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Dear Members

Special Community Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee

A Special meeting of the Community Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee will be held in the **Craddock Room, Civic Suite, Civic Centre, Riverside, Stafford on Tuesday 16 July 2019 at 6.30pm** to deal with the business as set out on the agenda.

Please note that this meeting will be recorded.

Members are reminded that contact officers are shown at the top of each report and members are welcome to raise questions etc in advance of the meeting with the appropriate officer.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "I. Curran".

Interim Head of Law and Administration

**SPECIAL COMMUNITY WELLBEING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE -
16 JULY 2019**

Chair - Councillor J Hood

A G E N D A

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HEAD OF DEVELOPMENT

ITEM NO 3(b) **Presentation - Proposed Merger between
Stafford and Rural Homes and Housing Plus** -

KAREN ARMITAGE

Membership

Chair - Councillor J Hood

C A Baron	A D Hobbs
R J Barron	J Hood
A R G Brown	L Nixon
A G Cooper	R M Sutherland
A P Edgeller	M J Winnington

Cabinet Members:-

Councillor J K Price - Environment

Councillor J M Pert - Community and Health

Councillor C V Trowbridge - Leisure

ITEM NO 3(a)**ITEM NO 3(a)**

Report of:	Head of Development
Contact Officer:	Hayley Smith
Telephone No:	01785 619554
Ward Interest:	Nil
Report Track:	Special Community Wellbeing 16/07/19 Only

SPECIAL COMMUNITY WELLBEING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

16 JULY 2019

Homeless and Rough Sleeper Strategy Review

1 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To provide an outline for the review of the current Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy, along with a review of the current Allocation Policy.
- 1.2 To request to consult with partners and members of the public on the proposed priorities outlined in the report.

2 Recommendation

- 2.1 To approve the request to consult on the Homeless and Rough Sleeper Strategy.

3 Key Issues and Reasons for Recommendation

- 3.1 In 2015 Stafford Borough Council published its last homeless strategy and delivery plan for 2015 - 2019. Since this time there have been substantial changes in homeless legislation including the implementation of the Homeless Reduction Act 2017 and the Government's commitment to end rough sleeping by 2027, as outlined by the Rough Sleeper Strategy published by Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) in August 2018. These changes, along with associated Government policy changes, such as welfare reform and the roll out of Universal Credit, require us to review our current homelessness strategy and formulate a Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy by Winter 2019. It is noted that Local Authorities are required to report on progress in delivering these strategies and publish an annual action plan along with making all finalised strategies available online for submission to MHCLG by Winter 2019.

4 Relationship to Corporate Priorities

- 4.1 The Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy supports Corporate Business Objective Two 'To improve the quality of life of local people by providing a safe, clean, attractive place to live and work and encouraging people to be engaged in developing strong communities that promote health and wellbeing.'
- 4.2 The commitments that are most closely aligned to the delivery of the homelessness and rough sleeper strategy are:
- Work towards everyone having access to safe and suitable accommodation
 - Encourage and support our residents to take responsibility for their own wellbeing and lifestyle; and
 - Develop a Health in All approach with our partners, ensuring that the health of local people is paramount in everything we do.

5 Report Detail

- 5.1 The Homelessness Act 2002 requires local authorities to carry out a homelessness review for their district and publish a homelessness strategy (that must be reviewed every five years). Stafford Borough Council's current homeless strategy runs from 2015-2019. The Homeless Reduction Act 2017, which substantially changes the way that the Government intends to tackle homelessness, puts additional requirements on local authorities to refresh and revise their current Homeless Strategies (further detail can be found in the Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities 2018).
- 5.2 Further to the above, MHCLG released the Rough Sleeper Strategy (August 2018) that supports the Government's vision to support every person who sleeps rough off the streets and into a home by 2027. The Rough Sleeper Strategy focuses on prevention, intervention and recovery and requires all local authorities to update their homeless strategies and rebadge them as 'homelessness and rough sleeper strategies' by Winter 2019. Local Authorities will be required to report progress in delivering these strategies and publish an annual action plan along with making all finalised strategies available online and for submission to MHCLG.
- 5.3 The Homeless and Rough Sleeper Strategy must include a strategy for:
- (a) preventing homelessness in the district;
 - (b) securing that sufficient accommodation is and will be available for people in the district who are or may become homeless and;
 - (c) securing the satisfactory provision of support for people in the district who are or may become homeless or who have been homeless and need support to prevent them becoming homeless again.

- 5.4 In formulating its strategy, the Council will need to consider the necessary levels of activity required to achieve the proposed priorities and the sufficiency of the resources available as outlined by the evidence review.
- 5.5 As part of the Homeless Review the Housing Options Team will also undertake a review of the Allocation Policy. The data collection for the Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy will be used to produce recommendations for amendments to the Allocation Policy that will reflect both changes associated with the Homeless Reduction Act 2017 along with current and projected demand for the service.

6 Project Plan

- 6.1 **APPENDIX 1** includes an overview of the project plan setting out the key dates to ensure the deadline of Winter 2019 is met.
- 6.2 The timeframe for delivery is tight as MHCLG are requesting sight of Strategy documents by Winter 2019, including a detailed action plan which flows from the agreed strategy.

7 Evidence Review

- 7.1. **APPENDIX 2** includes our Evidence Review which will be included in our consultation documents.
- 7.2 The Evidence Review has been gathered from both internal and external partners and focuses on changes to the service following the implementation of the Homeless Reduction Act 2017. The Evidence Review has been used to inform our proposed priorities for the Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy and provides the basis for our consultation (in line with relevant guidance).

8 Consultation

- 8.1 In light of deadlines put forward by MHCLG and democratic commitments, we have timetabled the consultation to commence on **20 March 2019**. The consultation strategy is set out within the project plan in **APPENDIX 1**.
- 8.2 The core priorities that are being proposed are compliant with the Homeless Reduction Act 2017 (and associated Code of Guidance) and have been put together with MHCLG's vision of prevention, intervention and recovery as a means to end rough sleeping by 2027¹. We have also included proposed changes to the Allocation Policy that are required following the implementation of the Homeless Reduction Act 2017 and to meet the evolving needs of the housing options service.

¹ MHCLG, Rough Sleeper Strategy 2018

8.3 Below is an overview of the proposed priorities:

- (1) **Early intervention** - working with partners to understand the root causes of homelessness and prevent homelessness at the earliest opportunity.
- (2) **Engagement** - a service that empowers personal responsibility and resilience for individuals to address their housing and support needs;
- (3) **Clear pathways out of Street Homelessness** - access to clear pathways for rough sleepers to access core services and obtain sustainable accommodation;
- (4) **Robust partnerships** - strategic commitment from partner organisations to prevent and relieve homelessness;
- (5) **Expanding options to prevent and relieve homelessness in Stafford** - suitable housing options for all individuals and households who are homeless or threatened with homelessness;
- (6) **Sustainment** - long-term housing options that promote integration into the local community.

Further details of the proposed priorities, that will form the basis of the consultation, are attached in **APPENDIX 3**.

8.4 The consultation will commence on 20 March 2019, pending approval. The consultation will include a press release and questionnaire that will be circulated to all key partners and made available on the Council's website for members of the public.

8.5 An additional Community Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee has been arranged as part of the consultation.

8.6 **APPENDIX 4** contains the proposed consultation questionnaire that will be circulated to partners and made available for the public on our website in order to structure the consultation responses.

9	Implications
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9.1	Financial	The Strategies will be delivered within existing budgets.
	Legal	Nil
	Human Resources	Nil
	Human Rights Act	Nil
	Data Protection	Nil

Risk Management	Stafford Borough Council is working with partner agencies to deliver these strategies. The extend of this collaboration will be determined by the availability of external funding for partners going forward.
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<p>9.2 Community Impact Assessment Recommendations</p>	<p>The Borough Council considers the effect of its actions on all sections of our community and has addressed all of the following Equality Strands in the production of this report, as appropriate:-</p> <p>Age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation.</p> <p>The Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy recognises that homelessness has a wide reaching impact on individuals with protected characteristics. A priority within the Strategy focuses on engagement with individuals, both in accessing the service and quality of service provided. The Options Team complete person-centred holistic housing and support assessments that address the specific needs of those with protected characteristics. Relevant signposting and referrals are made in partnership with core agencies within the Borough, including but not limited to mental health services, adult safeguarding and children’s services. The assessments will also inform the offers of accommodation provided to ensure they are suitable for the needs of the individual household.</p> <p>Partnership working extends to local community groups to help identify those households who are least likely to access core services, due to age, physical or mental disability or other, in order to promote access to services and upstream homeless prevention.</p>
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9.3 This report has been produced having considered the following additional issues:

- Sustainability
- Crime and Community Safety

Previous Consideration - Nil

Background Papers - Nil

Review of the Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy			
Desired Outcome	Actions	Lead	Timetable
Corporate Commitment and Approval			
To seek democratic approval for the review of the Strategy (including request to consult).			
1) There is corporate commitment to the review of the Strategy and proposed priorities prior to consultation with partners.	To provide an overview of the Strategy Review along with a detailed project plan and emerging key issues to the portfolio holder	HS	Informal Briefing – 14.01.2019
	2) The proposed priorities for the Strategy Review are consistent with other plans being delivered by the local authority. 3) There is corporate commitment to support the	To raise corporate awareness and provide an overview of the Strategy Review and request to consult on draft priorities	HS
AN			Management Team – 14.02.2019
HS			Report to Leadership Team – 22.02.2019
AN			Leadership Team Meeting – 27.02.2019
AN			Cabinet Briefing Meeting - 11.03.2019

<p>delivery of the revised Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy</p>	<p>Presentation to the Community Health and Wellbeing Partnership</p>	<p>HS</p>	<p>30.01.2019</p>
<p>Evidence Review</p>			
<p>To undertake a comprehensive review of homelessness, housing need and relevant support services within Stafford Borough.</p>			
<p>1) To determine the extent of homelessness in Stafford including those at risk of becoming homeless and assess, where possible, the likely extent of future homelessness within the Borough.</p> <p>2) To identify what is currently being done, and by whom, and</p>	<p>Collate quantitative data from internal and external resources in order to inform our proposed priorities for the Strategy Review</p>	<p>ER</p>	<p>07.01.2019 – 22.02.2019</p>
	<p>Circulate a questionnaire with key partners to collect qualitative data on homelessness in the Borough</p>	<p>ER</p>	<p>25.01.2019 – 01.02.2019</p>

<p>what resources are available to prevent and tackle homelessness by both internal and external partners.</p> <p>3) To inform the priorities for the Strategy and Allocation Policy Review.</p>	<p>Interview voluntary sector partners in order to collect qualitative data on homelessness in the Borough</p>	ER	01.02.2019 – 22.02.2019
	<p>Interview individuals and households who have used the service to collect qualitative data on homelessness in the Borough</p>	ER	01.02.2019 – 22.02.2019
<p>Consultation</p>			
<p>Consult with relevant partners on proposed priorities before finalising the review of the Strategy and Allocation Policy</p>			
<p>1) To consult with members of the public, internal partners, voluntary organisations, individuals and households who have used the service, specialist agencies and other appropriate persons before modifying the Strategy.</p>	<p>Online questionnaire</p>	HS	20.03.2019 – 19.06.2019
	<p>Press Release / Corporate Notices</p>	WC/HS	15.03.2019

2) To develop an effective strategy based on realistic assumptions and be developed and owned jointly with the partners who will be responsible for its delivery.	Email distribution to key partners and representatives from hard to reach groups	ER	15.02.2019
	Focus Group – Community Health and Wellbeing Group	HS	18.06.2019
	Focus Group – Homeless Forum	HS/JM	17/06/2019
	Focus Group – Landlord Forum	HS	04/04/2019
	Focus Group – Housing Associations	HS/ JM	03/06/2019
	Focus Group – Service Users	HS/ ER	14/05/2019
	Additional Community Scrutiny – Member Consultation	HS/AN	16/07/2019

	Collate and analysis consultation responses	ER	July/August 2019
	Review of Consultation Responses – Homeless Forum	HS/JM	TBC - June 2019
Allocation Policy Review			
To review the Allocation Policy in line with the evidence review and Homeless Reduction Act 2017.			
1) To develop an Allocation Policy that makes best use of social housing stock with a focus on homeless prevention. 2) Allocation Policy to be agreed and delivery to be supported by key partners 3) To coincide the review with changes to Stafford and Rural	Benchmarking exercise for best practice allocation policies following the implementation of the Homeless Reduction Act	HS	01.02.2019 – 22.02.2019
	Propose key changes to the Allocation Policy in line with benchmarking exercise and evidence review	HS	01.02.2019 – 22.02.2019
	To consult on key changes to the Allocation Policy	HS	20.03.2019 – 22.05.2019
	To liaise with Stafford and Rural Homes regarding key changes	HS/ AN	Ongoing via monthly meetings
	To consult on key changes to the Allocation Policy with Housing Associations	HS/ JM	Housing Association Focus Group – TBC April 2019

Home's Allocation Policy.	To review consultation responses with key partners	HS/JM	TBC – June 2019
Approval of Strategy and Allocation Policy			
To seek democratic approval for the Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy 2020-2025 and review of the Allocation Policy			
1) Obtain Cabinet approval of the Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy 2020 – 2025 and changes to the Allocation Policy. 2) Promote corporate commitment to support the delivery of the revised Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy	To obtain approval of final documents including the Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy 2020-2025 with Action Plan and published Evidence Review along with changes to the Allocation Policy.	HS	Management Team Report – TBC Aug 2019
		HS/AN	Management Team Meeting – TBC September
		HS/AN	Leadership Team – TBC October
		HS/AN	Cabinet – TBC December
		HS	Corporate Forum – TBC November 2019
Launch and Adoption of New Strategy			
1) Staff and partners are fully aware of the revised Strategy and are committed to support its delivery in line with the Action Plan.	Documents formatted	RB	Nov 19

<p>2) Changes to the Allocation Policy are operational and supported by relevant partners.</p>	<p>Website updated and new documents circulated</p>	<p>HS</p>	<p>Homeless Forum – TBC Nov-Dec 19</p>
	<p>Staff and partners briefed on changes and action plan</p>	<p>HS/ JM</p>	<p>December 2019</p>

Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy - Evidence Review

Background and Context

Stafford Borough is resident to 134,800 people, with the population expected to grow by 3% between 2017 and 2027. Although a relatively affluent area it contains some neighbourhoods experiencing social and economic deprivation. Generally, employment rates in Stafford are high, with around 82% of the adult population in employment, compared to 75% nationally and 79.3% in Staffordshire. However, it is recorded that around 24% (31,900) of the population of Stafford are estimated to be financially stressed, i.e. find it difficult or very difficult to cope on their current income (Source: Stafford District Data Pack, Staffordshire County Council, September 2018).

Historically, levels of homelessness and rough sleeping have been relatively low with resources and facilities able to meet needs. A number of programmes were rationalised as part of the process of refocussing public expenditure in the last decade, and this has provided challenges in delivering and maintaining appropriate services. The Borough Council worked closely with all providers prior to the reductions and successfully secured the future of Eagle House, a 32 bed unit of supported accommodation for single homeless people. Unfortunately, funding constraints meant that Eagle House was re-designated as accommodation for people with low needs only and therefore was unable to accept individuals with multiple and more complex needs.

A review of the Housing Option Service (undertaken in 2016) recognised that provision of social housing was not the driving force behind homelessness within the Borough, with delivery of affordable homes exceeding targets for 2015 – 2019. Instead it was recognised that some households are either losing tenancies, or are unable to access accommodation, due to unaddressed support needs. The support needs of these households were assessed as too high for much of the existing accommodation provision, meaning landlords were often unwilling to give them a tenancy, but too low to meet the criteria for statutory support. With increasing pressures on registered providers of social housing, it was becoming increasingly difficult to find suitable accommodation for this cohort and was placing increasing reliance on the private rented sector. Stafford Borough also saw a spike in rough sleeping during this period with 46 individuals recorded in Summer 2016.

The outcome of the Housing Options Review was to bring the waiting list for social housing back in house to Stafford Borough Council and to permanently fund a Tenancy Sustainment Officer to help those individuals who were struggling to access core services into suitable and sustainable accommodation. This coincided with a successful application for funding for the post of the Community Matron for the Homeless and for eight units of Housing First accommodation.

In 2017, official rough sleeping figures were halved, and the Housing Options Service achieved Gold Standard for Homeless Prevention from the National Practitioners Support Service.

Welfare reform and changes to Government policy and legislation continue to place additional pressures on the role of the Housing Options Team. Homeless legislation has significantly changed in the last two years with additional focus on homeless prevention and

provides eligible households access to homeless advice and assistance irrespective of priority need or intentionality. The Housing Options Team have embraced changes and have worked closely with partners to achieve positive outcomes. The Housing Options Team have been pragmatic in its approach to these challenges and evolved our way of working in order to meet the needs of vulnerable households in Stafford borough.

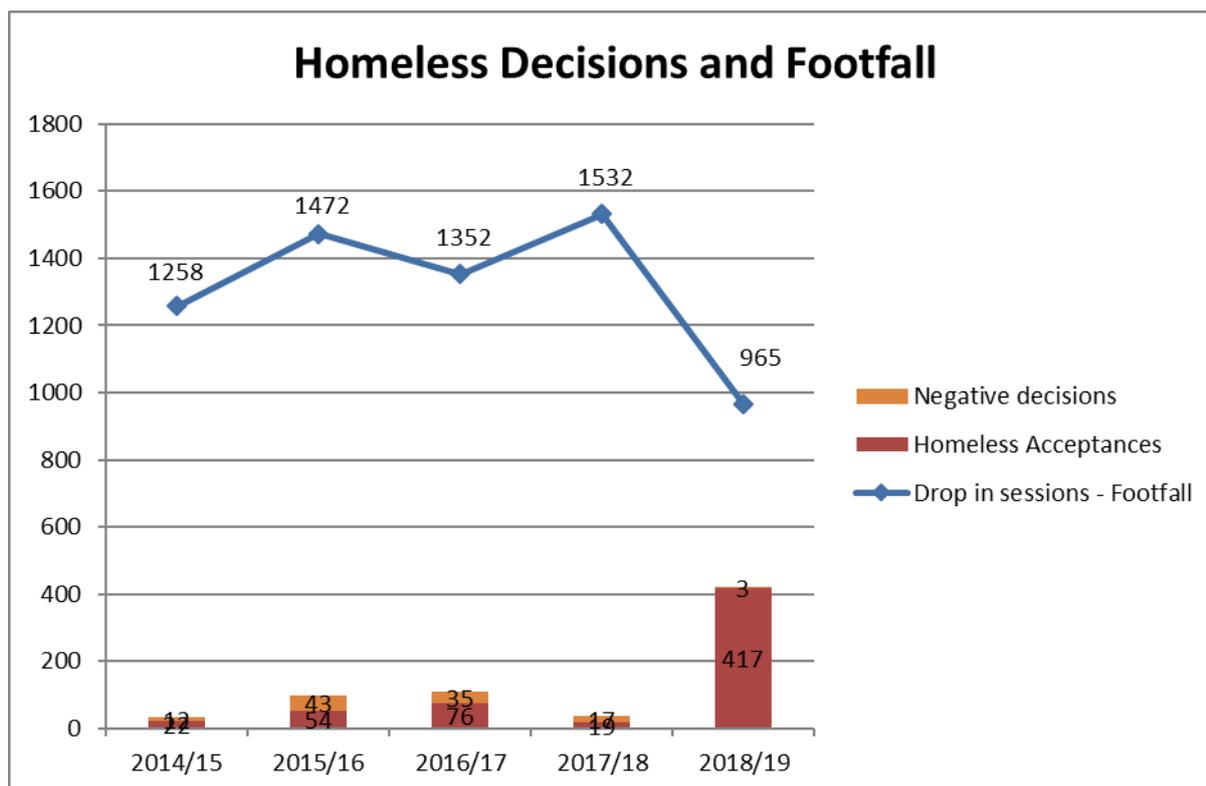
Households Accessing the Housing Options Service

The Housing Options Service provides general housing advice, free of charge to all members of the public. Households who are assessed as eligible for assistance and homeless or threatened with homelessness fall within our statutory function to take reasonable steps to prevent and/or relieve homelessness.

In April 2018, the Housing Options Team went through substantial change with the implementation of the Homeless Reduction Act 2017 which significantly extends the statutory function of local housing authorities. The two major changes include; the 'prevention duty' which extends the definition of 'threatened with homelessness' from 28 to 56 days and requires local authorities to assist all households who are eligible and threatened with homelessness, regardless of priority need, intentionality or local connection and; the 'relief duty' that requires local authorities to take reasonable steps to secure accommodation for eligible homeless households, regardless of priority need or intentionality. This means that all homeless, or threatened with homelessness, approaches are now considered as 'homeless applications' and has had a substantial impact on the workload of the Housing Options Team.

Case Type

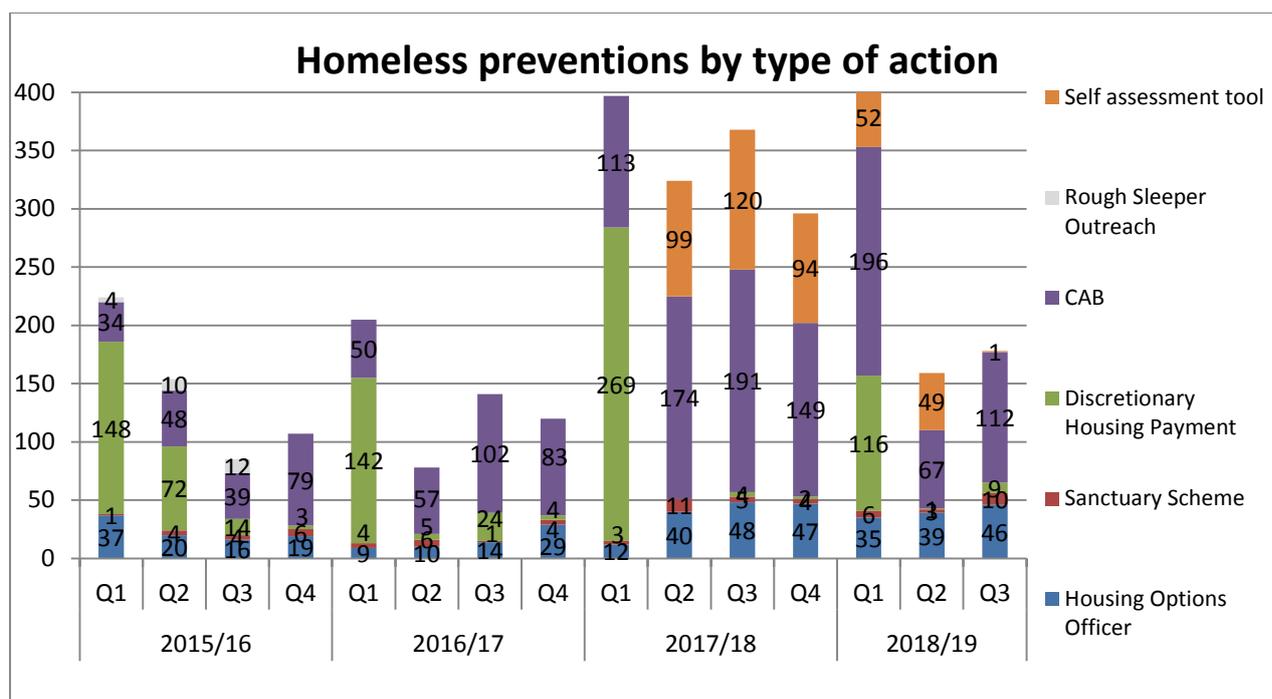
Between April 2018 and February 2019, 965 households approached our service for housing advice, compared to 1532 in 2017/18. Out of these, 374 applications (39%) were closed at triage stage; the applicant was not threatened with homelessness within 56 days but required general housing advice only.



In 2017/18, there were 65 homeless applications compared to 417 applications taken between April 2018 and February 2019. The substantial increase in homeless application reflects the new requirements under the Homeless Reduction Act however footfall through the service decreased by 25% compared to 2017/2018.

Out of homeless applications received since April 2018, 175 (42%) have been homeless prevention and 228 (55%) have been homeless relief demonstrating that individuals are accessing our service at crisis point as opposed to an earlier opportunity. The remaining 14 applicants (3%) have been final duty cases. The impact of crisis based intervention is demonstrated in the 'Outcomes' section of the evidence review.

The Housing Options Team has a long-standing focus on homeless prevention and continues to collect data from numerous sources within the Borough to demonstrate the wide-reaching impact of homeless prevention. The below table demonstrates homeless prevention across various services in Stafford Borough.



Prevention figures by the Housing Options Team for 2018/2019 remain similar to the previous year demonstrating Stafford Borough Council’s commitment to homeless prevention before the implementation of the Homeless Reduction Act. The graph also demonstrates the importance of partnership working, such as the Citizens Advice Bureau and Benefit Service in preventing homelessness through other measures such as debt advice and Discretionary Housing Payment.

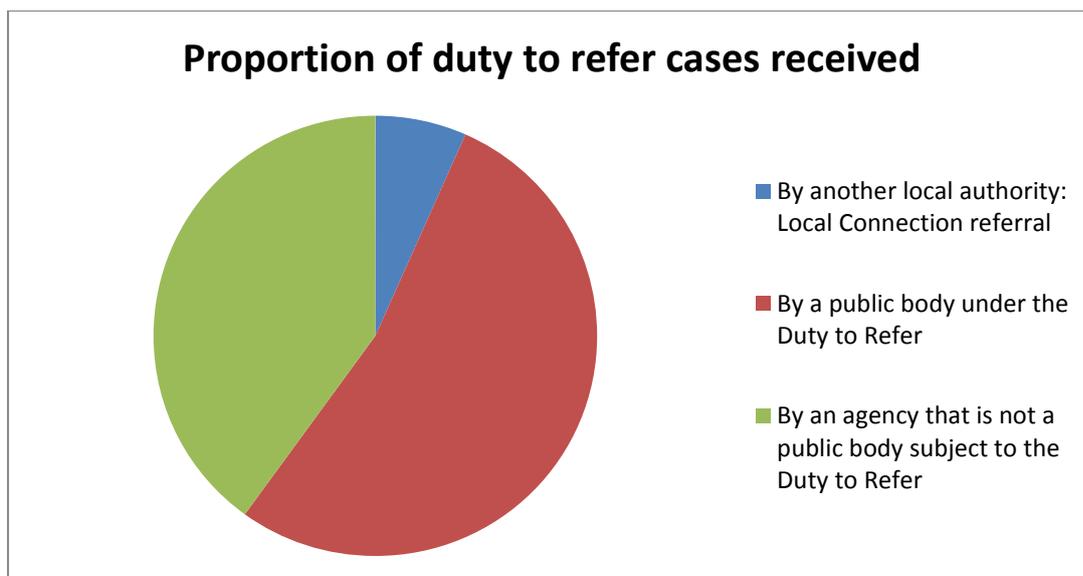
Duty to Refer

In October 2018, the Government introduced a new duty to refer households who may be homeless or threatened with homelessness on public bodies, including prisons, the Job Centre and adult social services (amongst others). There is a discretion on other agencies to refer into the service and this has been an available option since April 2018.

Between April 2018 and February 2019, the Council received 30 such referrals, with 53% being received from a specified public body under the Duty to Refer.

The main agencies that the Council received referrals from were:

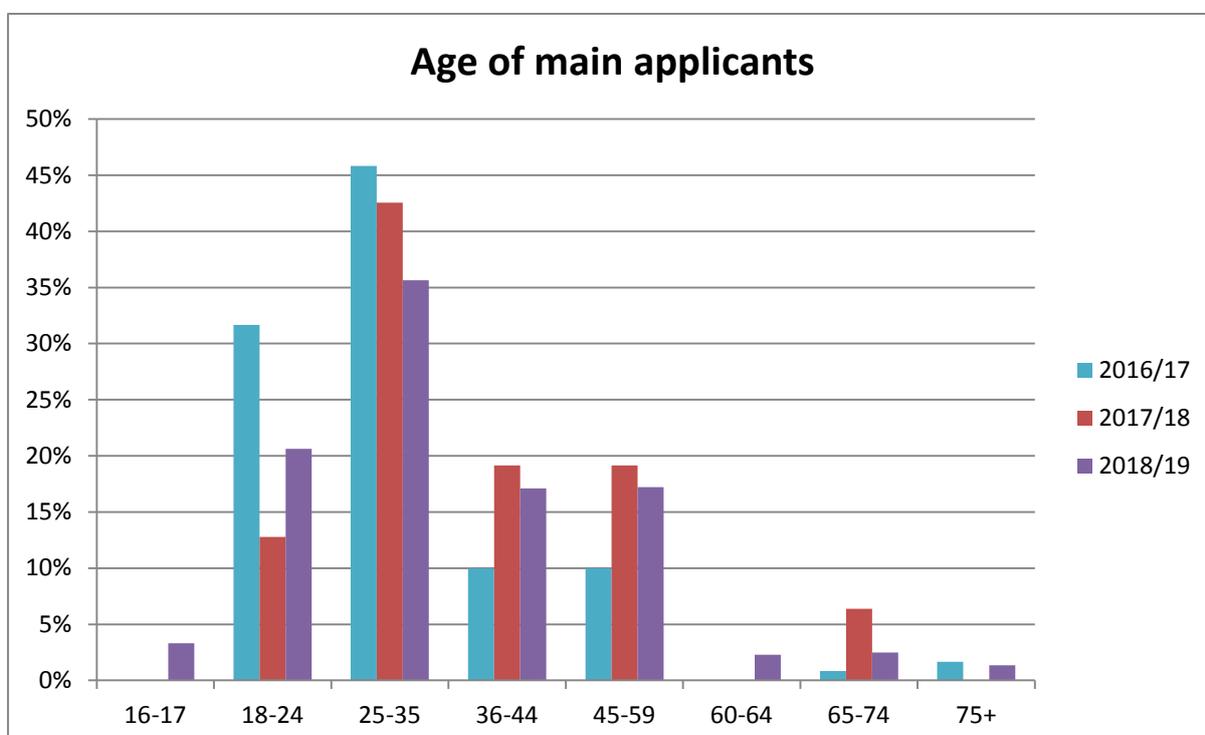
- Citizens Advice Bureau / Debt Advice Agency (13%)
- Community Rehabilitation Company (13%)
- DWP – Jobcentre Plus (10%)
- Adult Social Services (10%)



The overall proportion of referrals is only 7% of the total number of homeless applications (417) received since April 2018. The data demonstrates that there needs to be additional focus on encouraging partner agencies to refer cases into the Housing Options Team.

Breakdown of Individuals approaching the Housing Options Service

Between April 2018 and February 2019, 965 individuals approached our service, 57% of individuals approaching the Housing Options service are aged between 18 and 35. Out of this figure, 21% are aged between 18 and 24. This figure reflects trends pre-Homeless Reduction Act as demonstrated by the graph below.



Within our highest age band of 25-35 year olds, 55% are female and 44% are male. 1% of individuals approaching our service identified themselves as transgender.

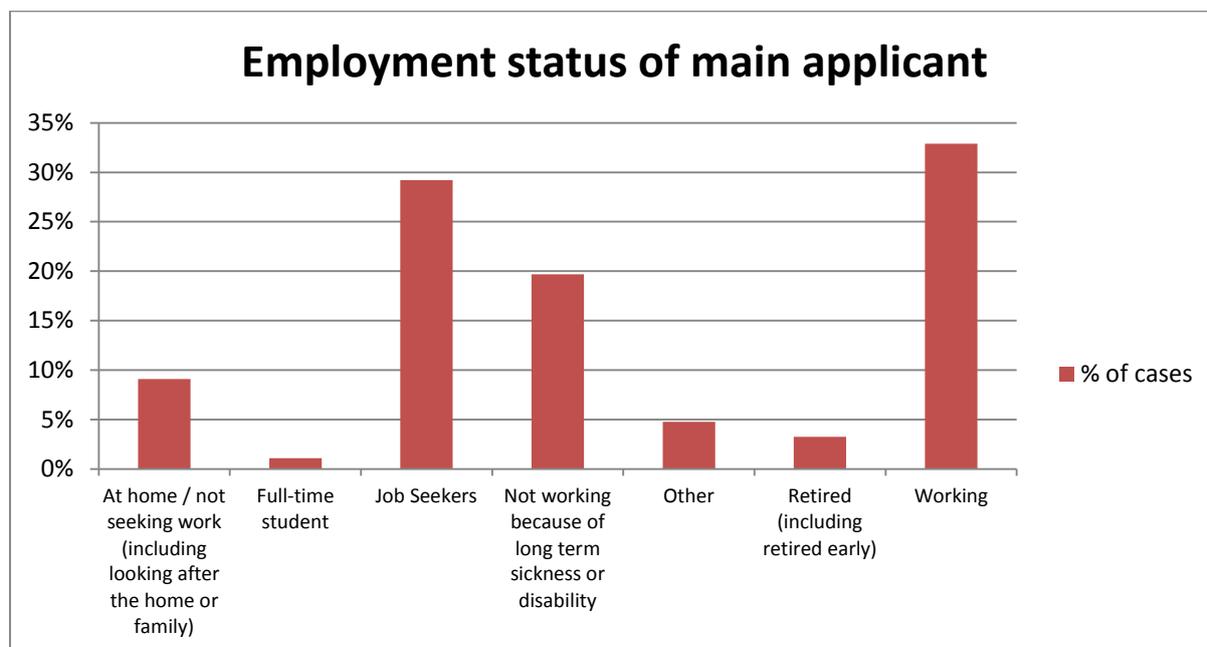
Sexual orientation of individuals approaching the Housing Options service, during the same period, is outlined below:

	Gay / Lesbian	Heterosexual	Other	Prefer not to say
% of Applicants April 2018 – February 2019	1%	92%	3%	5%

The largest ethnicity groups in the Borough are:

- White: English / Welsh / Scottish / Northern Irish / British (90%)
- Any other White background (3%)
- Black / African / Caribbean / Black British: African (2%)
- Mixed / Multiple ethnic groups: White and Black Caribbean (2%).

The employment status of individuals approaching our service is demonstrated by the graph below:



49% of individuals were in receipt of an income- based benefit, with 29% assessed as capable of work and 20% on a long- term sickness related benefit. 33% of individuals were employed at the time of approaching our service.

The roll out of full digital service for Universal Credit took place in Stafford on 21st November 2018. The impact was that qualifying households would transfer onto Universal Credit upon reporting a change of circumstances, which includes putting in a new claim for Housing Benefit. The impact since 21st November 2019 has been relatively minor with 26 applicants who are on Universal Credit as Benefits towards housing costs. The Housing Options Team are continuing to work closely with the Job Centre Plus, Benefits Team and Citizens Advice Bureau (along with voluntary groups and housing associations) in order to monitor the impact of Universal Credit and promote clear pathways of support for vulnerable households, particularly those who may be at risk of homelessness.

Support Needs of Homeless Applicants

The table of data below compares the support needs of Stafford homeless applicants between April 2018 and February 2019 and homeless applicants across England between April 2018 and June 2018.

During the period of Stafford applications:

- 965 individuals approaching the service in Stafford
- 417 homeless applications
- 213 of these applicants had no support needs

204 applicants had at least 1 support need (49%). The figures for each support need (see table below) relates to the proportion of homeless applicants having each support need. Therefore, the percentages don't add up to 49% for Stafford or 47% for England. An applicant may have more than 1 support need so are included in multiple support needs.

Overall, the table shows that the support needs of homeless applicants in Stafford are similar to support needs across England overall. However, the percentage of applicants with alcohol dependency, drug dependency and an offending history are slightly higher in Stafford than across England. The number of applicants with physical ill health or disability is significantly lower in Stafford than throughout England.

Support Need	Access to education, employment or training	Alcohol dependency needs	At risk of/has experienced abuse (non-domestic)	At risk of/has experienced domestic abuse	At risk of/has experienced sexual abuse/exploitation	Care leaver aged 18-20 years	Care leaver aged 21+ years	Drug dependency needs	Former asylum seeker
Count - Stafford	3	24	12	32	6	6	6	29	0
Stafford % of Applicants	1%	6%	3%	8%	1%	1%	1%	7%	0%
England % of Applicants	4%	4%	3%	9%	2%	1%	1%	5%	1%

Support Need continued	History of rough sleeping	Learning disability	No support needs	Offending history	Old age	Physical ill health and disability	Served in HM forces	Young parent requiring support to manage independently	Young person aged 16-17 years	History of mental health problems	History of repeat homelessness
Count – Stafford	32	12	213	38	11	30	2	3	1	71	36
Stafford % of Applicants	8%	3%	51%	9%	3%	7%	0%	1%	0%	17%	9%
England % of Applicants	6%	4%	52%	7%	1%	14%	1%	1%	1%	22%	7%

In February 2019, we conducted a survey with partner agencies to understand their views on homelessness within the Borough. The partner agencies who responded are outlined below:

Organisation Name	Type of organisation
Rethink Mental Illness	Supported Housing
Staffordshire County Council	Local Authority
Wrekin Housing Trust	Housing Association
Stafford & Cannock League of Hospital Friends	Housing Charity
Midlands Partnership Foundation Trust	Mental Health Trust
Citizens Advice Bureau – Staffordshire South West	Advice Charity
22 Signal Regiment	Military Establishment
Staffordshire and West Midlands Community Rehabilitation Company	Probation Service
Stafford and Rural Homes	Housing Association
Midland Heart	Housing Association
iMOVEHOME	Letting Agent

Partner agencies were asked to provide the top 3 support needs in ranked order.

The top needs identified by partner agencies are:

- 1) Drug and alcohol dependency
- 2) Budgeting
- 3) Physical illness or disability

Additional comments from organisations stated that “mental health needs are often present”, but that they also “work with a number of adults who have multiple and complex needs”, and the “majority of homeless may be dual diagnosis or have tri-morbidity issues”, as well as clients having “no concept of making sure they have money to pay their bills and keep their tenancies safe”.

10 out of the 12 partner agencies said that their agency or service was impacted by homelessness.

Causes of Homelessness

The main 3 reasons for homelessness in the Borough in 2018/19 are:

- End of private rented tenancy (17%)
- Family no longer willing or able to accommodate (17%)
- Domestic Abuse (10%)

As demonstrated in previous years, end of private rent tenancy and domestic abuse have consistently been the main reasons for loss of settled home; however, family no longer willing or able to accommodate has seen a sudden spike in 2018/19 (however this is in line with national trends).

In the period between 3rd April 2018 and 1st February 2019, there were 417 homeless applications in Stafford. This compares to 65 homeless applications in 2017/2018 and 76 homeless applications for 2016/2017.

The table below also looks at the main reason for loss of settled home across the whole of England in the period between April 2018 and June 2019. During this period, there were 58,660 homeless applications nationally. The main reasons for homelessness across England during this period are the same as Stafford Borough. However, there is also a significant number of 'Other' causes across England (25%).

Reason for loss of settled home

2018/19

	Domestic Abuse	End of private rented tenancy	End of social rented tenancy	Eviction from supported housing	Family no longer willing or able to accommodate	Fire or flood / other emergency	Friends no longer willing or able to accommodate	Left HM Forces	Left institution with no accommodation available	Mortgage Repossession	Non-racially motivated / other motivated violence or harassment	Other	Property disrepair	Racially motivated violence or harassment	Relationship with partner ended (non-violent breakdown)	Rent arrears	Required to leave accommodation provided by Home Office or asylum
Stafford No. April 2018 – February 2019	45	95	26	14	81	2	18	3	7	5	10	41	4	0	66	0	0
Stafford % of Applicants	11%	23%	6%	3%	19%	0%	4%	1%	2%	1%	2%	10%	1%	0%	16%	0%	0%
England % of Applicants April – July 2018*	8%	24%	6%	0%	18%	0%	4%	0%	1%	1%	2%	25%	0%	0%	7%	3%	1%

*Source: Statutory homelessness decisions on initial duties owed, Reason for loss of last settled home for those owed a prevention or relief duty by region – England, April to June 2018, MHCLG, December 2018

2017/18

	Domestic Abuse	End of private rented tenancy	End of social rented tenancy	Eviction from supported housing	Family no longer willing or able to accommodate	Fire or flood / other emergency	Friends no longer willing or able to accommodate	Left HM Forces	Left institution with no accommodation available	Mortgage Repossession	Non-racially motivated / other motivated violence or harassment	Other	Property disrepair	Racially motivated violence or harassment	Relationship with partner ended (non-violent breakdown)	Rent arrears	Required to leave accommodation provided by Home Office or asylum
Stafford No. 2017/18	11	10	0	1	2	0	3	0	2	4	2	8	0	0	2	2	0
% of Applicants	23%	21%	0%	2%	4%	0%	6%	0%	4%	9%	4%	17%	0%	0%	4%	4%	0%

2016/17

	Domestic Abuse	End of private rented tenancy	End of social rented tenancy	Eviction from supported housing	Family no longer willing or able to accommodate	Fire or flood / other emergency	Friends no longer willing or able to accommodate	Left HM Forces	Left institution with no accommodation available	Mortgage Repossession	Non-racially motivated / other motivated violence or harassment	Other	Property disrepair	Racially motivated violence or harassment	Relationship with partner ended (non-violent breakdown)	Rent arrears	Required to leave accommodation provided by Home Office or asylum
Stafford No. 2016/17	24	31	0	1	5	1	9	0	5	2	8	14	0	0	11	9	0
% of Applicants	20%	26%	0%	1%	4%	1%	8%	0%	4%	2%	7%	12%	0%	0%	9%	8%	0%

Repeat homelessness

Between April 2018 and February 2019, there were 49 cases recorded of repeated homelessness, which equates to 21% of relief cases during this period. Repeated homelessness cases are individuals or households who have accessed our services on more than one occasion within the last year.

The main causes of repeat homelessness are:

- End of private rented tenancy (14%)
- Eviction from supported housing (12%)
- End of social rented tenancy (10%)

In February 2019, Stafford Borough Council conducted a survey with 12 partner agencies. We asked 'do you think repeat homelessness is an issue in Stafford? 100% of respondents answered "Yes" to this question.

Reasons for this response included "individuals not having outreach support or the skills to live independently", "repeat offenders who struggle to maintain accommodation" and "clients with complex needs require high levels of support to be able to maintain independent living" and "because we see customers coming through our service many times" as they have "lost their accommodation due to non payment of rent, anti social behaviour etc."

We also asked 'what do you think are the main causes of repeat homelessness in Stafford?' Partner agencies were asked to provide their top 3 causes of repeat homelessness in ranked order.

The main causes identified were:

- Inappropriate offers of accommodation
- Low income
- Drug use

Despite repeat homelessness amounting to only 8% of total homeless applications, there is still a perception amongst partners that it is an issue in Stafford. The perceived causes of repeat homelessness from partner agencies demonstrates the importance of holistic housing and suitability of accommodation assessments in order to promote tenancy sustainment.

Rough Sleeping

Rough Sleeper Estimate

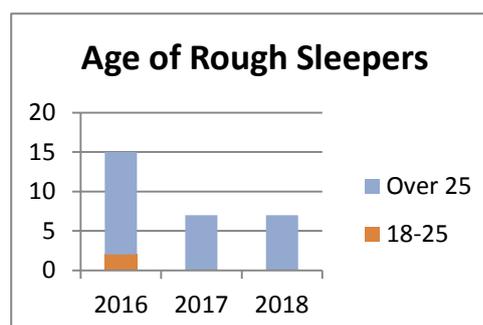
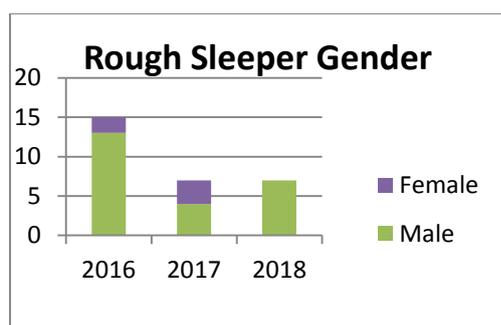
Rough Sleeping is the most acute form of housing need and is used to describe individuals who are roofless and bedding down without adequate shelter. Stafford Borough Council takes a proactive approach to rough sleeping with various interventions in place to provide options into long-term sustainable accommodation, including the Community Matron for the Homeless, the Tenancy Sustainment Officer and Housing First. Through the use of various interventions, Stafford have reduced the number of individuals rough sleeping by half since 2016 and have sustained this reduction into 2018.

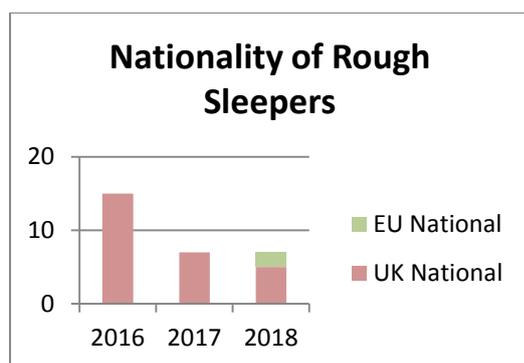
The Housing Options Team collect weekly estimates on rough sleepers within the Borough through the Vulnerabilities HUB which includes feedback from various partner agencies. This detailed approach has allowed us to maintain a named list of rough sleeper and gain a detailed understanding of their support needs which has been used to tailor the above mentioned interventions.

The Housing Options Team submits an official rough sleeper estimate on an annual basis to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. The most recent count, in November 2018, was 7 individuals rough sleeping in Stafford Borough. The data shows that the majority of our rough sleepers are consistently male. In 2018, for our most recent reporting, there were no female rough sleepers.

For the last 2 years, all rough sleepers have been aged over 25.

In the latest report, we had 2 individuals who were EU nationals with no recourse to public funds. Previously, all rough sleepers were UK nationals only. This has presented new challenges to the Housing Options Team who worked closely with adult social care and safeguarding in order to address the needs of vulnerable rough sleepers with no recourse to public funds.





Between April 2018 and February 2019, there were 13 homeless applicants whose accommodation at time of application was listed as rough sleeping (in the judgement of the assessor).

Out of the 13 approaches, the main reasons for loss of settled home for rough sleepers are:

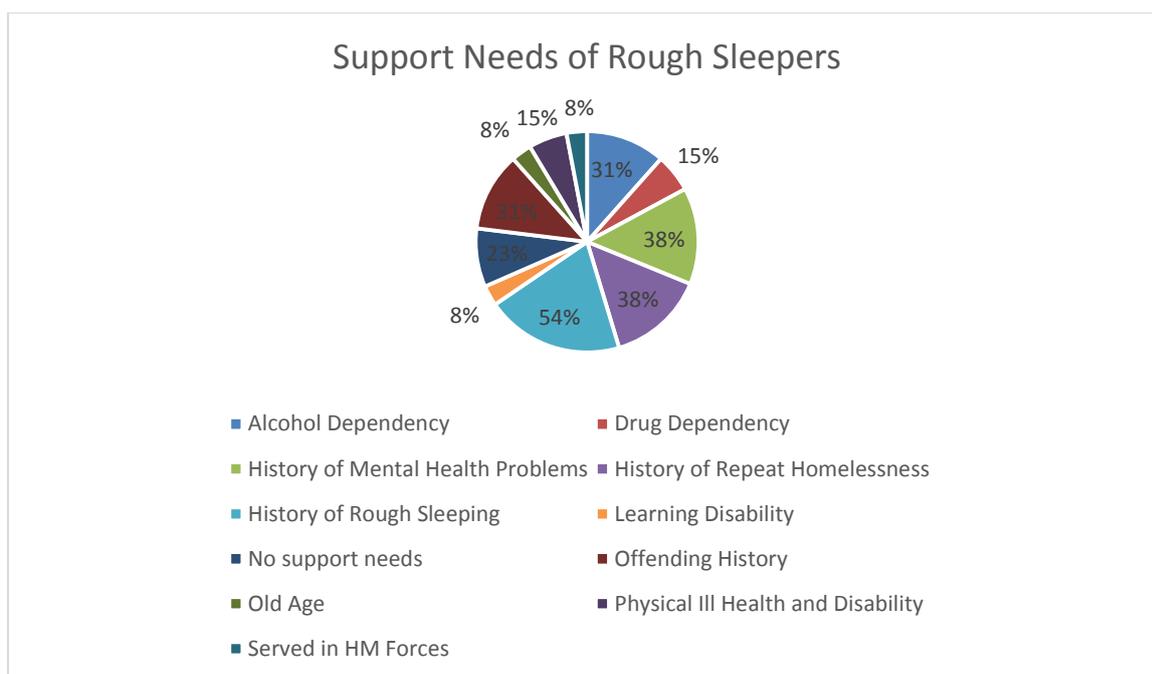
- Relationship with partner ended (non-violent breakdown) (31%)
- End of social rented tenancy (15%)
- Eviction from supported housing (15%)
- Left institution with no accommodation available (15%)

In addition to the above, 97 applicants (23% of all applicants) were recorded as having no fixed abode or sofa surfing with family or friends. There were also 5 applicants (1%) who were recorded as becoming homeless on departure from an institution – custody or hospital.

Support Needs

77% of rough sleepers have at least 1 support need with 46% presenting with support needs relating to substance misuse and 38% presenting with a history of mental health problems. Out of the 13 rough sleepers who approached the service between April 2018 and February 2019, 46% were recorded as having multiple and complex needs as they approached with both substance misuse and a history of mental health problems.

When we consider data collected from the Community Matron for the Homeless, this figure increases to 71% of entrenched rough sleepers who present with both substance misuse and mental health related support needs.



Outcome of Homeless Applications

Between April 2018 and February 2019, there were 633 closed cases, of which 120 were Prevention cases and 129 were Relief cases.

70% of Prevention cases were considered to be a “successful” outcome – identified as the first 4 reasons in the Prevention table below.

56% of Relief cases were considered to be a “successful” outcome – identified as the first 3 reasons in the Prevention table below.

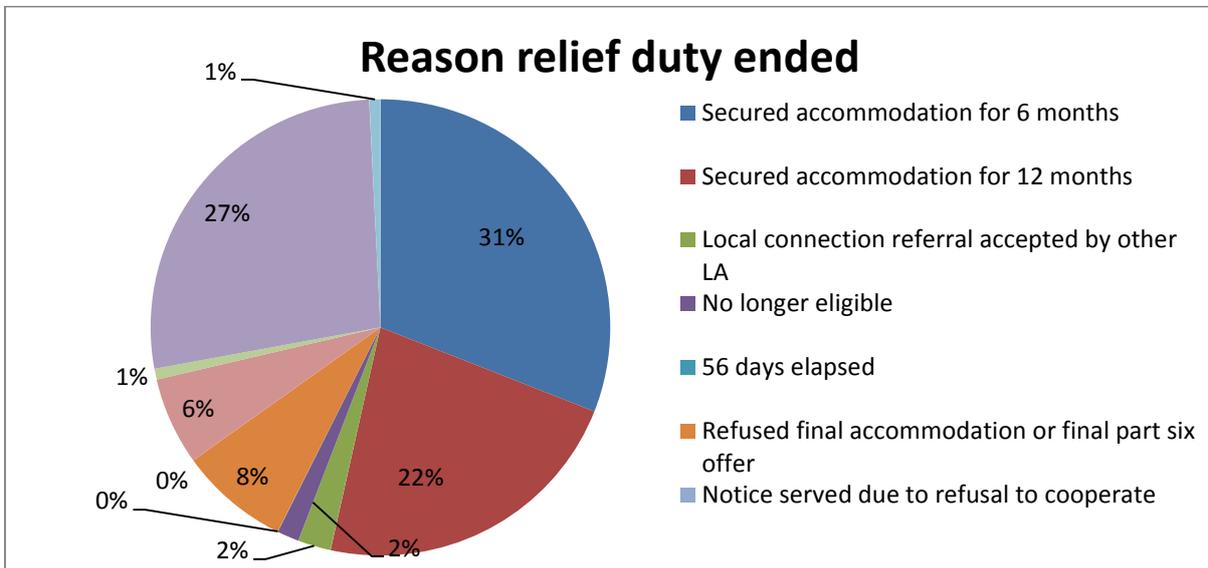
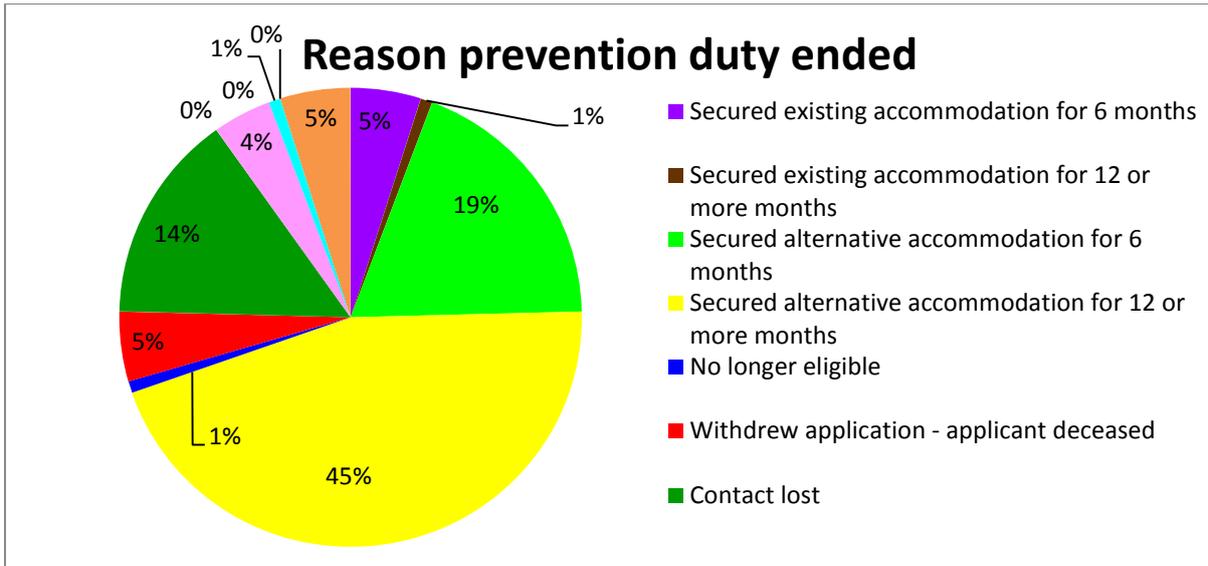
The 2nd column in the table below identifies the % of cases out of all prevention or relief cases. The 3rd column identifies the proportion the associated reason has as a % of all closed cases, for example 9% of all closed cases secured alternative accommodation for 12 or more months as a prevention case, and 5% of all closed cases secured accommodation for 12 months as a relief case.

Out of the closed prevention cases, 70% secure some form of accommodation for at least 6 months.

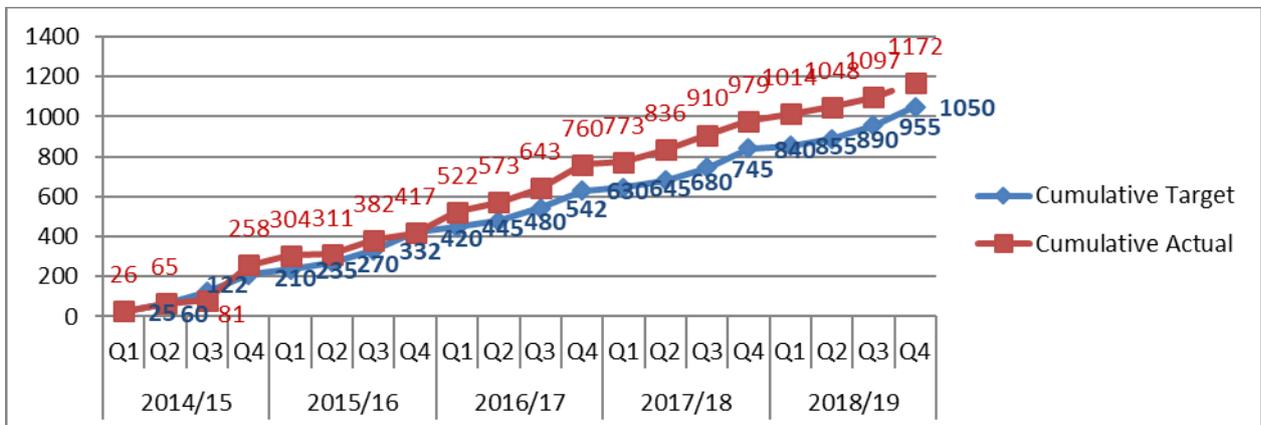
Out of the relief cases, 53% secured some form of accommodation for at least 6 months.

Unfortunately, contact lost is a common reason for prevention or relief duty to end. For relief cases, 27% of closed cases ended due to contact being lost.

Reason prevention duty ended	% of all Prevention cases	% of all closed cases
Secured existing accommodation for 6 months	5%	1%
Secured existing accommodation for 12 or more months	1%	0%
Secured alternative accommodation for 6 months	19%	4%
Secured alternative accommodation for 12 or more months	45%	9%
No longer eligible	1%	0%
Withdrew application - applicant deceased	5%	1%
Contact lost	15%	3%
Homeless	0%	0%
56 days or more expired and no further action	4%	1%
Intentionally homeless from accommodation provided	0%	0%
Refused suitable accommodation	1%	0%
Refused to cooperate	0%	0%
Unknown	5%	1%
TOTAL	100%	19%
Reason relief duty ended	% of all Relief cases	% of all closed cases
Secured accommodation for 6 months	31%	6%
Secured accommodation for 12 months	22%	5%
Local connection referral accepted by other LA	2%	0%
No longer eligible	2%	0%
56 days elapsed	0%	0%
Refused final accommodation or final part six offer	8%	2%
Notice served due to refusal to cooperate	0%	0%
Withdrew application - applicant deceased	6%	1%
Intentionally homeless from accommodation provided	1%	0%
Contact lost	27%	6%
Unknown	1%	0%
TOTAL	100%	20%

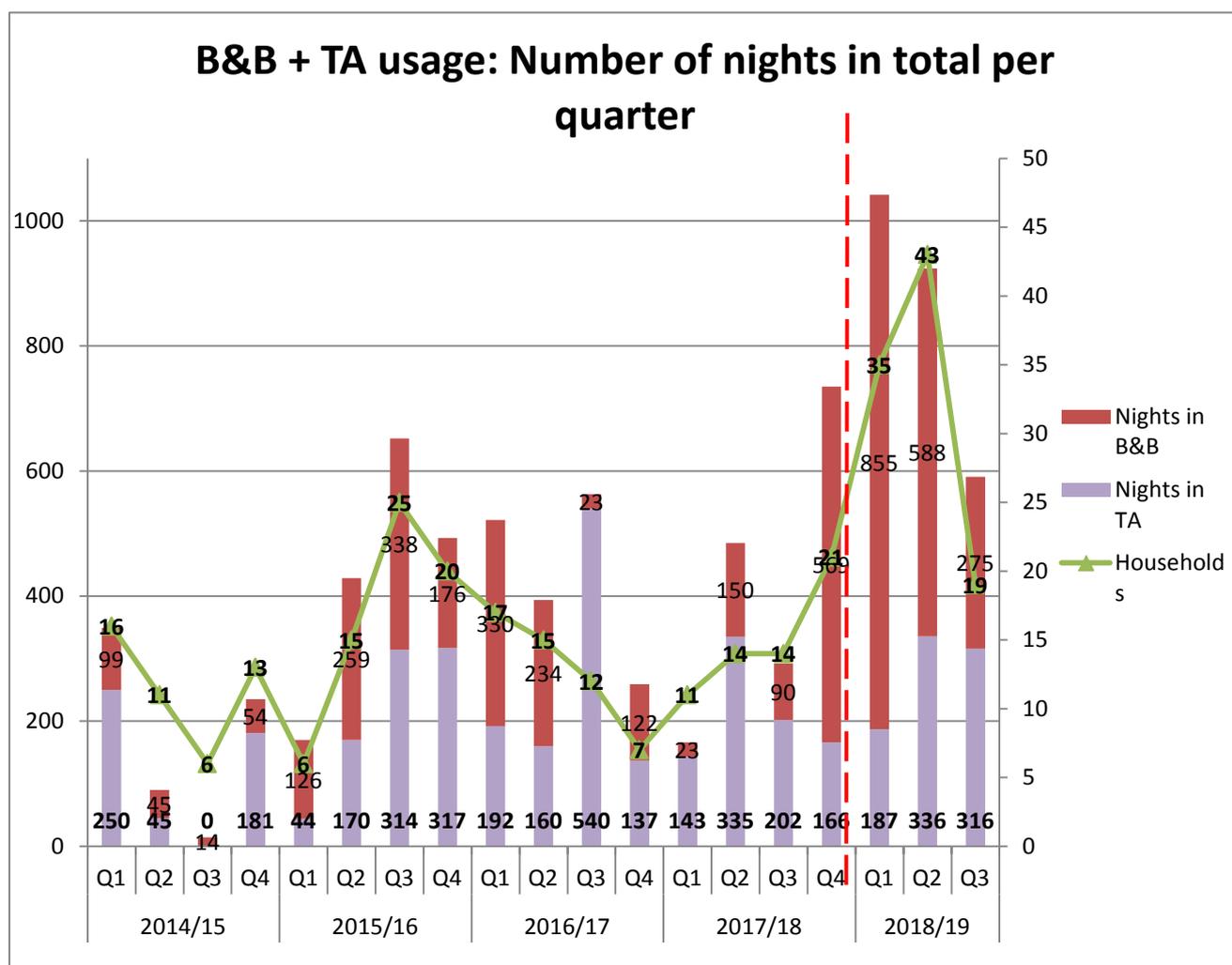


Supply of Affordable Homes



Continued delivery of affordable homes remains a Council priority as this is essential in tackling homelessness. The graph demonstrates how delivery is currently exceeding targeted figures however we are not predicting this trend to continue going forward.

Temporary Accommodation



NB: The red line demonstrates a change in our methodology.

Quarter 4 of 2017/018 saw the beginning of the spike in temporary accommodation usage and nights spent in temporary accommodation. The Housing Options Team introduced the changes associated with the Homeless Reduction Act 2017 in January 2018 which can be attributed to the increased use of temporary accommodation as households that had previously been found ‘intentionally homeless’ became eligible for temporary accommodation for a longer period of time. The Housing Options Team have a focus on reducing temporary accommodation use and we can see this take effect towards the end of 2018/2019.

Breakdown of applicants spending more than 4 weeks in B&B

Since 2016, there have been 37 households that have spent more than 28 days (4 weeks) in B&B accommodation. In 2018/19 alone, there have been 24 households in B&B longer than 4 weeks. Households who spend more than four weeks in B&B accommodation are single homeless who present with multiple and complex support needs. The Housing Options Team are required to tailor packages of support to find suitable accommodation within the Borough which can be challenging.

	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	TOTAL
Number in B&B > 4 weeks	4	9	24	37

The Housing Options Team will place families in leased accommodation, and not use B&B provisions where possible.

Waiting List

In February 2019, there were 80 people on the waiting list.

The property type most in demand are 1-bed properties, with almost half of these individuals waiting for 1-bed properties.

	1-bed	2-bed	3-bed	4-bed	TOTAL
No. on waiting list	39	27	13	1	80
% of people on waiting list	49%	34%	16%	1%	100%

The majority of people on the waiting list are in band A (urgent need) or band B (high need) (95% of people on the waiting list). The highest property type and band in demand are people in band B waiting for a 1-bed property (33 individuals, 41% of people on the waiting list).

	1-bed	2-bed	3-bed	4-bed	TOTAL	% of Waiting List
A	4	8	6	1	19	24%
B	33	17	7	0	57	71%
C	1	2	0	0	3	4%
D	1	0	0	0	1	1%
TOTAL	39	27	13	1	80	100%

Outcomes – Lack of Engagement with Services.

There have been increased trends of individuals who are difficult to engage and often do not want to work with the Housing Options Team. Lack of engagement can be for a variety of different reasons that relate to both support needs and previous experiences with public services, particularly for those leaving institutions. As demonstrated by the outcome of cases data above, lack of engagement is a particular issue for applicants who are already homeless with 27% of relief cases being closed due to lost contact and 15% of prevention cases being closed for the same reason.

We asked partner agencies ‘what do you consider are the main reasons for individual’s lack of engagement with services?’ As with previous questions, partner agencies were asked to provide the top 3 reasons in ranked order.

The most common reasons for individuals’ lack of engagement with services were:

- Mental illness or disability
- Mistrust for services (2.4)
- Inflexible working commitment from professionals
- Complicated pathways into services

Why do you think these are the main reasons?

Partner agencies were asked to provide additional information to support their answers to the previous question.

Responses stated that support services teaching life skills and tackling substance addiction “is failing”, and pathways / barriers to mental health support is making it “difficult for lower level needs to be treated”, as well as there being a “minimal understanding of the root causes of homelessness” and “judgemental attitudes”.

Another response suggested that homeless individuals find it difficult to “trust anyone, let alone those that are trying to help them” and that “this trusts needs to be built up over time”.

Another response acknowledged that agencies are “working really hard to provide services” and that they “don’t see a lack of compassion”.

They also acknowledged that services can stop working with individuals if they are seen as difficult or not engaging. This lack of engagement means the individuals misses opportunities for support and then they become lost from services. This can lead to a deterioration of an individual’s physical and mental health and the person will continue to be homeless, which may eventually progress to entrenched homelessness.

Partner agencies suggested the following ideas for tackling a lack of engagement:

- Keep trying to arrange visits / appointments with the individual / offering drop-in sessions that do not require a booked in appointment and visiting the individual in a place that they choose

- Focus on achieving small goals and praising individuals for these achievements e.g. attendance at a support visit
- Spending time to build a relationship with the individual to encourage engagement
- Work with people and organisations who the individual does successfully engage with, is familiar and comfortable with
- Working with other partner agencies to establish a joint engagement strategy

The Role of the Tenancy Sustainment Officer

Stafford Borough Council employed a Tenancy Sustainment Officer (TSO) in June 2017.

The role of the TSO involves assisting vulnerable individuals with high support needs through engaging with mental health services to work towards individuals' mental health stability, ensuring benefits are maximised e.g. Personal Independent Payments and Employment Support Allowance, setting up payment plans, securing white goods and pulling in other services such as Social Care and Occupational Health in order to support individuals as best as possible in order that they sustain their tenancies.

Since the beginning of this post, the TSO has:

- Supported 14 single people and 13 families
- Sustained 35 tenancies
- Secured in excess of £8,500 grants, in addition to £1,700 carpet grants and £100 grant for children's furniture
- Purchased £7000 worth of white goods
- Obtained 20 cookers with fitting, 7 fridge freezers, 3 washing machines, 10 single beds and mattresses
- Housed 7 rough sleepers with multiple and complex needs who had previously been refused access to accommodation.



Consultation Document Six Priorities for Homelessness Strategy 2020-2025

Background

Local Housing Authorities are required to review and refresh their Homeless Strategies every five years and consult with partners following a homeless review of the local area.

The below priorities are proposed following a detailed evidence review of homelessness within Stafford Borough. Nationally there is a lot of publicity about there being a crisis in housing supply, this isn't acute in Stafford due to recent strong delivery of housing however the Borough is facing other issues that need to be addressed, many of which are reflected nationally. It is noted that Stafford is not a stock holding authority for social housing and is therefore reliant on working closely with partners to prevent and relieve homelessness. There are working relationships with private sector landlords and letting agents within the Borough that are developing however this remains a challenge with market rents exceeding local housing allowance rates and a general reluctance in the private sector to rent to tenants in receipt of benefits.

The priorities recognise that provision of social housing is often not the principal driving force behind homelessness. Some households are either losing tenancies, or are unable to access accommodation, due to unaddressed support needs. Support needs of households are being assessed as too high for much of the existing accommodation provision meaning landlords are often unwilling to give them a tenancy, but too low to meet the criteria for statutory support.

The below priorities look to address these issues with existing resources available within the Borough.

1. Early Intervention

Stafford Borough Council are committed to homeless prevention and the importance of early intervention in order to reduce the cost impact of homelessness on both individual households and public sector services. The Housing Options Team have demonstrated this commitment by achieving

Gold Standard for homeless prevention awarded by the National Practitioners Support Service.

Stafford Borough Council will work with core partners to understand the root cause of homelessness and help identify hidden homelessness within the Borough. The Housing Options Team work closely with partners and community groups to upstream homeless prevention, as demonstrated by well attended joint workshops and forums hosted by the Borough Council and a programme of awareness raising with key partners on what the role of the Options Team is and how partners can work with us to help achieve our objectives. The roll out of Universal Credit in Stafford has presented an opportunity to upstream homeless prevention by further developing partner relationships with the Job Centre Plus, landlords, the Benefits Service and the Citizen's Advice Bureau with a focus on providing households with support to transition onto the new benefit, with clear pathways to housing advice where appropriate. Our approach to Universal Credit has been mirrored by our work with local foodbanks where the Housing Options Team chair a Forum which aims to coordinate local foodbanks with a view to ensuring households who may be at risk of homelessness can access core services at the earliest opportunity.

This approach recognises the wider impact of homelessness, particularly in relation to health and wellbeing, and is part of our commitment to empowering individuals and building resilient communities within Stafford.

2. Engagement

The Housing Options Team work with individuals and households to prevent or relieve their homelessness through the use of personalised housing plans. For this to be successful we must have the engagement of the individuals and households that we are working with which can often be difficult when we are dealing with high pressure, crisis situations and increased presentations from households with multiple and complex needs, who often have a mistrust of public services.

Stafford Borough Council is proud to promote a person centred Housing Options Service that treats individuals with compassion, understanding and empathy as demonstrated by our commitment to face-to-face interviews.

Every household who approaches as homeless or threatened with homelessness is provided with an holistic housing needs assessment and interactive personalised housing plan that provides clear advice and empowers personal responsibility for an individual's housing and support needs. We encourage individuals to share the plan with relevant partner agencies such as children's services, job centre plus, the Citizens Advice Bureau and any community groups they are working with. The Housing

Options Team will proactively work with partners and value their input to fully develop personalised housing plans with an aim of securing and sustaining long term sustainable accommodation.

3. Clear Pathways out of Street Homelessness

Stafford Borough Council is committed to making even more progress in tackling rough sleeping within the Borough. The Housing Options Team recognise that housing need for rough sleepers is often a manifestation of complex support needs that must be addressed for accommodation offers to be sustainable. The Community Matron for the Homeless is pivotal in highlighting the complex support needs of rough sleepers and provides clear pathways into mental health services, amongst others, whilst linking closely with the Housing Options Team. This role has been supported by Housing First funding which provides eight units of accommodation with specialist support for entrenched rough sleepers in Stafford.

Partner agencies within Stafford have demonstrated their commitment to providing clear pathways out of street homelessness through the establishment of the Stafford Inclusion Team which is a multi-agency drop in where rough sleepers can access core service, without the requirement for appointments or referrals. The Inclusion Team is supported by Stafford and Rural Homes, the police, drug and alcohol services, mental health services and the Job Centre Plus amongst others. The work is supported by the Vulnerabilities HUB which maintains a weekly named list of rough sleepers within the Borough.

The Housing Options Team runs a drop- in service with dedicated officers available to assist those who would be roofless that night. Fortnightly walk throughs of Stafford town see the Options Team working in partnership with the town centre police to further encourage individuals to access housing services.

4. Robust Partnerships

It is widely recognised that no single organisation can prevent or relieve homelessness. Addressing the underlying causes of homelessness and working closely with relevant partners is pivotal to the success of the Housing Options Team. The Housing Options Team has well established partner relationships with core agencies within the Borough, as demonstrated by the Homeless Forum. It is a priority for Stafford Borough Council that these relationships continue to develop and strengthen in order to ensure the Borough is best equipped to deal with the changing pressures of homelessness.

In Stafford, robust partnerships are particularly important as the Council does not own housing stock. Additionally, Stafford is part of the two-tier local government system where responsibility is shared between the Borough and the County Council. It is essential that robust partnerships function at both an operational and strategic level and that there are clear pathways of housing and support for individuals accessing services. The Housing Options Team has demonstrated the success of this approach through our nomination agreements with local registered providers and our success in obtaining and sustaining long term social sector tenancies for vulnerable households.

5. Expanding Options to Prevent and Relieve Homelessness in Stafford.

Stafford Borough Council is committed to providing suitable housing options for all individuals or households who are homeless or threatened with homelessness. It is recognised that this may extend beyond the provision of housing and can include tools to prevent homelessness such as mediation, referrals for benefit and debt advice or alternative options that will allow a household to remain in their current accommodation, where it is safe and reasonable to do so.

Stafford Borough Council promotes the best use of housing stock and has entered into nomination agreements with registered providers which allows for direct offers of accommodation for households on our waiting list. Stafford Borough Council developed and reviewed the Allocation Policy in 2017 which has been successful in assisting us to prevent and relieve homelessness for vulnerable households within the Borough. Following the implementation of the Homeless Reduction Act and current demand for the service (as outlined in the Evidence Review), the following changes are being proposed to that Allocation Policy, these changes are highlighted in red:

Band	Criteria	Examples of Need
Band A	Emergency Priority	<p>Homeless applicants owed a main housing duty (Section 193(2) duty) who are priority need and not intentionally homeless.</p> <p>Applicants who are homeless and are owed the relief duty (Section 189B duty) and would be owed, or be likely to be owed, the main housing duty (Section 193(2) duty) when the relief duty comes to an end because they are or would be likely to be priority need and unintentionally homeless.</p> <p>Medical Emergency</p>

		<p>Households unable to remain in their current property due to domestic abuse where a move within/ to Stafford Borough would resolve their safety issues.</p> <p>Households unable to remain in their current property due to fire or flood.</p>
Band B	Urgent Need to Move	<p>Homeless applicants who are owed the Section 189B Relief Duty for as long as that duty is owed to the applicant, and they would not be owed, or are unlikely to be owed, the main housing duty (section 193(2) duty).</p> <p>Applicants who have been accepted through the Move – On Protocol (from supported accommodation).</p> <p>Applicants whose current housing situation is having a serious detrimental impact on their health so that they require re-housing based on medical grounds.</p> <p>Applicants whose current living conditions have been assessed as unsuitable or unsafe for them to continue to occupy by Housing Standards.</p> <p>Applicants who are overcrowded by two or more bedrooms.</p> <p>Applicants who are under occupying by two or more bedrooms.</p> <p>Injured members of the armed forces or their bereaved spouses, such injury incurred through active service.</p>
Band C	High Housing Need	<p>Applicants who are owed a Section 195 Prevention Duty for as long as that duty is owed to the applicant.</p> <p>Applicants who have entered into agreements to live with family and friends for a minimum period of six months whilst they find alternative accommodation.</p> <p>Applicants who are sharing facilities, such as a kitchen or bathroom following an offer of accommodation from the local authority and/ or where the applicant has medical, care or support needs that require self-contained accommodation.</p>

		<p>Those overcrowded and short of one bedroom.</p> <p>Those under occupying by one bedroom.</p> <p>Applicants approved as foster or adoptive parents who need to move to facilitate the placement of a child/ children.</p>
Band D	No/ Low Housing Need	<p>Applicants living separately with ex-partners following a non-violent relationship breakdown.</p> <p>Those who have outstanding debts to a landlord and who have not entered into or are not adhering to a payment plan</p> <p>Those who have deliberately worsened their housing situation, or have been found intentionally homeless.</p>

The above changes reflect current data that demonstrate a blockage of individuals in Band B. It also reflects current causes of homelessness and should allow more flexibility for households and encourage the use of entry level accommodation (i.e. supported accommodation and house shares in the private rented sector) as a starting block for single households, reducing pressure on both temporary accommodation and one bedroom properties. It also provides households who are living with family and friends the option to negotiate an extended stay to plan a move rather than present as homeless. Other areas have been updated to allow for more flexibility under the policy and to promote best use of housing stock.

Stafford Borough Council recognise the importance of supported accommodation, for those individuals and households who would not be able to sustain a tenancy independently. The Council are committed to reviewing both bed spaces and levels of support provided in the existing supported accommodation in Stafford.

Access to the private rented sector remains challenging, with a growing disparity between market rent and local housing allowance making properties unaffordable for households in receipt of income-based benefits. Landlord perception is also a challenge with some landlords having blanket policies which refuse to let to households in receipt of Housing Benefit, particularly Universal Credit. The Housing Options Team have responded to these challenges by developing a Private Sector Toolkit that provides Landlords and Letting Agents with a variety of options to reduce perceived financial, and other, risks of letting to low income or vulnerable households.

The continued delivery of suitable affordable accommodation remains a Council priority and is essential in tackling homelessness.

6. Sustainment

The most successful outcome for the Housing Option Team is to enable households to live in long term sustainable homes. This requires a detailed assessment of circumstances that may go beyond statutory assessments of suitability. Stafford Borough Council recognises that a stable home enables people to access support services, integrate into their local community and obtain and sustain training and employment. It is important that offers of accommodation meet the support needs of households in order to promote long- term accommodation options.

The Housing Options Team fund a Tenancy Sustainment Officer who provides practical advice and support to help the most vulnerable households to achieve long term sustainable homes. Support packages are tailored to the individual and can include practical solutions such as taking individuals to appointments, accessing benefit services and applying for grants for white goods or furniture. This approach has been successful in sustaining accommodation and encouraging individuals to take personal responsibility for their home.

APPENDIX 4

Consultation Questions

- 1) Do you agree with each of the priorities as set out in the draft strategy?
Yes/ No
Comment
- 2) As a result of the evidence that has been produced in the review, do you think there are any additional priorities the Council should consider?
- 3) How can your organisation support the priorities within the Strategy?
- 4) Please explain any positive or negative potential impacts that the Strategy might have on equality and diversity?
- 5) Please explain any positive or negative potential impacts that the Strategy might have on health and communities?

Please provide any other comments