

CABINET
4 MARCH 2025

PREVENTING HOMELESSNESS AND ROUGH SLEEPING STRATEGY 2025-2030

**Responsible Cabinet Member - Councillor Matthew Roche,
Health and Housing Portfolio**

**Responsible Director - Elizabeth Davison,
Executive Director - Resources and Governance**

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. To approve the Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2025-2030.

Summary

2. Section 1(1) of the Homelessness Act 2002 requires housing authorities to carry out a homelessness review for their area and formulate and publish a homelessness strategy based on the results of the review every five years.
3. Together with our partners, Darlington Borough Council has an excellent track record in tackling homelessness and rough sleeping in Darlington. Our previous Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy for 2019-2024 successfully delivered a number of aims and objectives to reduce homelessness and deliver the requirements of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.
4. However, over the past few years, and particularly since the Covid-19 pandemic, the Council has had to deal with a significant increase in demand for Homeless services. Whilst these services would normally work in a proactive way with clients to prevent homelessness, the increase in presentations and demand for temporary accommodation has meant that services have had to be more reactive to ensure that no-one is left homeless or having to rough sleep.
5. The Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2025-2030 has been developed with the support of local partners and organisations including Commissioning, Adult and Children's Services, Health, Probation, the Police, social and private landlords and the voluntary sector. It aims to be, not just a Council document, but one that is owned by partners and the people of Darlington.
6. The strategy sets out our long-term vision, which is simple yet ambitious:

- (a) To work in partnership to end homelessness in Darlington
- (b) That every resident in Darlington has a secure, affordable place to call home
- (c) That the right support is in place at the right time
- (d) Where homelessness occurs it is rare, brief and non-recurrent.

Recommendations

- 7. It is recommended that Cabinet:
 - (a) Note the content of this report, and
 - (b) Approve the Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2025-2030 at **Appendix 1**.

Reasons

- 8. The recommendations are supported by the following reasons:
 - (a) To ensure Darlington has a strategic and joined up approach to preventing and tackling homelessness and rough sleeping.
 - (b) The Homelessness Act 2002 requires housing authorities to carry out a homelessness review for their area and formulate and publish a homelessness strategy.

Elizabeth Davison
Executive Director - Resources and Governance

Background Papers

- (i) The Housing Act 1996
- (ii) The Homelessness Act 2002
- (iii) The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017

Council Plan	This report supports the Council Plan's HOMES priority to provide affordable and secure homes that meet the current and future needs of residents
Addressing inequalities	People experiencing homelessness can be amongst the most disadvantaged groups and therefore, reducing the risk of homelessness will have a positive impact on addressing inequalities
Tackling Climate Change	Investing in energy efficiency measures in tenant's homes will help to reduce utility bills and prevent homelessness due to affordability issues
Efficient and effective use of resources	This strategy aims to improve the quality and reduce the cost of temporary emergency accommodation, which will have a positive impact on those people affected by homelessness
Health and Wellbeing	There are significant benefits to health and wellbeing by reducing the risk of homelessness
S17 Crime and Disorder	Reducing the risk of homelessness should also have a positive impact on reducing crime and anti-social behaviour
Wards Affected	All wards are potentially affected
Groups Affected	Anyone who may be at risk of homelessness or rough sleeping
Budget and Policy Framework	This report does not recommend a change to the Council's budget or policy framework
Key Decision	This report does not represent a key decision
Urgent Decision	This report does not represent an urgent decision
Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	This report aims to reduce the risk of homelessness amongst young people and care leavers

MAIN REPORT

Information and Analysis

Background

9. Section 1(1) of the Homelessness Act 2002 requires housing authorities to carry out a homelessness review for their area and formulate and publish a homelessness strategy based on the results of the review every five years.
10. Together with our partners, Darlington Borough Council has an excellent track record in tackling homelessness and rough sleeping in Darlington. Our previous Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy for 2019-2024 successfully delivered a number of aims and objectives to reduce homelessness and deliver the requirements of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.
11. However, over the past few years, and particularly since the Covid-19 pandemic, the Council has had to deal with a significant increase in demand for Homeless services. Whilst these services would normally work in a proactive way with clients to prevent homelessness, the increase in presentations and demand for temporary accommodation has meant that services have had to be more reactive to ensure that no-one is left homeless or having to rough sleep.

The Council's Statutory Homeless Duties

12. The Council's statutory duties in relation to its homelessness services include the following:
 - (a) **A prevention duty:** the Council must take reasonable steps to prevent homelessness for any eligible household at risk of homelessness within 56 days, regardless of priority need. This can involve assisting them to stay in their current accommodation or helping them to find a new place to live.
 - (b) **A relief duty:** the Council must take reasonable steps to help a household to secure suitable accommodation. Help could be, for example, providing a bond guarantee, funding a rent deposit or working with a private landlord to make properties available.
 - (c) **Personal Housing Plans:** the Council must carry out a holistic assessment of the applicant's housing needs, support needs and the circumstances that led to them becoming homeless.
 - (d) **Main housing duty:** the Council's main housing duty is to provide temporary accommodation until such time as the duty is ended, either by an offer of settled accommodation or for another specified reason. In addition, we must be satisfied that the applicant is homeless and eligible for assistance, in priority need and not intentionally homeless.

Increases in Homelessness and Costs

13. As well as the pressures created since the Covid-19 pandemic, the lifting of the ban on section 21 (“no fault”) evictions in June 2021 has also created an increase in homeless presentations and requests for housing advice. In 2023-24, we received 1,357 presentations to the Housing Options service, compared to pre-Covid levels of 835 in 2019-20, an increase of 63%. **Table 1** below shows a breakdown of the reasons for homeless presentations and the percentage changes. The most common reasons for homeless presentations in 2023-24 have been because of:

- (a) Family and friends no longer willing to accommodate (32%)
- (b) People’s private tenancy coming to an end - served section 21 notice (18%)
- (c) Victims of domestic abuse (13%)
- (d) People leaving hospital or prison (12%)

Table 1 – Homeless presentation increases in 2023-24 compared to 2019-20

Reason for homeless presentation	2019-20	2023-24	Change
Family no longer willing to accommodate	232	306	+32%
End of Assured Shorthold Tenancy (section 21 notice)	152	238	+57%
Domestic abuse - victim	73	177	+142%
Leaving hospital/prison	51	169	+231%
Friends no longer willing to accommodate	114	128	+12%
Relationship with partner ended (non-domestic abuse)	82	80	-2%
Evicted from supported accommodation	27	60	+122%
End of social housing tenancy	28	51	+82%
Required to leave asylum seeker accommodation	13	34	+162%
End of non-Assured Shorthold Tenancy	16	23	+44%
Non-racially motivated violence or harassment	26	22	-15%
Property disrepair	6	14	+133%
Property no longer suitable due to ill health/disability	0	12	-
Mortgage repossession/arrears	10	11	+10%
Loss of Looked After Child placement	0	7	-
Fire/flood/emergency	5	5	0%
Domestic Abuse - Perpetrator	0	6	-
Loss of tied accommodation	0	4	-
Racially motivated violence or harassment	0	3	-
Homes for Ukraine sponsorship breakdown	0	2	-
Total	835	1,357	+63%

14. The main reasons given for family or friends no longer willing to accommodate in 2023-24 (the largest category) were:
- (a) Sofa surfing (so not a long-term option)
 - (b) Overcrowding
 - (c) Arguments
 - (d) The friends and family losing their accommodation
 - (e) Drug and alcohol use
 - (f) Benefits entitlement/tenancy rights affected.
15. As well as the increase in presentations, the nights spent in temporary accommodation has increased significantly (a 137% increase year on year in the first quarter of 2024-25), because of the difficulties to move people on to permanent settled accommodation.
16. **Table 2** below shows the number of households placed in temporary accommodation in 2023-24 (485) compared to pre-Covid levels in 2019-20 (174), an increase of 179%.

Table 2 – Homeless households placed in temporary accommodation in 2023-24 compared to 2019-20

	2019-20	2023-24	2024-25
April	7	40	32
May	8	39	40
June	13	42	37
July	11	32	40
August	22	53	43
September	18	37	29
October	16	29	
November	13	36	
December	15	43	
January	24	63	
February	14	45	
March	13	26	
Total	174	485	

17. **Table 3** below shows the number of nights spent in temporary accommodation in 2023-24 (9,616) compared to pre-Covid levels in 2019-20 (1,486), an increase of 547%. The nights spent in temporary accommodation for the first two quarters of 2024-25 is already 8,004 and is therefore on course to be over 16,000 for the year, over 10 times the level in 2019-20.

Table 3 – Nights spent in temporary accommodation in 2023-24 compared to 2019-20

	2019-20	2023-24	2024-25
April	65	529	923
May	74	494	1,337
June	93	454	1,246
July	234	624	1,413
August	241	709	1,738
September	176	847	1,347
October	65	526	
November	96	515	
December	91	949	
January	157	1,426	
February	47	1,287	
March	147	1,256	
Total	1,486	9,616	

18. The cost of temporary accommodation is paid for by our Housing Options service, and most of those costs are covered by Housing Benefit claims, paid by the Council. Any remaining costs can usually be met from the Government’s annual Homeless Prevention Grant.

19. The Council has a statutory duty to administer Housing Benefit on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). In most cases, Housing Benefit payments are fully subsidised by the DWP. However, in certain cases, such as temporary accommodation for homeless people and some supported accommodation, the DWP subsidy does not meet the full cost of the Housing Benefit paid. These are the claims that will not migrate to Universal Credit and so will remain the responsibility of the Council.

20. In 2019-20, we paid £214k in Housing Benefit for temporary accommodation and received £146k in subsidy from the DWP, leaving a shortfall of £68k. However, in 2023-24, we paid £897k in Housing Benefit for temporary accommodation and received £315k in subsidy from the DWP, leaving a shortfall of £582k. For 2024-25, the Housing Benefit subsidy loss is estimated to be £1.176m, of which £952k is due to homeless temporary accommodation.

The Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2025-2030

21. The Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2025-2030 is set within the framework of the legislation governing how we must exercise our statutory duties in relation to how we deal with homelessness, set out in paragraph 12.

22. Our strategy has been developed with the support of local partners and organisations including Commissioning, Adult and Children’s Services, Health, Probation, the Police, social and private landlords and the voluntary sector. It aims to be, not just a Council

document, but one that is owned by partners and the people of Darlington.

23. The strategy sets out our long-term vision, which is simple yet ambitious:
 - (a) To work in partnership to end homelessness in Darlington.
 - (b) That every resident in Darlington has a secure, affordable place to call home.
 - (c) That the right support is in place at the right time.
 - (d) Where homelessness occurs it is rare, brief and non-recurrent.

24. The co-produced six key priority areas to enable us to achieve this vision are:
 - (a) Working in partnership with charities and voluntary organisations, other social housing providers, Public Health and other statutory agencies to prevent homelessness.
 - (b) Tackling rough sleeping by implementing our agreed Rough Sleeper Plan.
 - (c) Increasing the amount and improving the quality of temporary accommodation.
 - (d) Addressing homelessness faced by particular groups of people, including those presenting with multiple or complex needs.
 - (e) Improving move on accommodation provision, including specialist housing and support provision.
 - (f) Securing funding to increase accommodation and resources.

25. Many people are already in crisis before they approach our homelessness service, therefore the strategy reflects the need to focus on prevention and early intervention. We want fewer people in Darlington to experience the trauma of homelessness and ensure that those who do, can find a settled home quicker.

26. The action plan contained within the strategy sets out the key actions required to deliver our six priority areas. The actions range from sourcing more, and better quality, temporary accommodation and move-on accommodation, working better with our key partners to help reduce homelessness, and providing accommodation to specific groups, particularly those presenting with multiple or complex needs.

Outcome of Consultation

27. A consultation exercise has taken place to seek a wide range of views on our draft Strategy. We received 91 responses to our public on-line survey, and the results are set out in **Appendix 2**, together with a summary of comments made.

Equalities considerations

28. The Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2025-2030 seeks to remove barriers which people can face in accessing housing and homelessness support.
29. People experiencing homelessness can have multiple disadvantages and it is important to identify when individuals require additional support and appropriate reasonable adjustments. This may include assisted communication or specific approaches and strategies that are known to be helpful to best engage and support the individual.
30. Where an applicant's first language is not English, we will provide interpreting services and publicise the availability of these services to residents and community organisations.
31. We will ensure all the priorities within the strategy meet the needs of all groups of people, in particular those who are the most marginalised in our communities. We will engage with our communities including people who have experienced homelessness and make sure current and future service provisions meet the need of our communities.