

## **Housing Services Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2025-2030**

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## **Introduction**

Everyone in Darlington should have a secure, affordable place to call home, and yet many are struggling to keep a roof over their heads. Our previous Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy made significant progress in helping our residents to stay in their homes, through early intervention and strong partnership working. However, more and more of our residents are now finding themselves homeless or at risk of becoming homeless, for many reasons and we recognise that the challenge of preventing homelessness and rough sleeping is both national and local.

This strategy sets out our ambition to meet these challenges, working in partnership with local providers to deliver better outcomes for our residents at risk of homelessness and to reduce rough sleeping. Such are the challenges with homelessness at present, that we cannot manage this on our own. We must seek to build upon relationships we have with the many local landlords and agencies who are committed to providing excellent and affordable housing.

Timely homelessness prevention advice and support at the earliest opportunity will also be critical and we need to make that advice easily accessible to anyone who needs it, as well as also being able to provide the accommodation that people need in an emergency. We are also aware how homelessness can be particularly difficult for families, and we need to ensure that children do not spend lengthy periods in temporary accommodation.

Many of those who are struggling with homelessness are now facing long periods awaiting re-housing, often in circumstances which are far from ideal, and it is important therefore that we do as much as possible to ensure they have the right support and decent living conditions. Ideally, homelessness should be rare, brief and non-recurring, but we recognise that much will need to be done to make progress with this ambition. With over 2,000 people awaiting re-housing on our Housing Register, we also recognise that we must plan the future supply of housing in Darlington.

Finally, I would like to thank all of you who contributed to developing this new strategy, including our residents, charities and voluntary organisations, Council staff, social housing providers and health services. You have told us what you think of our current work, and you have shared with us your ideas on how we can improve.

I would also like to thank everyone who works with us every day to help deliver the services that contribute to tackling homelessness and rough sleeping in Darlington.

**Councillor Matthew Roche**  
**Cabinet Member for Health and Housing**

## Vision

This strategy sets out a framework of broad priorities and key actions which we will work towards in achieving our vision for homelessness in Darlington.

Our long-term visions are simple yet ambitious:

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

We recognise that homelessness is complex and increasingly that creative and innovative responses are required.

We cannot tackle or prevent homelessness alone and this strategy has been prepared in partnership with other registered landlords, Council Members, statutory and voluntary sector agencies. Homelessness is not a single issue, and we all have a contribution to make and a role to play.

The co-produced 6 key priority areas to enable us to achieve this vision are:

- Working in partnership with charities and voluntary organisations, other social housing providers, Public Health and other statutory agencies to prevent homelessness.
- Tackling rough sleeping by implementing our agreed Rough Sleeper Plan.
- Increasing the amount and improving the quality of temporary accommodation.
- Addressing homelessness faced by particular groups of people, including those presenting with multiple or complex needs.
- Improving move on accommodation provision, including specialist housing and support provision.
- Securing funding to increase accommodation and resources.

This document provides a framework for public and voluntary organisations in Darlington to work together, with a common approach, to prevent homelessness and rough sleeping.

Many people are already in crisis before they approach a 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.

## Relevant Legislation

The Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeper Strategy has been developed in response to a number of legal duties and powers, and with regard to national and local policy.

### Homelessness Act 2002 and Housing Act 1996

While the Homelessness Act 2002 contains the strategic duties, the main operational legislation on homelessness is contained in the Housing Act 1996 (“the 1996 Act”). This includes a statutory definition of homelessness which broadly means that you may be legally homeless if:

- You have no legal right to live in accommodation anywhere in the world.
- You have a home but cannot get into it for some reason.
- It is not reasonable to stay in your home, for example because you are at risk of violence or abuse or because of affordability problems.
- You are forced to live apart from your family, or people you normally live with, because there is no suitable accommodation for you.
- You are living in very poor conditions, such as overcrowding.

### The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017

This Act made sweeping changes to the 1996 Act demonstrating the direction of government policy: towards a more collaborative approach between the local housing authority and the customer and also between public bodies, with a focus upon preventing homelessness rather than tackling it once it has happened. The key changes were:

- **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.
- **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.
- **Personal Housing Plans:** 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.
- **A Duty to Refer:** certain named public authorities must refer users of their service, who they have reason to believe are homeless or threatened with homelessness, to a local housing authority of the service user’s choice. The aim of this is to help people to get access to homeless services as soon as possible and ensure that people’s housing needs are considered when they come into contact with a range of public bodies.

### Rough Sleeper Strategy

The Government published a Rough Sleeper Strategy in August 2018 that lays out their commitment to halve rough sleeping by 2022 and end it by 2027. The work to deliver these aims is built around three core pillars:

- 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.

### Welfare Reform Act 2012

The major proposal for reform was the introduction of Universal Credit, which replaced the previous in and out of work benefits. Welfare reforms present ongoing challenges to households in receipt of benefits and to the organisations and individuals that house and support them. Most notably, since the introduction of Universal Credit, local authorities and social housing providers have reported its impact on claimants' ability to meet their household costs.

### The Domestic Abuse Act 2021

This Act addresses the needs of victims of domestic abuse, the act imposes a duty on the Council's to provide support in safe accommodation and that all eligible victims of domestic abuse have a priority need for assistance.

### The Care Act 2014

The Care Act set a strong expectation that agencies would work together to protect children, young adults and people with care and support needs.

### Children Act 1989

The Children Act sets out clear expectations on the requirement for suitable housing for 16- and 17-year-olds, looked after children and preparing care leavers for independent living. Subsequent guidance and case law has clarified how social and housing services should work together.

## **Current provision and achievements from the previous strategy**

Darlington Borough Council provides a dedicated Housing Options team within the Housing Services department and has strong links to other internal and external departments such as Social Services, Public Health, Police and Probation.

The Housing Options team provide a dedicated, specialist service which offers signposting, advice and support to individuals who are at risk of homelessness or who have become homeless. They work in line with current homeless legislation and provide free of charge information and advice relating to:

- Preventing homelessness.
- Securing long-term and short-term accommodation.
- The rights of homeless households or those threatened with homelessness.
- Services available to homeless households or those threatened with homelessness and how to access them.
- Domestic abuse services.
- Substance misuse services and support.
- Supported accommodation.

Darlington Borough Council have excellent links with the voluntary sector and organisations within the town who help support and deliver the achievements within the previous strategy.

We look forward to building upon this and creating new partnership working as a priority within this strategy. Details of all the help available and the agencies involved can be found in the [Housing Services – A guide to homelessness advice and support in Darlington leaflet](#) (link to follow)

Our achievements from the previous strategy include:

- Established an effective Duty to Refer process and ensured professional partners and agencies are aware of this process.
- Improved our needs assessments to ensure it helps us to address individuals' issues.
- Improved the information available on the Darlington Borough Council website.
- Increased the use of social media and other digital platforms (podcasts) to ensure homeless persons have access to the right information easily.
- Collaborated with local hospitals to reduce homelessness issues from hospital discharges.
- Reduced the risk of young people becoming homeless through establishing positive support pathways for young people with colleagues in Childrens Services.
- Created a specialist Mental Health Officer post within the Housing Options team to work with Mental Health services to improve support to those households.
- Introduced a new, easy to use social housing allocation system for Council Housing and agreed nomination agreements with all other registered providers in Darlington.

- Introduced an interest free loan scheme (Homeless Prevention Fund) to improve access to private rented sector properties.
- Built effective links with the Department of Work and Pensions to address welfare benefit challenges (such as introduction of Universal Credit).
- Set up a Rough Sleeping Action Group to look at ways to reduce repeat homelessness and prevent rough sleeping.
- Established multi-agency groups to help identify and address the needs of individuals.
- Established Preventing Begging Meetings for all agencies to look at joined-up and innovative ways to reduce begging in the Borough.
- Established the Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Forum to support and improve partnership working and information sharing.
- Continued to work closely with and build new relationships with voluntary sector agencies and looked for ways of increasing support for individuals.
- Created a temporary, specialist Domestic Abuse Officer post, through government funding, within the Housing Options team to work with victims and perpetrators of domestic abuse to improve support.

## **Guiding Principles**

At the core of our strategy are a number of guiding principles that underpin our approach to both the development and delivery of homelessness services.

These principles have been co-produced with the wider homelessness sector partners in Darlington and Council colleagues. They are:

### **Partnership Working**

We have a strong focus on partnership working and will look to expand upon the relationships developed to tackle the many challenges that exist around homelessness and inequalities.

### **Person Centred**

We work with people as individuals and support their unique situations, aspirations, strengths, and personal challenges.

### **Solution Focused**

We create, share, and replicate best practice and innovation to find lasting solutions in responses to homelessness and its prevention across Darlington.

### **Responsive**

We respond quickly and effectively, ensuring we safeguard people and provide effective flexible services. Whilst we focus our efforts on prevention, where homelessness does occur, we aim to make sure the experience is as brief as possible and not repeated.

## **Current national and local context**

People become homeless for lots of different reasons. There are social causes of homelessness, such as a lack of affordable housing, poverty and unemployment, and life events which push people into homelessness. People can be forced into homelessness when they leave prison, care or the armed forces with no home to go to. Many people experiencing homelessness have escaped a violent or abusive relationship. People also become homeless because they can no longer afford the rent or mortgage.

What is the national data telling us?

- 94,560 households in England had initial homelessness assessments between January to March 2024, which is an increase of 10.8% compared to January to March 2023.
- 86,520 were owed a duty to prevent or relieve homelessness between January to March 2024.
- 38,440 were assessed as being threatened with homelessness, with an increase of 1.2% due to section 21 notices between January to March 2024.



- 48,080 households were assessed as homeless and owed a relief duty between January to March 2024, which is up 11.4% on January to March 2023, those with children in the household increased by 6.9% compared to the same period in 2023.
- 17,120 households were accepted as owed a main homeless duty between January to March 2024, up 19.8% from January to March 2023.
- As of 31 March 2024, 117,450 households were in temporary accommodation, which is a 12.3% increase from 31 March 2023. Those with children increased by 14.7% and single households by 8.5%.

What are the local challenges?

We have seen:

- A significant increase in homeless presentations in Darlington since 2019-2020.
- A 57% increase in presentations since 2019-2020 in section 21 notices (no fault evictions) within the Private Rented Sector. This rose from 152 in 2019-2020 to 238 in 2023-2024.
- Increasing numbers of presentations with multiple needs, making placement and long-term sustainment of tenancies more difficult. The number of presentations from people with one or more need rose from 485 in 2019-2020 to 1,039 in 2023-2024.
- An increase in presentations of people suffering domestic abuse, which was 13% of all presentations in 2023-2024, and this was a 142% increase from 2019-2020.
- An increase in presentations from hospital and prison leavers, including those from the early release scheme from prisons (Probation Refresh). Presentations rose from 51 in 2019-2020 to 169 in 2023-2024.
- An increasing number of households leaving the asylum system after gaining leave to remain. This rose from 13 in 2019-2020 to 34 in 2023-2024.
- A reduction in the number of affordable and suitable move on accommodation within the Borough.
- A lack of specialist accommodation for clients trying to withdraw from substance misuse.
- A lack of specialised accommodation for those with complex needs.
- A reduced number of suitable temporary accommodation meaning out of area placements have increased.
- An increase in presentations from families experiencing homelessness.
- An increase in presentations of people suffering homelessness due to mortgage arrears.

The 6 priority areas identified within our vision reflect the current picture within the homeless sector both locally and nationally.

## Working in partnership to prevent homelessness

Working in partnership to prevent homelessness is a key area within the homelessness sector. To have a universal approach to prevention within Darlington will help reduce homelessness in the town. The work within the previous strategy shows some the positive work in this area, but we will continue to build on this.

Prevention and early intervention can help sustain tenancies and can prevent a person from becoming homeless. Most people approach the Council for help when they are in a crisis so by focusing on early homeless prevention, we can help save tenancies and stop a person becoming homeless.

By working in partnership to prevent homelessness we can recognise and understand the signs of a person not managing in their home and work together to provide support to save the tenancy and prevent homelessness.

## Tackling Rough Sleeping

The longer someone experiences rough sleeping the more likely they are to face challenges around trauma, mental health and drug misuse.

The Ending Rough Sleeper Plan (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ending-rough-sleeping-for-good>) sets out the national agenda around ending rough sleeping nationally, it focuses on areas of preventing rough sleeping, delivering intervention where appropriate, support recovery and providing transparent and joined up working.

Our Rough Sleeper Plan 2024-2025, which was agreed by Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) and is reviewed annually, builds on the national Ending Rough Sleeping Plan and includes the following themes:

- Reviewing and improving accommodation for chaotic clients.
- Raising awareness with other agencies and build good relations to reduce the chance of someone rough sleeping.
- Build on the current Rough Sleeper Action Group to ensure agencies play their part in preventing, identifying and supporting rough sleepers.

## Move on Accommodation

Darlington has thrived on a good private rented market within the town. In 2023-2024, 18.47% of the town population live in private sector housing. However, there has been a shift in the market following Covid and the new, proposed Renters Reform Bill are adding pressure onto private landlords and reducing access to private rented homes.

These pressures affect the number of long-term rented homes available for clients to move on to, and whilst we have an excellent social housing market it cannot manage the demand for accommodation alone.

Whilst the new Renters Reform Bill aims to give private renters greater security and stability within their homes, which in turn should reduce homelessness, it has had the short-term

effect of increasing the number of private rented tenants being issued a legal notice of eviction.

It has been proven that working with private landlords to support them through changes can increase access to accommodation which can reduce the time spent in temporary accommodation. This can help to reduce costs to Council's and ensure homeless persons can access longer-term accommodation.

### Temporary Accommodation

The average length of stay in temporary accommodation in Darlington has increased from 8.5 days in 2019-2020 to 19.8 days in 2023-2024, increasing the net cost of temporary accommodation from £68k in 2019-2020 to an estimated £952k in 2024-2025.

This can predominantly be due to lack of permanent move on accommodation due to the changes in the private rented sector in Darlington.

As a consequence to the longer stays, temporary accommodation availability has reduced and a reliance on accommodation outside of Darlington, hotels and B&B's to meet statutory requirements has occurred.

It has proven that by increasing the availability of temporary accommodation and reducing the time spent in temporary accommodation will reduce costs to a local authority. This helps to improve the experience for the homeless client with better, longer-term outcomes.

Affordability of temporary and move-on accommodation is a significant factor as the local housing allowance remains low with no uplift since 2011 so does not reflect the current economy and rent charges.

### Addressing homelessness faced by particular groups of people

The reasons for homelessness are as individual as people themselves, however, we recognise that those with additional needs such as addiction issues have an increased risk of homelessness. In particular substance misuse and mental health can be a significant factor.

Support for people suffering from these addictions are essential, to help prevent and deal with homelessness. The highest needs for clients presenting to us are:

- Mental health issues.
- Substance misuse.
- Physical health issues.
- Offending history.

Other particular groups of people are also at higher risk of homelessness, and these include:

- Prison leavers.
- Survivors of domestic abuse.
- Refugee and those that have been granted leave to remain.
- Young people (16-25) and care leavers.

- Veterans and those leaving the armed forces.

### Securing funding to increase accommodation and resources

Appropriate funding is a key to this strategy and will ensure we can provide the appropriate support and accommodation for homeless households.

We will work in partnership with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) and local agencies and charities to secure funding opportunities to help resource viable solutions to tackle homelessness in Darlington.

Previous funding from the government has included short-term funding such as:

- Rough sleeper initiative (RSI) which funded:
  - 2 x Housing First properties - Housing First is an approach which prioritises access to permanent housing with tailored, open-ended, wraparound support for residents that emphasises choice and control.
  - 1 x Regional Rough Sleeper Coordinator post who co-ordinates good practice across the Tees Valley to help prevent rough sleeping.
  - 1 x Outreach Support Worker post who attends to any reports of rough sleepers in the Borough from StreetLink and provides immediate support.
  - 1 x Housing Navigator post who triages any Duty to Refer referrals from agencies and arranges contact with the affected person.
- Rough Sleeper accommodation programme (RSAP):
  - 4 x units of Next Steps accommodation - The Next Steps Accommodation Programme funding provides funding for property costs and support.
  - 3 x units of move on accommodation from supported/hostel accommodation to build on independent living skills.
- Single Household Accommodation Programme (SHAP)
  - Funding for accommodation and support from 18- to 25-year-olds.
- Accommodation for Ex Offenders (AfEO)
  - Funding to support ex-offenders into private rented accommodation.
- Domestic Abuse New Burdens Funding
  - 1 Housing Options Officer post (Domestic Abuse) short term funding to provide specialist support and advice to victims and perpetrators of domestic abuse.

## **Action plan**

<b>Action</b>	<b>Outcome</b>	<b>Key Priority Area</b>	<b>Partners Involved</b>
Source additional temporary accommodation	Reduced use of B&B/hotel accommodation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increasing the amount and improving the quality of temporary accommodation</li> <li>• Tackling rough sleeping by implementing our agreed Rough Sleeper Plan</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• DBC Commissioning</li> <li>• DBC Housing Services</li> <li>• Registered Social Housing providers</li> <li>• Charities</li> </ul>
Source more rented move-on accommodation	<p>Reduced time spent in temporary accommodation</p> <p>Less children in temporary accommodation</p> <p>Reduced void periods in Council accommodation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improving move on accommodation provision, including specialist housing and support provision</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• DBC Commissioning</li> <li>• DBC Housing Services</li> <li>• DBC Private Sector Housing</li> <li>• Local lettings agencies and landlords</li> <li>• Registered Social Housing providers</li> <li>• Charities</li> </ul>
Re-establish multi-agency homeless forum	Improved partnership working and outcomes for homeless clients	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Working in partnership with charities and voluntary organisations, other social housing providers, Public Health and other statutory agencies to prevent homelessness</li> <li>• Addressing homelessness faced by particular groups of people, including those presenting with multiple or complex needs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• DBC Commissioning</li> <li>• DBC Housing Services</li> <li>• Registered Social Housing providers</li> <li>• Charities</li> <li>• DBC Private Sector Housing</li> <li>• Representatives of private landlords</li> <li>• Probation</li> <li>• Police</li> <li>• Fire Service</li> <li>• Public Health</li> </ul>

Action	Outcome	Key Priority Area	Partners Involved
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• DAD</li> <li>• DAR</li> </ul>
Establish shared goals with partner agencies	Improved referrals, prevention and move-on plans Rough Sleeper Action Group attendees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Working in partnership with charities and voluntary organisations, other social housing providers, Public Health and other statutory agencies to prevent homelessness</li> <li>• Addressing homelessness faced by particular groups of people, including those presenting with multiple or complex needs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• DBC Commissioning</li> <li>• DBC Housing Services</li> <li>• Registered Social Housing providers</li> <li>• Charities</li> <li>• DBC Private Sector Housing</li> <li>• Probation</li> <li>• Police</li> <li>• Fire Service</li> <li>• Public Health</li> </ul>
Source additional specialist temporary and longer-term accommodation including Housing First	Improved offer for those with multiple and complex needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increasing the amount and improving the quality of temporary accommodation</li> <li>• Securing funding to increase accommodation and resources</li> <li>• Addressing homelessness faced by particular groups of people, including those presenting with multiple or complex needs</li> <li>• Improving move on accommodation provision, including specialist housing and support provision</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• DBC Commissioning</li> <li>• DBC Housing Services</li> <li>• Registered Social Housing providers</li> <li>• Charities</li> </ul>
Raise awareness in the community and with agencies and charities	Improved referrals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Working in partnership with charities and voluntary organisations, other social housing providers, Public Health and other</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• DBC Commissioning</li> <li>• DBC Housing Services</li> <li>• Registered Social Housing providers</li> </ul>

Action	Outcome	Key Priority Area	Partners Involved
		statutory agencies to prevent homelessness <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tackling rough sleeping by implementing our agreed Rough Sleeper Plan</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Charities</li> <li>• DBC Private Sector Housing</li> <li>• Probation</li> <li>• Police</li> <li>• Fire Service</li> <li>• Public Health</li> <li>• DAD</li> <li>• DAR</li> </ul>
Identify higher risk groups, working with partner agencies to understand and improve support available to specific groups	Improved understanding of issues and improved offer to specific groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Working in partnership with charities and voluntary organisations, other social housing providers, Public Health and other statutory agencies to prevent homelessness</li> <li>• Addressing homelessness faced by particular groups of people, including those presenting with multiple or complex needs</li> <li>• Securing funding to increase accommodation and resources</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• DBC Housing Services</li> <li>• Registered Social Housing providers</li> <li>• Charities</li> <li>• DBC Private Sector Housing</li> <li>• Probation</li> <li>• Police</li> <li>• Fire Service</li> <li>• Public Health</li> <li>• DAD</li> <li>• DAR</li> <li>• Social Services</li> </ul>
Identify funding opportunities	Improved resources and new services developed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Securing funding to increase accommodation and resources</li> <li>• Working in partnership with charities and voluntary organisations, other social housing providers, Public Health and other statutory agencies to prevent homelessness.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• DBC Commissioning</li> <li>• DBC Housing Services</li> </ul>

Action	Outcome	Key Priority Area	Partners Involved
Identify and build on existing support networks	Improved partnership working and outcomes for homeless clients	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Working in partnership with charities and voluntary organisations, other social housing providers, Public Health and other statutory agencies to prevent homelessness</li> <li>• Addressing homelessness faced by particular groups of people, including those presenting with multiple or complex needs</li> <li>• Securing funding to increase accommodation and resources</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• DBC Housing Services</li> </ul>
Improve communication and engagement with private landlords	Increased prevention and reduced number of homeless clients from private rented properties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Working in partnership with charities and voluntary organisations, other social housing providers, Public Health and other statutory agencies to prevent homelessness</li> <li>• Tackling rough sleeping by implementing our agreed Rough Sleeper Plan</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• DBC Housing Services</li> <li>• DBC Private Sector Housing</li> </ul>
Continue to provide Domestic Abuse a dedicated Housing Options Officer	Continued support for victims of Domestic Abuse	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Working in partnership with charities and voluntary organisations, other social housing providers, Public Health and other statutory agencies to prevent homelessness</li> <li>• Addressing homelessness faced by particular groups of people, including those presenting with multiple or complex needs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• DBC Commissioning</li> <li>• DBC Housing Services</li> <li>• Public Health</li> </ul>



Action	Outcome	Key Priority Area	Partners Involved
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Securing funding to increase accommodation and resources</li> </ul>	
Explore landlord incentives to help increased access to private rented sector	Increased move-on accommodation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improving move on accommodation provision, including specialist housing and support provision</li> <li>• Securing funding to increase accommodation and resources</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• DBC Housing Services</li> <li>• DBC Private Sector Housing</li> </ul>
Review the pathway into specialist services	Increased number of households with complex needs rehoused into settled housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Working in partnership with charities and voluntary organisations, other social housing providers, Public Health and other statutory agencies to prevent homelessness</li> <li>• Addressing homelessness faced by particular groups of people, including those presenting with multiple or complex needs</li> <li>• Securing funding to increase accommodation and resources</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• DBC Commissioning</li> <li>• DBC Housing Services</li> <li>• Public Health</li> </ul>
Improve information available to homeless persons and professionals	Clients and professionals better informed of the support and processes involved	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Working in partnership with charities and voluntary organisations, other social housing providers, Public Health and other statutory agencies to prevent homelessness</li> <li>• Addressing homelessness faced by particular groups of people, including those presenting with multiple or complex needs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• DBC Housing Services</li> </ul>

## **Equality and Diversity**

We are committed to ensuring all parts of the community can access, engage with and benefit from services.

This strategy seeks to remove barriers which people can face in accessing housing and homelessness support.

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.

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.

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.

## **Performance Monitoring and Review**

This strategy will be monitored and reviewed on a regular basis, as part of the existing governance arrangements and will involve key stakeholders, partners and agencies in its delivery.

To assist with our continuous improvement and to ensure we meet the key priority areas, we will collate and monitor performance information. We will re-establish our multi-agency homeless forum and hold regular meetings with our key partners and stakeholders.

Our Homeless Forum will lead on the delivery of the action plan, through task and finish groups, reporting progress on a regular basis.

Members will also be provided with an annual review of performance, against the action plan, at the relevant Scrutiny Committee.

## Outcome of Consultation – Survey Results

### To what extent do you agree or disagree with our visions?

Question	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Don't know
To work in partnership to end homelessness in Darlington	85.7%	7.7%	4.4%	2.2%
That every resident in Darlington has a secure, affordable place to call home	82.4%	7.7%	6.6%	3.3%
That the right support is in place at the right time	85.7%	4.4%	8.8%	1.1%
Where homelessness occurs, it is rare, brief and non-recurrent	63.7%	5.5%	27.5%	3.3%

### Comments

We are pleased that the vision recognises that the approach to homelessness should be holistic and inclusive. We also agree with an approach that places such an emphasis on early intervention.
Only proviso is what do you do with those who don't want to be housed/helped?
At Citizens Advice the clients we see have been through the homelessness system and refused due to antisocial behaviour drink drug or mental health issues causing them to be a risk for housing.
Too many homeless people are denied accommodation by the Housing Options team due to drug/alcohol issues or offending histories that were linked to their substance misuse. This is unfair and the council needs to have options to make sure no one is forced to sleep rough due to a lack of supported temporary accommodation. Other councils have much more resources in this area, and it is not acceptable that people in Darlington suffer a postcode lottery with homelessness services due to the council being the third smallest in the country.
I've been sleeping on my dad's couch for a year and still haven't been given a home.
I am helping a severely disabled friend through this journey, it's very frustrating for him as he keeps being told he will be put up in a hotel if he is evicted from his home (section 21) no fault eviction. He is disabled and 78 years old and is worried sick he will be put in a hotel room.
Need to make accommodation affordable and available for the long term.
These are the views of any caring human being, but can the council afford it?
Hoping there will be proper support for people not just "Here is a nice home", and that will be right, but support for addictions, budgeting, cooking properly all need support.
Very clear visions, I appreciate homelessness will never be completely resolved but think these visions are important to show the aims of the Council.

**To what extent do you agree or disagree with the co-produced six key priority areas to enable us to achieve the visions?**

Question	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Don't know
Working in partnership with charities and voluntary organisations, other social housing providers, Public Health and other statutory agencies to prevent homelessness	90.1%	4.9%	2.5%	2.5%
Tackling rough sleeping by implementing our agreed Rough Sleeper Plan	85.2%	7.4%	3.7%	3.7%
Increasing the amount and improving the quality of temporary accommodation	84.0%	4.9%	7.4%	3.7%
Addressing homelessness faced by particular groups of people, including those presenting with multiple or complex needs	84.0%	6.2%	4.9%	4.9%
Improving move on accommodation provision, including specialist housing and support provision	88.9%	4.9%	3.7%	2.5%
Securing funding to increase accommodation and Resources	88.9%	3.7%	3.7%	3.7%

Comments

Support is important.
Fully agree with the six priority areas. As the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner we are keen to work in partnership to improve community safety and improve outcomes for vulnerable groups. The key groups we have an interest in are (though not limited to) those experiencing domestic abuse, people who misuse substances and alcohol and those who are leaving custody. These are all groups at high risk of homelessness, and it is pleasing to see they are included in the strategy.
The rough sleeper plan does not go far enough in helping those sleeping rough. A much more compassionate and modern approach is needed. For example, abolishing the begging committee and focusing on modern evidence-based approaches.
I don't particularly agree with increasing the temporary accommodation because effectively everyone should have a secure place to live but people who have those complex needs need better supported accommodation to enable them to have a better chance of sustaining a tenancy.
Properties should be fit for purpose and not just a landlord cash fund.
We agree with all of the 6 priorities, all partners maximising what they can offer. As a

suggestion, potentially DBC could examine their own resources and systems in regards to ensuring voids are kept to a minimum, i.e. setting a 3 month turn around for an empty property. Also, potential look at privately owned empty homes.
As before, very laudable and absolutely brilliant but what do you propose for those who will not be helped?
As before, the main clients seen are those with complex multiple needs - no available accommodation due to risk and previous history of complex behaviour issues. These are the street homeless or sofa surfing, which is detriment to their health. A plan for temporary/ interim housing and support is needed to help them move into accommodation.
You send people on their way and say something like, you're not priority.
Agree with them all, if it is possible to get the priorities put into place.
A variety of services / providers are needed to meet the needs of people holistically, supporting people both proactively and reactively (given the current climate) to meet peoples increasing needs.
Forces veterans seem to face particular problems.
All great ideas but for a lot of these people it is a life choice.
I believe the 6 priorities will assist in achieving the aims, and give particular emphasis on the key groups most affected by homelessness.

**To what extent do you agree or disagree with the actions identified within the strategy?**

<b>Question</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Neither Agree nor Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Don't know</b>
Source additional temporary accommodation	79.8%	6.3%	6.3%	7.6%
Source more move-on accommodation	81.0%	7.6%	6.3%	5.1%
Re-establish multi-agency homeless forum	83.5%	5.1%	3.8%	7.6%
Establish shared goals with partner agencies	88.6%	3.8%	2.5%	5.1%
Source additional specialist temporary and longer-term accommodation including Housing First	87.3%	3.8%	5.1%	3.8%
Raise awareness in the community and with agencies and charities	86.1%	5.1%	5.1%	3.8%
Identify higher risk groups, working with partner agencies to understand and improve support available to specific groups	84.8%	6.3%	3.8%	5.1%
Identify funding opportunities	87.3%	3.8%	3.8%	5.1%
Identify and build on existing support networks	88.6%	3.8%	3.8%	3.8%
Improve communication and engagement with private landlords	82.3%	7.6%	5.1%	5.1%

Question	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Don't know
Continue to provide Domestic Abuse a dedicated Housing Options Officer	84.8%	8.9%	2.5%	3.8%
Explore landlord incentives to help increased access to private rented sector	72.1%	12.7%	5.1%	10.1%
Review the pathway into specialist services	75.9%	12.7%	1.3%	10.1%
Improve information available to homeless persons and professionals	86.1%	6.3%	2.5%	5.1%

### Comments

A slight caution around more temporary accommodation. Whilst temporary accommodation is important it is equally important that there is not an over-reliance on this. As previous, it is pleasing to see that higher risk groups are considered, and it is essential to work with partners to understand issues and improve support available to these specific groups so that they can maintain tenancies and be safe and secure in their homes.
There needs to be increased homelessness prevention and timely referrals for money advice from independent and regulated providers. DBC routinely do not spend the whole DHP pot and allocate towards the end of the financial year. This suggests that there could be more proactive prevention work.
Forums needed and compassionate committed people involved to support complex needs. Problem being they decline the services already provided.
Raising awareness and making links, communicating with others must lead to actual progress and solutions not just become talking shops.
There has been no mention on the Council only accepting applications for homelessness on the day of eviction, instead of saying when they receive the notification of eviction start processing.
The Council needs to move to a position of looking for ways that legislation can be interpreted positively to actually resolve homelessness rather than using it to gate-keep and exclude vulnerable people on technical legal grounds.
I really agree with the transitional model, we need to consider supported accommodation models too.
Depends on the incentives to Landlords. It should not be money, and it would have to be legal and monitored.
Very important to keep at least one dedicated Domestic Abuse Officer, as these are some of the most vulnerable people in our society and require as much help and assistance as possible.

**Overall, how satisfied are you with the Housing Services Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2025-2030?**

Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied
43.6%	29.5%	19.2%	5.1%	2.6%

Comments

<p>The Strategy is good, the funding, budget and resource to support it isn't. The Government needs to recognise that not having a home for those people with complex needs is highly likely to result in more crime, rough sleeping and a decline in mental health. They don't recognise that.</p>
<p>I am so glad to have read this plan this morning - I feel a lot more hope for the homeless.</p>
<p>This is a very comprehensive and realistic view of the current situation and offers practical ways forward.</p>
<p>It is a comprehensive document that highlights the increase in service demands pre-COVID and post-COVID. These concerns and availability of funds has left a big question mark on us all, which is "How did we get here?".</p>
<p>Would like key names and contacts to help those with complex needs and a reassurance they will at least be housed that day even if temporarily.</p>
<p>Sorry but really don't think it's any good when they say we will phone you back and don't.</p>
<p>I don't believe the strategy goes far enough or is explicit enough with regards to the practicality's day to day for homeless service users. Particularly around the very harsh interpretation of the priority need test that some service users receive from officers. Also, the no second night out scheme is often not adhered to by officers. I see this through my work in another public service in Darlington supporting vulnerable adults who may be denied accommodation through something as simple as being on the waiting list for secondary care but not yet allocated a CPN etc. The strategy grandstands about making rough sleeping a rare occurrence but on the ground the officers do not take this seriously enough. Anyone who claims to be rough sleeping should be given the benefit of the doubt in a moral society.</p>
<p>Should aim to abolish TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION.</p>
<p>As explained in the first comment, (name withheld) has been on the list for a long time and we work closely with a Humankind case worker, he has automated bidding from the Council, but little or no updates, no communication unless he instigates it. As I said, very agitating for an elderly gent, through no fault of his own.</p>
<p>I think this strategy gives the perfect balance between preventing and helping those who are homeless. It's important that everyone works together, and those people that have genuine need for homeless assistance know where to access it and are given it. It's clear that the Council cannot do this alone and it's great to see that other agencies and groups have been involved. I hope they continue and increase their support to the Council.</p>

## Additional Comments Received

### **Darlington Assistance for Refugees (DAR)**

The strategy identifies refugees as having a high risk of homelessness but doesn't explain why. We suggest they:

- Are vulnerable due to language
- Lack finance to secure loans or offer deposits
- Have no access to utility bills needed for proof of ID
- Are not in a position to find guarantors
- Are subject to a "cliff edge" of 28 days' notice to leave Mears accommodation.

To counter this, we suggest improved coordination between the Home Office, Mears, the Council, housing providers and local charities including DAR. The Home Office, Mears and other housing providers should also be partners included in the action plan.

Numbers of asylum seekers will increase as local authorities have been told by the regional Migration Partnership that Darlington has not reached the designated saturation point.

In the absence of available accommodation, refugees are increasingly being accommodated in expensive temporary accommodation.

The private rented sector:

- Expensive option for refugees.
- The Local Housing Allowance has been frozen once again this year, meaning that while rents continue to increase, there is a growing gap in the Housing Benefit available to cover this. The Council should raise this with Central Government.
- There is high demand for private rented property and private landlords are choosing not to accommodate the most vulnerable in society.

Temporary accommodation:

- Other local authorities are able to buy up houses in Darlington and use them for temporary accommodation (Durham for example). Why is this not an option for Darlington Borough Council?

Acquisition and refurbishment to increase housing stock:

- The Council should explore the opportunities for the acquisition and refurbishment of long-term empty properties and poor quality private rented stock.
- Schemes such as those developed by Back on the Map in Sunderland and Community Campus '86 in Teesside could be replicated here.
- There is the potential to use and develop the building skills of asylum seekers and refugees and students at Darlington College in developing a scheme of this nature.



### Supported Housing:

We feel strongly that Supported Housing providers should offer move-on accommodation for a period of time. Most do not do this, because it reduces their income. Some organisations like Action Foundation offer, housing for those with No Recourse to Public Funds, Supported Housing, move-on housing, and direct links with private landlords (not through agencies who charge £400 for references and have rigid guidelines around who is eligible for renting properties on their books). This ensures a flow of tenants who progress through the system and who are ultimately in private accommodation.

- We feel that the cost of Supported Housing is not value for money if it continues to trap tenants into not working and claiming benefits.
- All Supported Housing providers should be monitored to ensure they provide genuine support enabling the majority of their tenants to move into independent living within private or social housing.
- Stricter controls should exist asking for evidence of progress in moving on.
- Often those who need Supported Housing the most, cannot access it because it is clogged up with long term tenants.
- Tenants in supported housing should have a grace period of at least 4 months if they find work (for more than 16hrs/week) so that they are able to save for a deposit and have evidence of an income.
- Open Door North East also has good relationships with private landlords who take refugee tenants because they know they are offered support.
- This saves landlords the agency fees.

### Local Authority and Social Housing:

More social and council homes should be built in the Borough to provide more move-on options.

DAR has been shocked to witness that the council properties allocated to those granted leave to remain do not have carpets and curtains. We understand that these are removed by the council as a matter of course. This has made properties uncomfortable and hard to heat, and added to the hardship experienced not just by refugees but also others struggling with the cost of living crisis. We believe there must be a way of consulting with prospective tenants and allowing the option of deep cleaning rather than removal when requested by them. Other Social Housing providers retain furnishings giving potential tenants the options so we feel it shouldn't be beyond DBC to do this.

### **Darlington Borough Council – Adult Social Care**

Adult Social Care are experiencing increased referrals for people without a fixed abode, leading to 'sofa surfing' and/or street homelessness and at times a blend of both. This exposes our most vulnerable people in our communities to exploitation and risk of abuse. Within Adult Social Care we cannot begin to meet people's needs effectively without accommodation in place.

We welcome the strategy and in particular the development of housing for specific groups of people, including those with complex needs and specialist housing and support offers, which we hope will address housing for those people with previous forensic risks, which are

experienced as the most difficult to support within current housing provision as well as increasing temporary housing options. Limited specialist housing impacts on available options following hospital discharge and can lead to unnecessary placements in short stay residential care beds.

### **700 Club**

On behalf of the 700 Club, we would like to offer a warm commendation of the new Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy. The proposed Strategy is comprehensive, covering everything from the individual rough sleeper to the families in temporary accommodation. It offers an honest depiction of the difficulties that Darlington faces, including lack of move on accommodation, a high prevalence of mental health problems, etc. and this reflects what we are seeing on a day-to-day basis within our services.

The strategy is ambitious, with a positive emphasis on prevention. It also recognizes the complexity of homelessness as something that can only be answered by working together. We look forward to our continuing partnership with DBC and the excellent Housing Options Team.

### **Darlington Borough Council – Commissioning**

The Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Plan (2025-30) sets out a clear and positive strategy in respect of the Council's response to a major societal challenge. There is a strong focus on early intervention and prevention of homelessness. The Council commissions a range of service with Voluntary, Community, and Social Enterprise (VCSE) (across all ages) to support this agenda including, housing related support services and accommodation based/outreach services to support people suffering domestic abuse. These commissioned services are critical in the provision and maintenance of supported accommodation, re-settlement and outreach support for people who are homeless or at risk of being homeless.

It is also recognised that "move on" accommodation is essential, especially for people with complex needs and require specialist housing. The exploration and development of this specialist housing option benefits the wider health and social care system in Darlington. It is through the continuing close working partnership between VCSE, Housing, Commissioning, housing developers and operational services such as Adult Services that we will deliver the objectives set out in the plan.