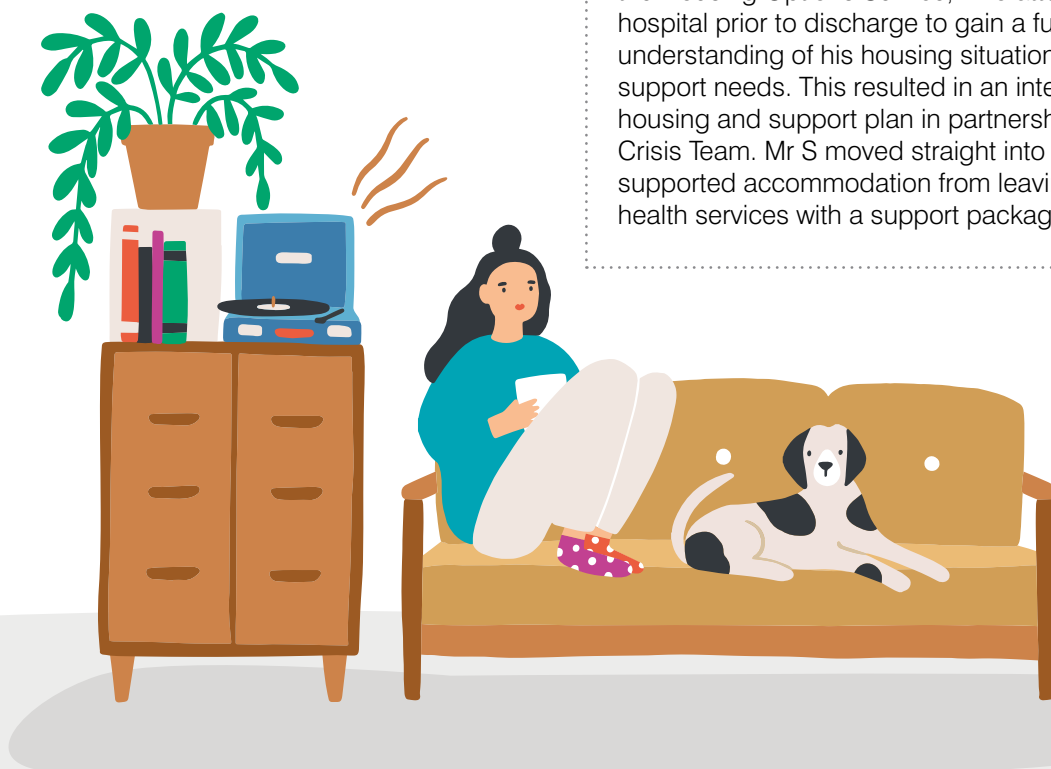
The challenge continues to be stopping new people becoming street homeless making upstreaming the rough sleeper pathway vital.

In 2018/2019, the Housing Options Service assisted 96 individuals who were sofa-surfing and at risk of rough sleeping. Continued development of the Rough Sleeping Pathway will respond to the needs of sofa-surfers, addressing both housing and support needs.

This will be done by utilising resources of all partners; ensuring pathways that take an individual from rough sleeping (or risk of rough sleeping) into sustainable long-term accommodation with support are clear and accessible for both professionals and the individuals accessing the service.

### Case Study

Mr S had a history of repeat homelessness and rough sleeping. At the time, Mr S was accessing in-patient mental health services and was due to be discharged. The mental health team informed the Housing Options Service, who attended hospital prior to discharge to gain a full understanding of his housing situation and support needs. This resulted in an integrated housing and support plan in partnership with the Crisis Team. Mr S moved straight into suitable supported accommodation from leaving mental health services with a support package in place.







## Case Study

Stafford Borough Council's Streetscene team are an essential partner in tackling rough sleeping. They work early mornings and late evenings and often check on rough sleepers to ensure they are well.

This team are frequently the first to identify someone new to the streets. They build up good relationships with rough sleepers and can broker contact between the Options Team and an individual.

These relationships have been used further in one instance where Streetscene welcomed a previous rough sleeper into their team while he was in temporary accommodation to provide him with work experience and daily routine.

## Actions

- › Commitment to maintaining a flexible, proactive service with a daily rough sleeper drop in.
- › Utilise existing resource for partnership Rough Sleeper Outreach, for example through Streetscene and the Local Policing Team, ensuring the benefits of joint working are recognised and celebrated locally;
- › Promote rapid response and assertive outreach for rough sleepers, both within the Housing Options Team and the Vulnerabilities Hub, based on peer learning from partner services;
- › Utilise Government funding to establish projects for rough sleepers; particularly in relation to dual diagnosis;
- › Explore options for high level supported accommodation;
- › Explore options for young person's accommodation and support to reduce the risk of them becoming the rough sleepers of tomorrow;
- › Review support services for Rough Sleepers, including provisions for tenancy sustainment.
- › Review current Severe Weather Emergency Protocol provision with continued focus on rapid response and move on;
- › Work in partnership with Making Every Adult Matter (MEAM) to further develop the work of the Stafford Inclusion Team and promote a whole system change approach for rough sleepers;
- › Refresh Stafford Borough's Allocation Policy to be responsive to the needs of rough sleepers.



# 4

## Key Priority 4

# Robust Partnerships

**Robust partnerships is a commitment to creating and developing partnerships in order to address underlying causes of homelessness and promote sustainable tenancies.**

No single organisation can prevent or relieve homelessness. Enabling individuals and households to access and sustain accommodation requires a cross-sector response; recognising that housing is one of many social and economic factors that can result in homelessness.

Robust partnerships are required for all housing authorities, but are particularly poignant for Stafford Borough Council which does not have its own housing stock and is dependent on Housing Associations, particularly Stafford and Rural Homes to fulfil our statutory function and provide access to properties through Nomination Agreements.

Stafford Borough Council is part of a two tier system local authority where the Borough have the housing duties and Staffordshire County Council have responsibilities for services that have a direct impact on homelessness including domestic abuse, adult social care, substance misuse and children's services. Partnership working is critical both in resolving current issues but also in providing strategic direction to reduce the knock on impact of homelessness.

There are areas of good practice most recently in relation to the provision of substance misuse services and support for care leavers.

In order for strategic partnerships to work, there must be robust protocols and procedure agreed by operational leads as well as close day to day relationships between the teams.

The Housing Options Service have long established partnerships that have been formed over a number of years and emerging partnerships that are formed as the team respond to changes in homelessness.

Partnerships have been maintained through forums, namely the Homelessness Forum and Vulnerabilities Hub which are underpinned by a shared approach to how we tackle emerging issues, with clear roles and responsibilities for each partner involved.

Going forward service protocols need to remain relevant and will be updated to reflect new pressures

on services and changes in housing legislation and policy on both a local and national level, as demonstrated by the establishment of the Adult Safeguarding and Homelessness Protocol.

It is a priority for Stafford Borough Council to continue developing and strengthening robust partnerships in order to ensure that the Housing Options Team is best equipped to support those most vulnerable within the Borough.

Stafford Borough Council chair the County-wide Housing Policy Officers Group, which brings all districts together to address cross cutting issues. Stafford Borough Council also represents the districts on a number of countywide priorities that relate to homelessness, for example, the Drug and Alcohol Strategy commissioning group and the Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) strategic board.

### Actions

- › Commitment to providing a flexible, supportive face-to-face appointment service for households who are homeless or at risk of homelessness or present with a complex housing need;
- › Targeted assistance for those who need more support in taking steps outlined in their Personalised Housing Plan;
- › Use of the online Self-Assessment Tool as a means of empowering households to address their own housing issues;
- › Review Stafford Borough Council's Housing Options webpage to ensure that information is clear and easily accessible;
- › Invest in staff training in psychologically informed interviewing and listening skills;



## Case Study

Ms T had lived independently in a remote, rural area of the Borough. She was close to, but not at pensionable age when she faced a change of circumstances which meant she needed to claim Universal Credit.

Ms T did not want to accept any assistance from public services, wishing to continue living independently. Rent arrears started to increase and the housing provider was left with no choice but to start possession proceedings that would have resulted in her losing her home.

The housing provider raised these concerns during a multi-agency meeting, resulting in the Housing Options Service visiting Ms T to offer support in addressing her rent arrears to enable her to remain in her home.

Repeatedly Ms T refused any assistance, however with the persistence of the Tenancy Sustainment Officer, who would visit outside office hours to try and get her to engage the officer managed to gain her trust and successfully completed a claim for Universal Credit.

The Work Coaches assisted in applying for direct payments to the Landlord, along with deductions for outstanding rent arrears and made changes to her Claimant Commitment in light of her current situation.

Ms T is now able to remain in her home, whilst receiving appropriate welfare benefits and support as a result of robust partnership working across agencies within Stafford.



# 5

## Key Priority 5

# Expanding Housing Options

Expanding housing options is a commitment to providing suitable and sustainable options to resolve housing issues for households who are homeless or threatened with homelessness.

The Housing Options Service extends beyond the provision of social housing. The Service has a wide range of interventions to enable households to remain in their current home and, where this is not possible, to provide alternative housing.

Since 2017, Stafford Borough Council have managed a list of households in housing need, with almost half of households on the list requiring a one bedroom property. Households who are homeless, or threatened with homelessness, amounts to three quarters of the people in housing need. To address the demand on social housing in Stafford, the Housing Options Service must explore alternative options to prevent and relieve homelessness, including mediation and looking at other forms of housing tenure such as shared ownership and the private rented sector (where appropriate).

The Housing Options Service are continually looking to source new skills and approaches to expand housing options which can include mediation and prevention tools, debt advice and assistance along with training and employment schemes; with a focus of enabling people to remain in their homes. The Housing Options team is part of a wider Health and Housing service that delivers Disabled Facilities Grants, brings Empty Homes back into use, enforces housing standards and licenses HMOs. Close working with the wider team provides many housing opportunities and methods of preventing homelessness.

Where remaining at home is not possible, the Service works closely with landlords across all sectors to provide suitable offers of accommodation and promote the continued development of affordable homes. The Housing Options Service have nomination agreements with all social landlords in the Borough, along with a private sector access scheme that enables the service to provide suitable options of accommodation for households in housing need. It is recognised that Stafford has an ageing population therefore ensuring options for housing are appropriate to that demographic is a priority for the Housing

Options Service. Equally, 25% of homeless applications are made by people under 25 years of age, so it is essential to ensure the needs of young people are met.

Households facing homelessness often have barriers to accessing accommodation, as a result of failed tenancies, low income or outstanding debt, amongst other factors. The Housing Options Service works with households to remove these barriers by developing support packages, both with external agencies and our Tenancy Sustainment Officer.

Removing barriers to housing takes time and supported accommodation can provide a vital stepping stone, particularly for vulnerable households. Without available and appropriate supported accommodation, including refuge provision, there is a risk of over-reliance on temporary accommodation. Housing options that are suitable and accessible are required to address all forms of homelessness, from upstream prevention to rough sleeper intervention. The team continue to explore alternative methods of preventing and relieving homelessness through revising the Allocation Policy, along with reviewing Supported Accommodation provision within the Borough, to promote best use of housing for the most vulnerable within Stafford.



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## Actions

- › Explore further training options for mediation and conflict resolution for the Housing Options Team;
- › Support delivery of affordable homes as required in the Local Plan each year;
- › Evaluate and review the Private Rented Sector Access Scheme, including use of houses in multiple occupation.
- › Update Stafford Borough Council's Allocation Policy following the Homeless Review and recent legislative and policy changes;
- › Support provision of accommodation for older people through the Local Plan and review current sheltered accommodation provision in the Borough;
- › Review provision of high-level supported accommodation in Stafford;
- › Commitment to supporting Staffordshire Woman's Aid Refuge provision and continued funding of the Sanctuary Scheme to enable victims of domestic abuse to remain in their home where it is safe to do so.
- › Support delivery of Empty Homes Strategy;
- › Explore options to better support young people at risk of homelessness
- › Raise awareness of Disabled Facility Grants and how they can be used to prevent homelessness.



# 6

## Key Priority 6

# Sustainment

Sustainment is a commitment to long-term tenancies that enable individuals to access support services, integrate into the local community and access training and employment.

The vast majority of people do not require any housing support, but for the small minority, support can be a vital lifeline to getting into and keeping long term sustainable housing. Helping an individual or household to find accommodation is just the first step. It is sustaining that accommodation that can be the equal or even greater challenge. In 2018/2019, 20% of homeless casework was as a result of repeat homelessness, with the majority from the private rented sector.

Promoting long-term tenancies and reducing the revolving door impact of repeat homelessness requires continuation of housing related support beyond the offer of accommodation; enabling households to embed within local communities and build resilience and coping strategies to respond to crisis should it occur again.

Within Stafford, the Community Matron for the Homeless, along with the Tenancy Sustainment Officer, have the flexibility to continue to support homeless recovery beyond the provision of accommodation; enabling people to access vital healthcare services, benefits and budgeting support along with developing support networks with local community and faith groups that promote social inclusion.

Commissioned services who are already at capacity, such as the Community Matron, work closely with the voluntary and faith sector to assist households who have experienced homelessness to live independently. For example, much use is made of Rising Brook Baptist Church who provide practical support for households moving into accommodation through their furniture project along with holistic support and guidance through their drop in and community café.

For homes to be sustainable, offers of accommodation must be suitable for the household. The Housing Options Service work closely with commissioned services along with community and faith groups to provide suitable offers of accommodation, recognising the importance of local support services in sustaining long-term tenancies.

Households must want to take responsibility for their own home and this is more likely to happen if offers of accommodation are in places where they want to live, close to family or other support networks and close to education and employment opportunities.

## The role of the Tenancy Sustainment Officer

Stafford Borough Council have created a permanent Tenancy Sustainment Officer post which provides flexible and holistic support to enable the most vulnerable households to access and sustain accommodation. This role recognises that the first six months of tenancy are crucial in promoting long-term tenancy sustainment. The Tenancy Sustainment Officer assists with setting up bill and rent payments, budgeting, applying for welfare benefits and grant applications for furniture, white goods and carpets with outcomes focused on enabling households to live independently within the community.

Over a twelve month period, the Tenancy Sustainment Officer has supported 29 households to find and sustain accommodation, including eight rough sleepers with multiple and complex needs who had previously been refused accommodation. None of these households have since lost their accommodation.





The Community Matron

## Case Study

Mr F had been sofa surfing and rough sleeping for some time. He had a mental health diagnosis and history of drug misuse, along with poor physical health. He was struggling to access housing.

Mr F was placed in emergency accommodation whilst he worked closely with the Tenancy Sustainment Officer and the Community Matron to ensure he was accessing appropriate primary and secondary mental health care services, along with housing. Mr F was offered a social housing flat, with a package of support in place, to include regular home visits, assistance with welfare benefit appointments and assistance in maintaining health and substance recovery appointments.

Two years later Mr F is still in accommodation. The support package has been reduced but remains in place with fortnightly visits from the Tenancy Sustainment Officer. Mr F continues to access regular healthcare treatment that has enabled his recovery and helped sustained his tenancy. This ongoing tenancy support has reduced the costs to other partners and reduced crisis intervention.

## Actions

- › Commitment to suitability of accommodation assessments that recognise the social and support needs of applicants;
- › Commitment to continued support of the Community Matron for the Homeless (MPFT);
- › Map current tenancy support services provided by Housing Associations and community groups to enable individuals to access support services once in accommodation;
- › Support partners to apply for funding for Tenancy Sustainment and Resettlement Worker roles;
- › Partnership working with the Job Centre and Housing Providers to promote smooth transition onto Universal Credit and continued promotion of employment and training opportunities, for example through Building Better Opportunities.
- › Promote the support available and options to landlords interested in taking people made homeless into the Private Rented Sector, where appropriate, via the landlord forum and other engagements





# Governance and Delivery of the Strategy

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The Key Priorities within the Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy will be delivered and monitored through an action plan expanding on the commitments set out in this strategy to prevent and relieve homelessness in the next five years.

This will be led by the Health and Housing Team, but will require the active involvement of partners, recognising that resolving homelessness often goes beyond the provision of housing alone. The Homelessness Forum will monitor and evaluate the plan.

Stafford Borough's Corporate Plan commits to supporting households who are homeless or threatened with homelessness and quarterly performance reporting is provided for Cabinet and the Community Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee.

Over the past five years, the work undertaken has changed beyond all recognition and it is anticipated that a proactive and flexible approach will be required to respond to the evolving demands of the people within the Borough, as we continue on the journey to providing timely and suitable housing options for all so that no person is faced with a first night out rough sleeping.



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