

Evidence Review

2025 - 2030

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1. Background and Context

Stafford Borough has two main towns, the County town of Stafford and a smaller market town of Stone. The Borough is resident to approximately 138,670 people, with over half the population living in Stafford Town.

Levels of home ownership in Stafford are 9% higher than across England, with 42,532 owner occupied properties. Social housing accounts for 14% of overall housing stock (compared to 17% across England) with 8,146 properties across the Borough and private rented properties account for 16% of overall housing stock (compared to 20% across England) with 9,336 properties across the Borough (Census 2021).

Stafford Borough has a significantly higher percentage of owner-occupied homes than across England (71% vs 62%). Levels of social (14%) and private rented properties (16%) are subsequently lower in Stafford than England (20% - private; 17% social rented).

Although a relatively affluent area it contains some neighbourhoods experiencing social and economic deprivation. (ONS; Exploring Local Income Deprivation) Employment rates in Stafford are 80.8%, which sits above the West Midlands (75%) and national average (75.7%) however is slightly below the Staffordshire average (84.4%) (Joint Strategic Needs Assessment 23/24).

Homeless applications from working households has remained relatively high at approximately 30% since the last evidence review was completed in 2019.

Cost of living pressures have inevitably impacted households ability to sustain accommodation. In 23/24, Citizen's Advice have recorded presentations from 2,091 households with debt related issues, amounting to nearly £5 000,000 amount of debt.

Stafford has an ageing population, with the number of people aged 75 to 84 years increasing by 38.9% whilst the number of residents between 35 and 49 decreased by 11.6% from 2011 to 2021. The proportion of those aged 65 is expected to increase further by 21% by 2032.

Despite the ageing population, the self-reported health of the population is good with 83% of residents reporting good or very good health compared to 81.7% across England. Lower levels of bad or very bad health are also reported (4.5%) compared to England (5.3%) and Staffordshire (5.2%). However, health inequality is apparent with a lower life expectancy of over 6 years for those living in the most deprived areas. Within the borough, these are Common, Highfields and Weston Downs, Forebridge and Penkside (Census 2021)

Since 2022, households approaching Housing Options for advice and support has more than doubled. Historically, a number of programmes that prevented homelessness were rationalised as part of the process of refocussing public expenditure, and the impact of these changes continues to be seen through increasing numbers of homeless presentations.

Stafford Borough is not a stock holding authority. In 2006, Stafford Borough Council transferred housing stock to Stafford and Rural Homes (now Homes Plus). Since 2017, Stafford Borough Council has managed their waiting list internally, with nomination agreements to Homes Plus along with other registered providers of social housing with stock in the Borough. Nomination agreements mean that a percentage of properties will be made available to the Council to offer to applicants from the waiting list in accordance with the Allocation Policy. Homes Plus advertise these properties via My HomesPlus website and applicants bid for eligible properties, whereas other Housing Associations provide their properties for direct nomination from the Council.

Since 2014, completion of affordable homes has been in line with this target however we recognise the pipeline in the short-term is reduced. In July 2024, Government announced an overhaul of the planning system which has seen new mandatory housebuilding targets for councils. Stafford has a new target of 751 dwellings per year. This is a significant uplift on previous figures and will result in significantly more affordable housing being delivered.

Support needs of households accessing the service continue to be high with 71% of households presenting with at least one support need, that is often unaddressed and increasing numbers presenting with more than one support need. Households experiencing homelessness can fall between the gap of not meeting the criteria for adult social care or statutory support services but perceived as having needs that are too complex for existing accommodation provision, resulting in homeless services being the safety net catching households who have fallen outside of other services in the Borough.

As it remains difficult to accommodate households with unaddressed support needs in the social housing sector, households often have no choice but to turn to the private rented sector which can be inaccessible due to high rents and competitive demand for properties within the sector. Those households with vulnerabilities, who may have a low income or need additional support to maintain a secure tenancy, get overlooked for more financially stable households who present with little or no need.

Since the last review, we have been working with housing providers and partner agencies to bridge this gap and provide options for those who would have previously fallen between services. We have continued to build on existing relationships with registered providers of social housing to strengthen our existing nomination agreements by sharing information and support plan relating to households who may have previously been considered as too complex for general needs housing. For such cases, we have promoted a multi-disciplinary approach, where agencies with the ability to provide support are part of the housing process, sharing risk and responsibility for housing those with perceived complex needs and providing reassurance to housing providers who may otherwise have felt unsupported in the process.

Covid impacted the way we work with partners. Changes in working practices, alongside system restructures and staff changes has meant that we have had to take a dynamic approach to partnerships and respond pragmatically to those changes at both an operational and strategic level.

Practical challenges such as the ability to arrange in person appointments for vulnerable clients can impact otherwise resilient partnerships. As partnership meetings have become virtual, the ability to build rapport with colleagues from different agencies has become more difficult, with pressures on frontline staff to attend more virtual meetings with no travel time or crucial networking time in between. With multi-disciplinary meetings often taking place online, it can be more difficult to portray the challenges we have as a service, whilst other practitioners can often be balancing conflicting demands at the same time.

Despite the above, we have significant support of our partner agencies for our work in ending rough sleeping. We have continued our joint working with Midland Heart to provide 33-bed purpose-built accommodation at Eagle House for those experiencing homelessness. Eagle House have seen increasing demand from applicants with multiple and complex needs that, since supporting people funding was repurposed, they have not had the ability to support. Ring-fenced grant funding has been utilised to enable Eagle House to provide more intensive support to high need residents, including those with experience of rough sleeping. The new model has been successful in providing accommodation for single homeless with complex need but there remains challenges with availability of move on accommodation for the cohort and uncertainty of future funding that is currently dependant on short-term grant funding.

In 2021, Stafford Borough Council were successful in bidding for two rounds of rough sleeping funding resulting in five units of dispersed 'housing first' accommodation with support and six units of purpose-designed accommodation under one roof for entrenched rough sleepers, who had been repeatedly excluded from other provision. This funding has been pivotal in providing secure accommodation for those rough sleepers in crisis and ensuring that they receive appropriate support.

Since opening, all units have been fully occupied with providers maintaining waiting lists for those requiring high level supported accommodation demonstrating that there remains a gap in provision for high level supported accommodation.

'Everybody In' demonstrated that it is not just the provision of accommodation that is needed to break the cycle of entrenched homelessness and rough sleeping but that multi-agency support to address the wider needs of those experiencing homelessness is essential for long-term sustainment.

As services across the sector face their own restrictions and challenges, we are finding it increasingly difficult to access support that is timely and meets the multifaceted needs of those experiencing homelessness and rough sleeping. Policies relating to early prison release, migration and the private sector housing have added to the existing pressures within the system, compounded by uncertainty on the ability of Housing Associations to continue to develop in the near future.

In order to end rough sleeping and prevent homelessness we must ensure sufficient supply of suitable affordable housing and work with our partner agencies so that adequate and timely support is provided that enables household to sustain long-term accommodation.

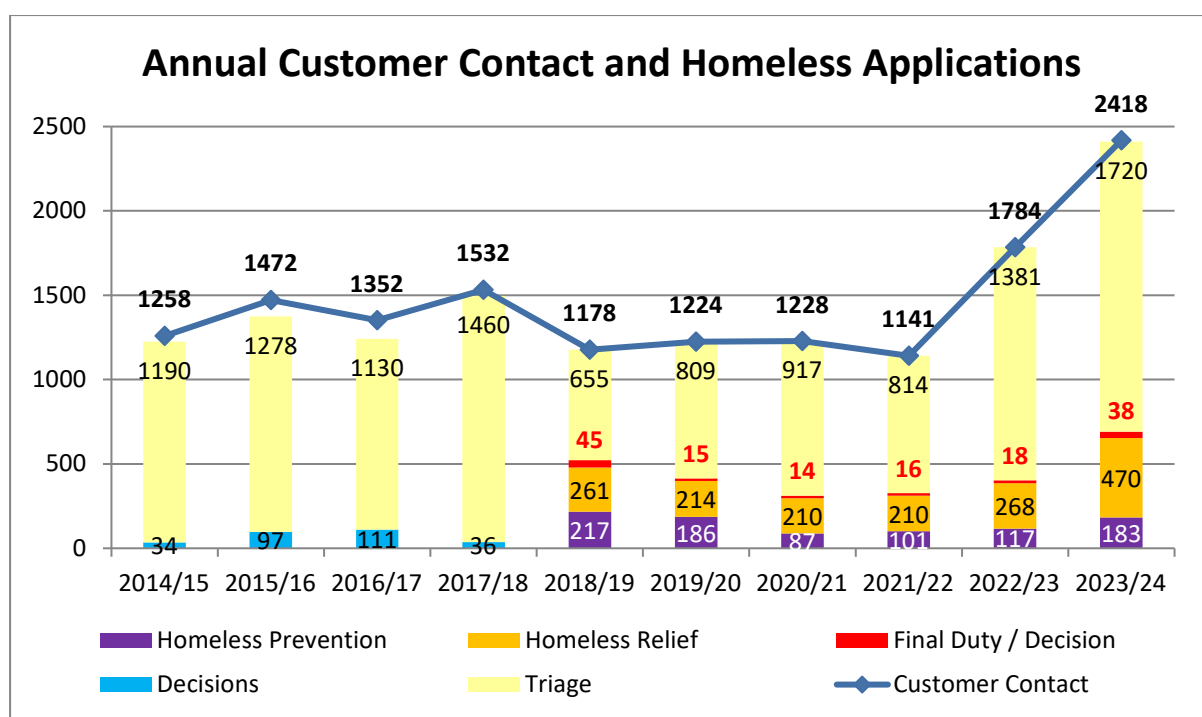
2. Households Accessing the Housing Options Service

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.

Case Type

Since 2021/2022, there has been a 112% increase in households approaching the service for housing advice and assistance, with a 120% increase in homeless applications during the same period which has placed considerable resource pressures on the Housing Options Team.

Figure 1 - Graph showing demand on the service throughout the years showing the number of households approaching the council broken down by case type and duty:



For those presenting as homeless, over 70% approach at crisis point (known as Homeless Relief) whilst less than 30% approach for early interventions (known as Homeless Prevention).

The Housing Options Team work closely with partner agencies to encourage early referrals into the service however it remains a challenge to encourage households to seek help at an earlier stage. As demonstrated later in the evidence review, households are more likely to engage with the Housing Options Officer and obtain successful outcomes when they approach at prevention stage.

Early interventions reduce wider pressures on the service, including emergency accommodation and pressures on staff who find themselves in a position of having to find immediate solutions to often complex and multi-faceted problems. Scope for creative interventions, that involve relevant partner agencies that best address the needs of the household, is best placed when households approach at the earliest opportunity. However, in some areas this requires a culture change for frontline practitioners who have become accustomed to working in crisis environments where policy and budget constraints provide an expectation that only those in crisis receive a response.

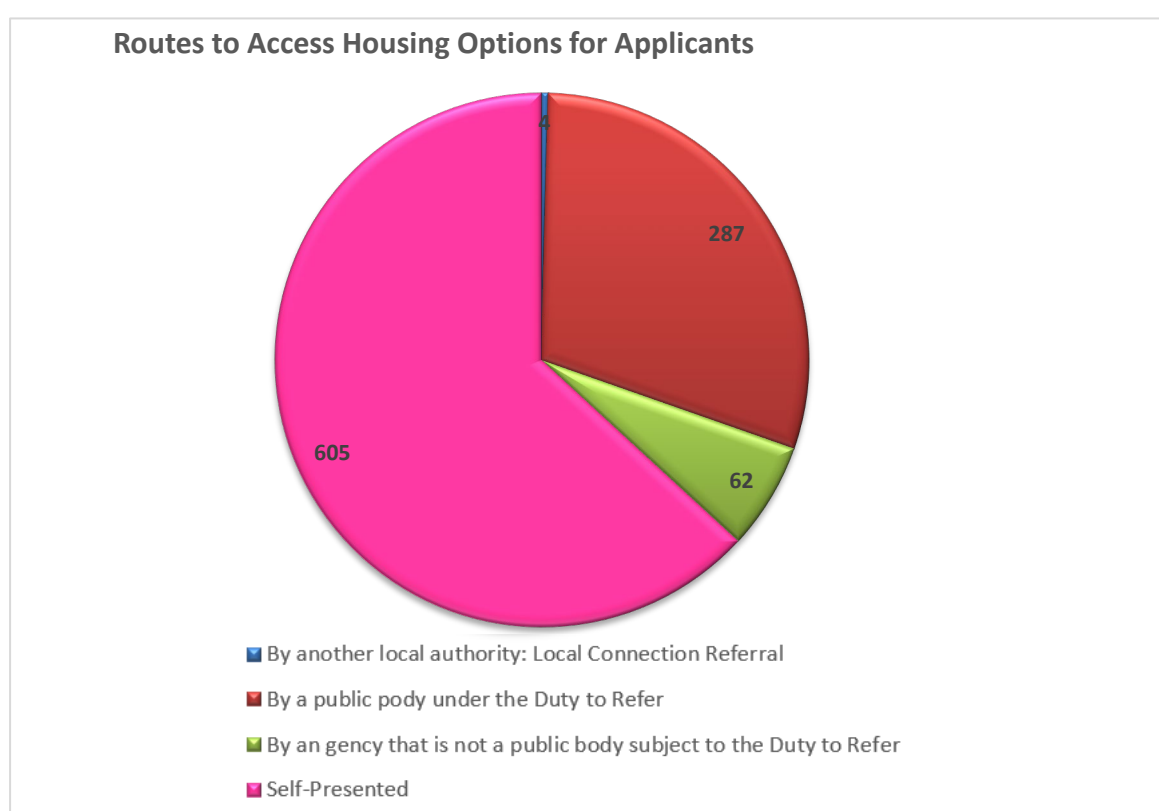
In Summer 22/23, caseloads reached over 100 per Officer which was unsustainable, resulting in unmanageable caseloads. Throughout 23/24, caseloads were reduced to an average of 37 per Officer, enabling more time for detailed case managed and positive interventions. However, this has only been achieved due to additional staff resources through ring-fenced Homeless Prevention Funding.

Duty to Refer

The Duty to Refer places a duty to public bodies to refer households who may be homeless, or threatened with homelessness to their local housing authority. There is a discretion on other agencies to refer into the service and Stafford encourage those agencies to use this route to refer cases to the team at the earliest opportunity.

In 2023/2024, 353 referrals were received of which 121 were opened as homeless cases. 81% of referrals were received by a specified public body, with the remainder from agencies choosing to use this route to refer into the service.

Figure 2 - Pie chart showing the variation of routes through which applicants accessed the service:



Duty to Refer accounts for 16% of all homeless applications, which matches the national average. This has increased from 7% in 2018, showing that agencies' use of Duty to Refer has increased since it was first introduced.

The top three referring agencies are:

- Probation (43%)
- DWP - Job Centre (20%)
- Mental health services (15%)

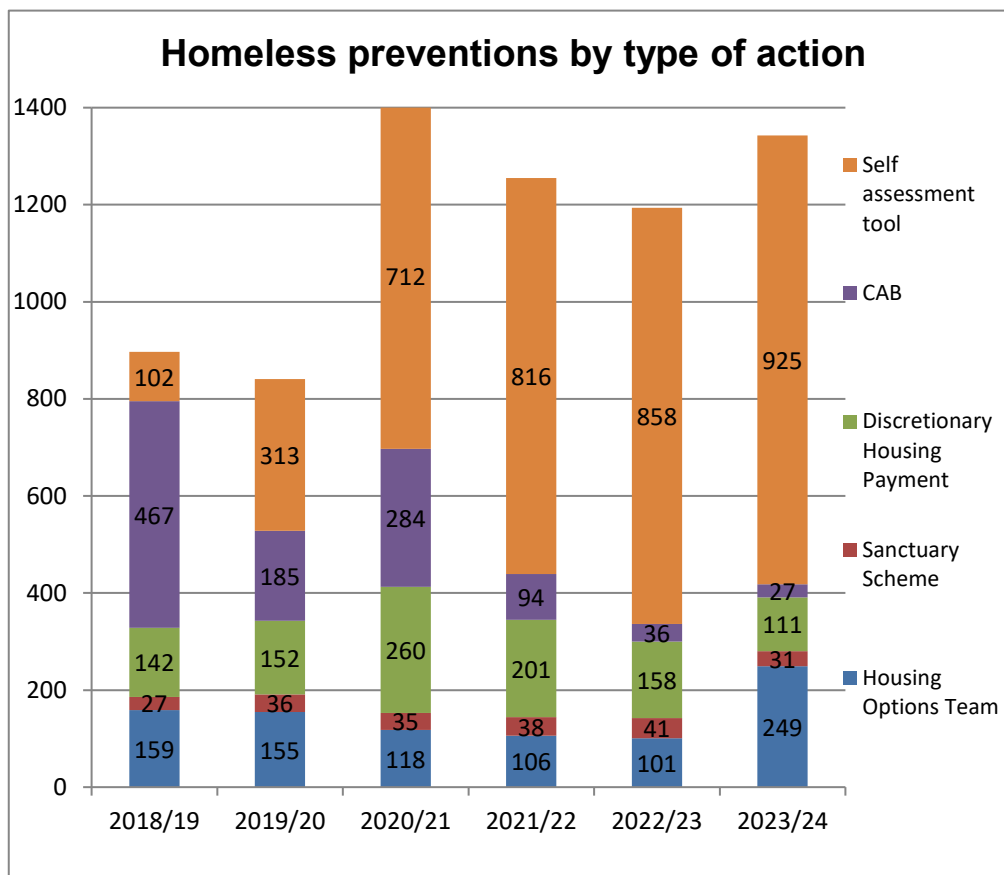
Although we have seen an increase in referrals through the Duty to Refer, we would expect higher levels of multi-agency referrals due to the wider support need of applicants presenting as homeless. In addition, over half the Duty to Refer received, do not progress to a homeless application which indicates that the quality of the referral information provided, along with discussion with applicants about the referral, needs to be improved.

Homeless Prevention by Type of Action

Homeless prevention needs to occur upstream and we recognise that there are other agencies, internal and external, that prevent households from being required to access homeless service by resolving issues at the earliest opportunity.

The table below demonstrates homeless prevention across various services in Stafford Borough.

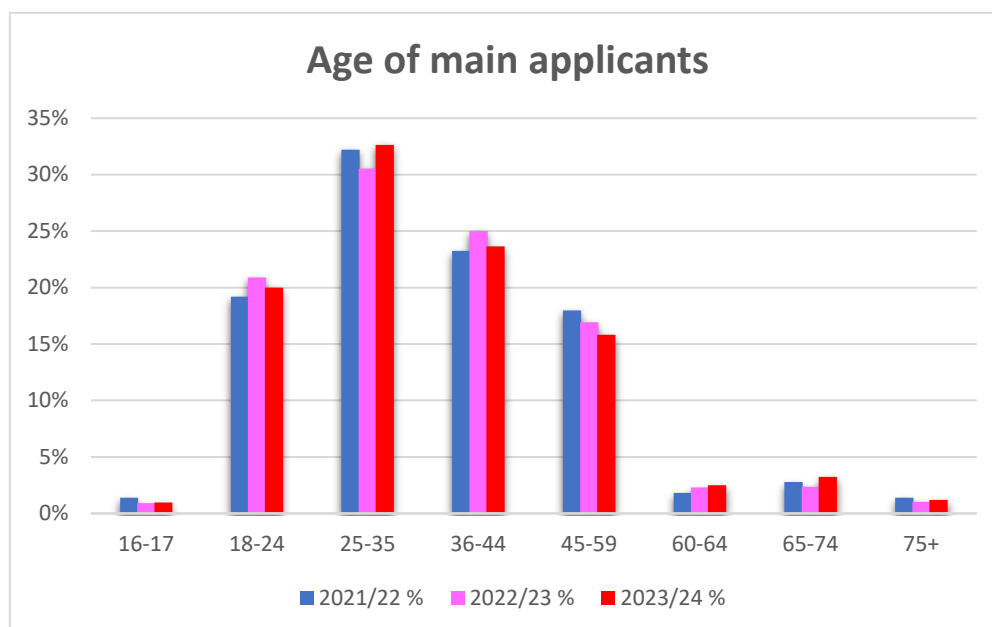
Figure 3 - Bar chart showing homeless preventions each financial year broken down by partner/agency:



Breakdown of Individuals approaching the Housing Options Service

In 23/24, 2418 customers contacted the service, with over half of those aged under 35.

Figure 4 - Bar chart showing approaches to the service for the last three financial years broken down by the age group of the main applicant:



Of those who approach the service for advice, 53% are male and 47% are female.

Despite Stafford Borough having an ageing population, there has been no notable increase in those aged over 65 approaching for homeless advice and assistance which indicates that older people have secure housing suitable for their needs, i.e. with the assistance of Disabled Facilities Grants, or their needs are being met elsewhere, i.e. through Adult Social Care and the provision of Sheltered Schemes.

Sexual orientation of individuals approaching the housing options service, during the same period, is outlined below.

Figure 5 - Table displaying the sexual orientation of applicants approaching the service:

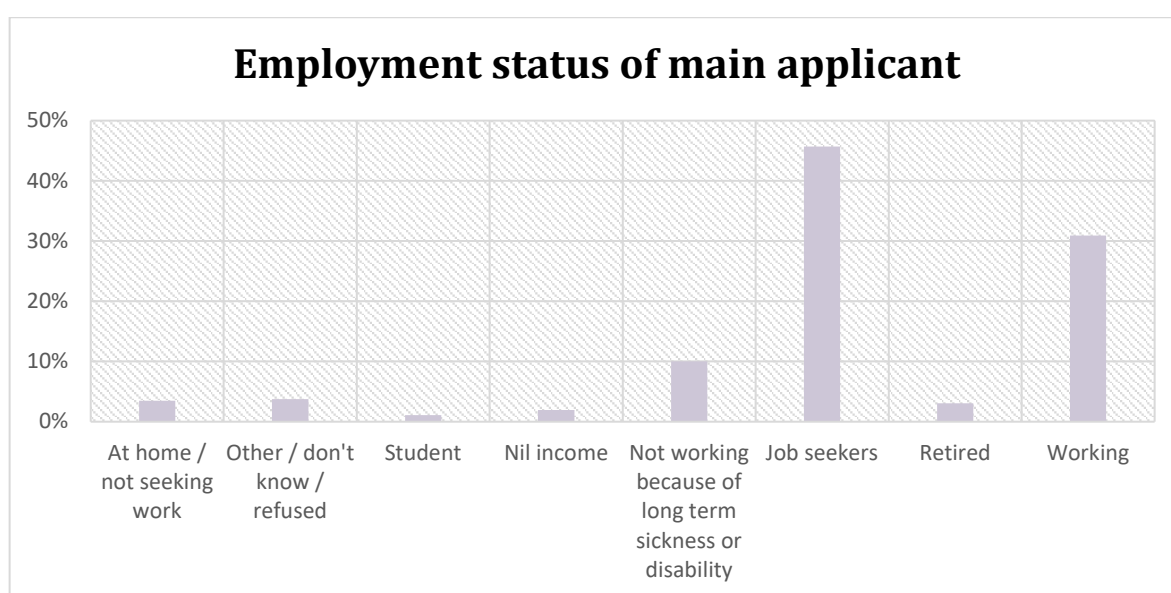
	Gay / Lesbian	Heterosexual	Other	Prefer not to say	Unknown
% of Applicants April 2023 – December 2023	1%	37%	1%	17%	45%

The largest ethnicity groups who approached Borough are:

- White: English / Welsh / Scottish / Northern Irish / British (48%)
- Unknown (47%)
- Any other white background (1%)
- Black/ African/ Caribbean/ Black British: African (1%)
- Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups (1%)

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

Figure 6 - Bar chart showing the employment status of applicants approaching the service:

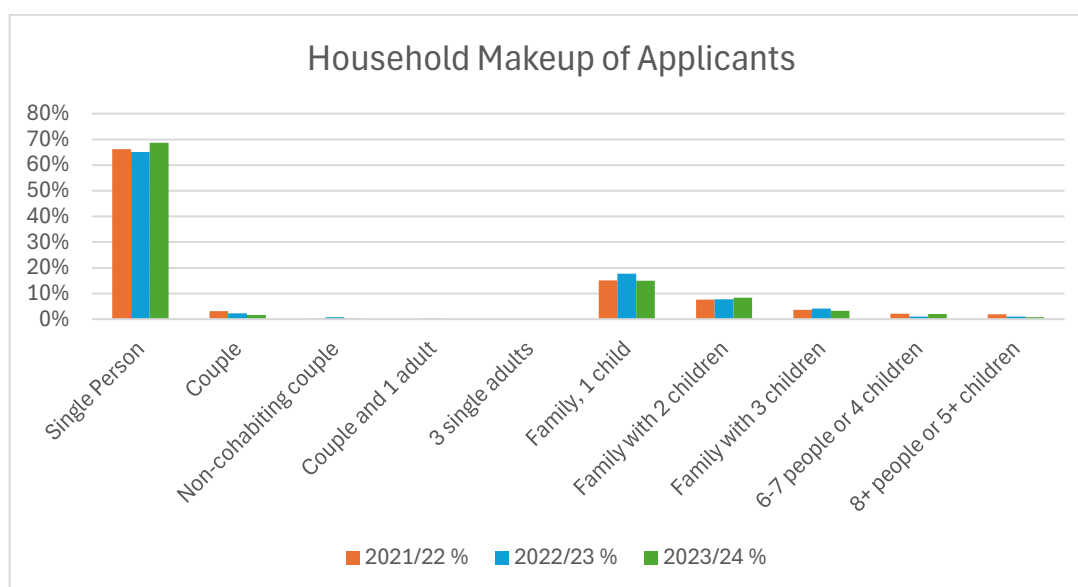


65% of homeless applicants were in receipt of an income- based benefit, whilst 31 % of individuals were employed at the time of approaching Housing Options.

Out of those on income related benefits, 35% were in receipt of Universal Credit, with households in receipt of legacy benefits receiving Managed Migration Notices during 23/24. We would anticipate that levels of those in receipt of Universal Credit will increase. There have not been any noticeable changes trends between those claiming Universal Credit and causes of homelessness.

The household make-up of those approaching as homeless as remained similar to the previous evidence review, with 69% of applications from single people.

Figure 7 - Bar chart comparing the household makeup of households approaching the service throughout the last three years



Support Needs of Homeless Applicants

The table of data below compares the support needs of Stafford homeless applicants and homeless applicants across England during the same period.

In 23/24, 71% of households approached with at least one support need. Applicants. In 2018/2019, 49% of households in Stafford presented with at least one support need.

The table below shows the support needs from each applicant from Tables on homelessness - GOV.UK - Detailed local authority level tables: financial year 2023-24. One applicant may have more than one support need so will be included in multiple support needs. The data is subjective and based on an assessment of individual need completed by the Housing Options Officer in accordance with homeless legislation.

Figure 8 - Table comparing support needs of main applicants that approach the service to the national average:

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 21-24 years	Drug dependency needs	Former asylum seeker
Stafford % of Applicants	7%	8%	6%	17%	4%	3%	2%	12%	1%
England % of Applicants	4%	5%	3%	12%	2%	1%	0.5%	6%	3%

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	Young person aged 18-25 years requiring support to manage independently	History of mental health problems	History of repeat homelessness
Stafford % of Applicants	17%	8%	27%	18%	1%	22%	1%	1%	1%	8%	43%	22%
England % of Applicants	6%	6%	46%	8%	2%	19%	1%	1%	1%	4%	26%	7%

Notably, 43% of applicants were assessed as having a history of mental health problems, compared to 26% across England. This was followed by history of repeat homelessness and physical health and disability as the main support needs of homeless applicants.

Applicants often present with more than one support need, with 32% recorded as having three or more support needs (considered as multiple and complex needs). In 2020/2021, 19% of applicants were assessed as presenting with multiple and complex needs.

The above demonstrates that we have not just seen an increase in numbers presenting as homeless but also an increase in complexity of need which makes it difficult to source suitable accommodation, particularly at a time where housing providers are under their own pressures. The role of partner agencies to help to address the relevant support needs and reduce the risks perceived by housing providers is critical.

3. Causes of Homelessness

In order to prevent homelessness we must address the underlying causes. The below includes data on a household's last settled address along with the main reason for loss of that accommodation.

In 23/24, the accommodation at time of application was:

- Living with family and friends (29%)
- No fixed abode (20%)
- Private rented sector (20%)

The reason for loss of last settled address was:

- Family/ Friends no longer being willing or able to accommodate (31%)
- End of Private Rented Tenancy (16%)
- Domestic Abuse (10%)

Since the previous evidence review, the above three remain the main causes of homelessness.

In each case, the Options Officer will try to prevent homelessness by securing existing accommodation and delve into reasons why applicants are being asked to leave.

In the private rented sector, the main reason that applicants are being asked to leave is due to landlords wishing to sell or re-let their properties which demonstrates the pressure on private landlords who no longer find it beneficial to remain in the market and aligns with announcements relating to the Private Renters Bill and abolishment of Section 21 Notices.

Repeat Homelessness

In 23/24, there were 61 individuals with multiple cases, accounting for 131 cases in total which equates to 18% of homeless cases during this period. Repeat homeless 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:

- Family no longer willing or able to accommodate (16%)
- Eviction from supported housing (15%)
- Friends no longer willing or able to accommodate (14%)
- End of private rented tenancy (14%)

4. Rough Sleeping

Rough Sleeper Evidence Based Estimate

Stafford Borough Council is committed to ending rough sleeping and since the last evidence review have developed a number of interventions and new partnerships to support entrenched rough sleepers into long-term accommodation, through ring-fenced government grant funding.

Cross-sector partnerships are key in delivering interventions to end rough sleeping and are embedding with Stafford Borough's Vulnerabilities HUB.

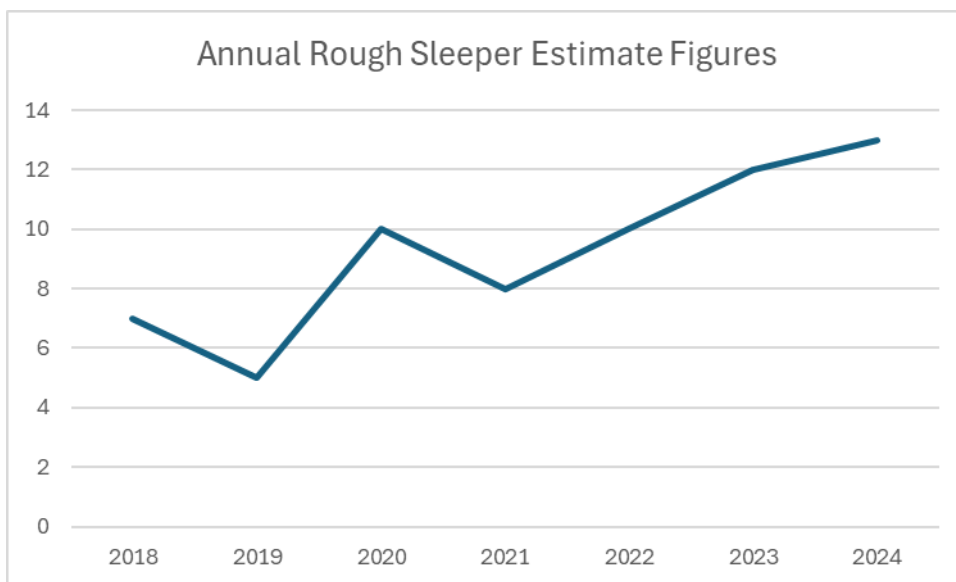
Each week, partner agencies share information on those who they believe to be rough sleeping and multi-agency action plans are agreed that are coordinated by our grant funded Rough Sleeper Outreach Worker alongside the Housing Options Team.

The needs of those who are sleeping out are complex and multi-faceted and with limited supply of high needs supported accommodation it can be difficult to find suitable placements within Borough. 'Everyone in' demonstrated to us that providing a roof over someone's head provides the foundation for support but, in order to sustain that accommodation, support must be readily available and designed to meet the specific needs of the individual - recognising that individuals with a history of rough sleeping may have chaotic lifestyles and carry with them complex trauma.

In this section, we will look at the numbers, demographics, support needs and root causes of rough sleepers in Stafford.

Since Covid 19, we have seen an increase in rough sleeping, which follows the national picture.

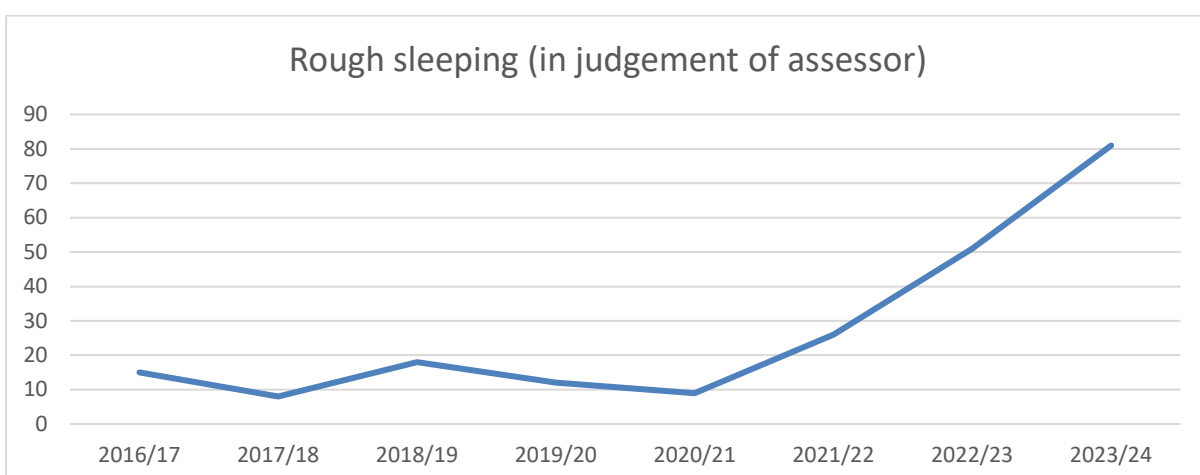
Figure 9 - Graph showing annual rough sleeper estimate figures since 2018



In 23/24, there were 81 homeless applicants whose accommodation at time of application was listed as rough sleeping, this includes 8 repeat cases.

The below graph demonstrates the increase in those assessed as rough sleeping at the time of application since 2020/2021.

Figure 10 - Graph showing the number of applicants rough sleeping (in judgement of assessor) at the time they approached the service:



The main reasons for loss of settled home for rough sleepers are:

- Eviction from supported housing (29%)
- Relationship with partner ended (non-violent breakdown) (17%)
- Family no longer willing or able to accommodate (13%)
- End of private rented tenancy - assured shorthold tenancy (11%)

In addition to the above, 134 applicants (20% of all applicants) were recorded as having no fixed abode or sofa surfing with family or friends.

The below graphs demonstrate the demographics of those assessed as rough sleeping at the time of homeless application.

Figure 11 - Bar chart showing the gender of rough sleepers since 2020/21:

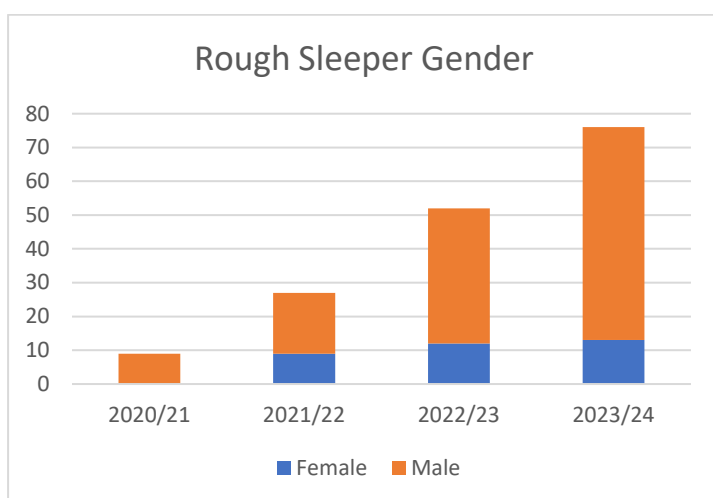


Figure 12 - Bar chart showing the nationality of rough sleepers:

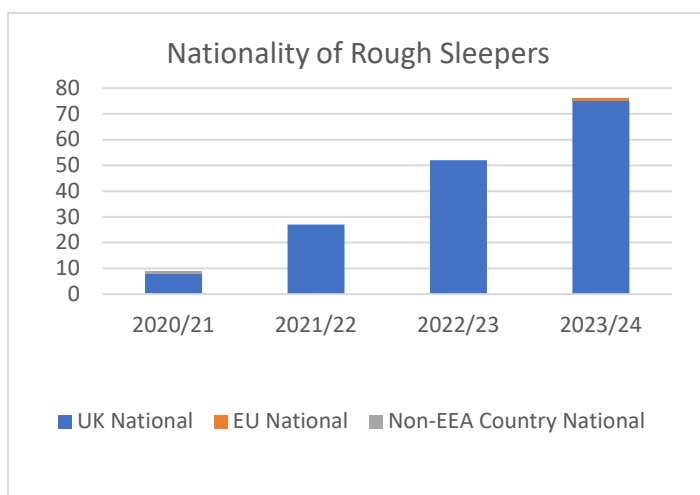
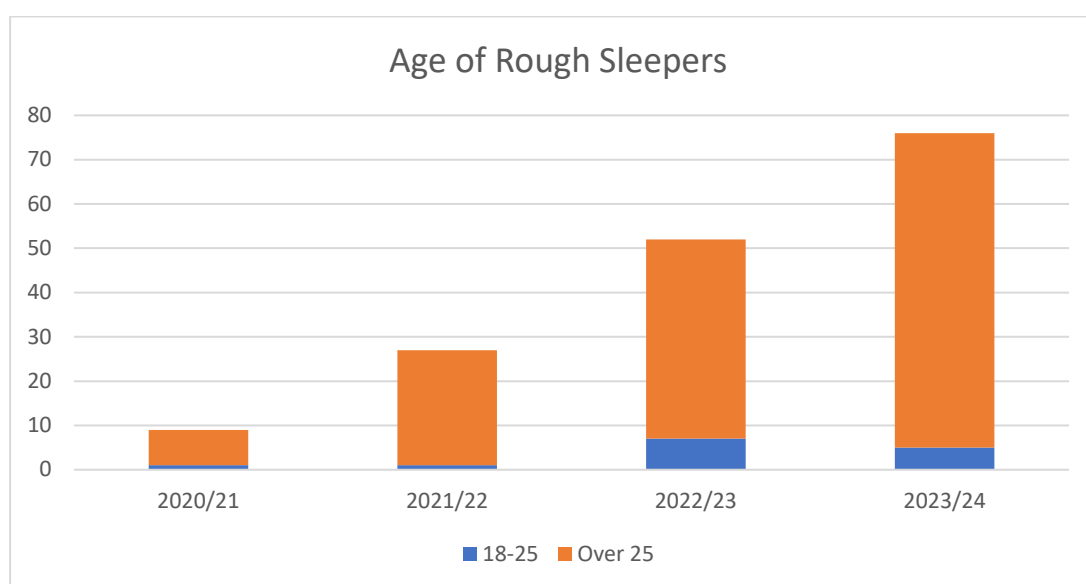


Figure 13 - Graph showing the age category of rough sleepers since 2020/21:



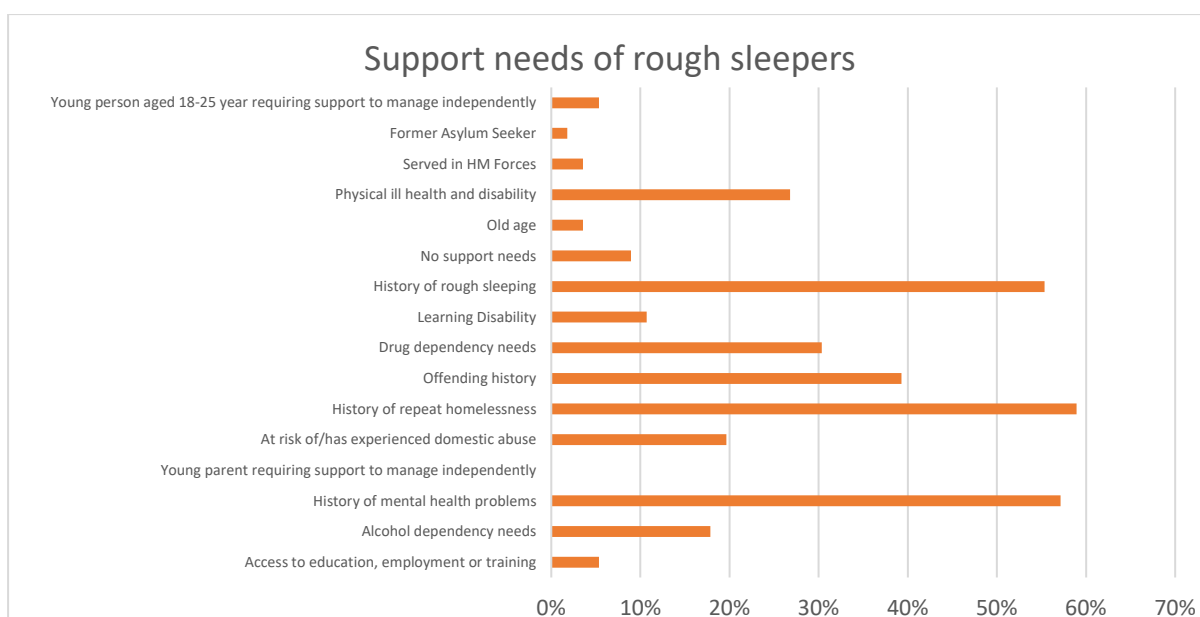
Support Needs of Rough Sleepers

The below data shows the support needs of homeless applicants who have been assessed as rough sleeping at the time of the application. Not all applicants would have been verified as rough sleeping by the outreach team and will not be entrenched rough sleepers. The support needs of entrenched rough sleepers (those reported each week as sleeping out) are more intensive than this client group, with all rough sleepers being reported as having multiple and complex needs.

Over 90% of those assessed as rough sleeping at time of application, have at least 1 support need with 40% presenting with support needs relating to substance misuse and 57% presenting with a history of mental health problems. 38% of those with a history of mental health problems, also presented with support needs relating to substance misuse (co-occurring need). Out of the rough sleepers with support needs, 65% have 3 or more support needs (multiple and complex needs).

The below diagram shows the recorded support needs of those assessed as rough sleeping at the time of homeless application.

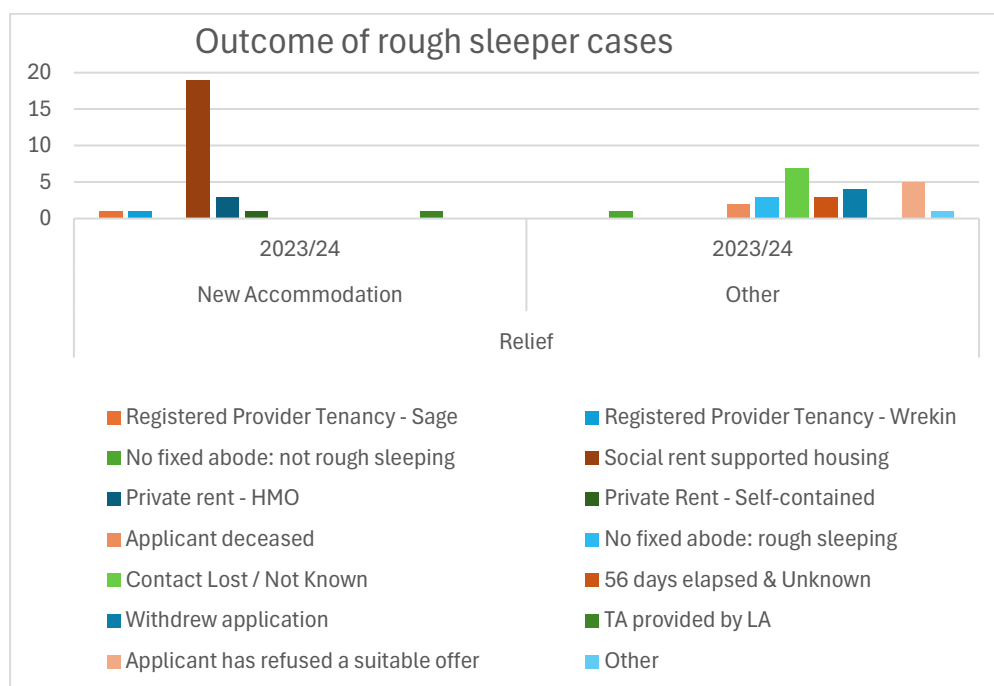
Figure 14 - Chart highlighting the support needs of rough sleepers:



Of those assessed as rough sleeping at time of application, 14% were placed on the waiting list for social housing. Social housing is not always appropriate for those who would be rough sleeping as they often require immediate interventions, or may be disqualified from the housing register due to past tenancy history/ behaviours. This demonstrates that those who are experience rough sleeping do not access the most secure form of housing tenure.

The main housing outcome for those assessed as rough sleeping at the time of application is supported housing. However, this demonstrates the breakdown in the rough sleeper pathway, as this is also the main reason for loss of settled home for rough sleepers.

Figure 15 - Graph showing the accommodation outcomes of rough sleepers, broken down by those securing new accommodation and all other outcomes:



Of the rough sleeper cases opened during 23/24, only 3 were nominated for a Housing Association property. 1 was successful, 1 the applicant refused and 1 the HA refused. Three individuals were offered private sector accommodation.

Of the rough sleeper cases opened during 23/24, 23 secured accommodation for 6 or 12 months. 18 were offered supported housing, whilst only 2 were offered a Housing Association tenancy. Three moved into private sector accommodation. 5 applicants refused a suitable offer and 6 lost contact with Housing Options.

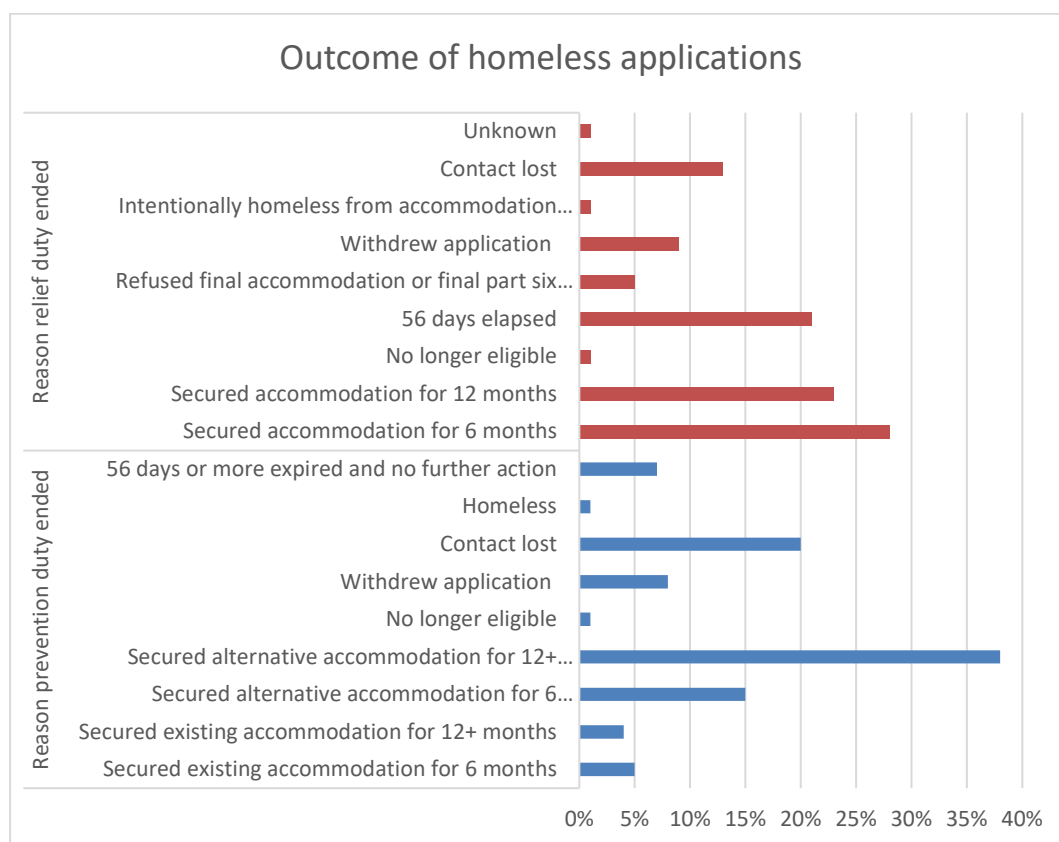
For those verified as sleeping out and considered entrenched rough sleepers, the main accommodation outcome has been specialised rough sleeper accommodation which includes purpose designed accommodation and housing first style properties.

5. Outcome of Homeless Applications

In 23/24 there were 653 closed homeless cases, of which 171 were Prevention cases and 476 were Relief cases.

In 23/24, 62% of prevention cases and 51% of relief cases were closed with successful outcomes where the household had secure accommodation for minimum period of six months. Overall, 57% of homeless cases in Stafford are closed with positive outcomes, which is above the national average of 40%.

Figure 16 - Graph showing the outcomes of closed cases, broken down by relief duty and prevention duty:



Whilst the majority of households receive positive housing outcomes, there are still high numbers of contact lost and application withdrawn, which are above the national average. This can be for a number of different reasons, including change of circumstances but demonstrates the challenges of engagement with those facing homelessness.

The graph also demonstrates the benefits of early intervention, as those who approach at Prevention are more likely to obtain a positive housing outcome for those who approach at Relief (crisis intervention). Nearly 40% of those who approach at Prevention are offered social housing whilst less than 10% secure their existing accommodation. Prevention work should focus on securing existing accommodation for households where it is safe and reasonable to do so which will reduce pressures on social housing. Housing Options are reliant upon social housing as an accommodation outcome, with very view moving into the private rented sector. Future projections of affordable housing delivery show that we cannot continue to rely on social housing as an accommodation outcome but need to expand housing options available to homeless households.

Lack of Engagement with Services

There has been an increasing trend 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.

Overall, 15% of homeless cases are closed due to lack of engagement with the service, with there being more likelihood of cases being closed for non-engagement at the relief stage as opposed to prevention.

We often find that services do not meet expectations as households develop their understanding of the roles and responsibilities of the local housing authority or the availability of social or supported accommodation.

Ultimately, non-engagement remains a challenge for Housing Options who continue to explore creative and pragmatic ways to reach out to those least likely to engage, that includes working with the Rough Sleeper Outreach Worker and Tenancy Sustainment Officers. It is recognised that this approach requires Officers to have sufficient time and resource to work creatively to engage those who are most hard to reach and requires Officers to maintain low levels of casework to be able to achieve this.

The views of partner agencies and those with lived experience on challenges around engagement are included in the qualitative section of the evidence review.

6. Tenancy Sustainment

In recent years, the gap in services for homeless households has increased, particularly around the need for practical tenancy-related support. If we do not find a way to meet the gap in support provision, there would not only be an increase in pressure on Housing Options but there would also be a risk that we would not be able to source suitable accommodation for households that we owed a statutory duty.

In 2017, Stafford Borough Council utilised core funding for a Tenancy Sustainment Officer who assists vulnerable households who would otherwise fall through the gaps in services to access support and sustain accommodation. Demand on the Tenancy Sustainment Officer exceeded the capacity of one Officer, and we have used Homeless Prevention Grant for a second Officer. For many of our clients, the Tenancy Sustainment Officer is the only option of floating support in the community.

On average, each Tenancy Sustainment Officer hold a caseload of 13 clients which provides flexibility for assertive outreach and support that is trauma-informed and person-centred. There are no time frames on support, with casework designed around the needs of the individual.

Tenancy Sustainment Officers also support households to access grant funding for furniture and white goods, set up bills and direct debits, referrals and support in accessing statutory support services, assist with budgeting and income maximisation and hand-hold households who may otherwise not have been offered accommodation due to being perceived as too high need by housing providers. They also provide support to those in emergency accommodation to enable move on at the earliest opportunity and prepare households who have experienced homelessness for independent living.

The tenancy support workers advocate for individuals at risk of homelessness with statutory agencies recognising that they may not meet the eligibility criteria for services without assistance in portraying their needs.

Below is a case study highlighted the importance of Tenancy Sustainment:

'When I first met T and his dog Max he had spent six years on the streets. When I approached T he would run away from me and it took weeks of outreach to build trust and for T to feel comfortable around me.

Although T was offered accommodation when the Government launched its 'Everyone In' campaign at the start of the first lockdown in 2020, he was still using substances and felt that he couldn't live a normal life at that time. He preferred to stay rough sleeping until he could get on a script, especially as few places were also not willing to accept his dog Max.

T stayed on the streets and continued begging however his health issues were getting worse. T was registered with a local GP and started a methadone programme through STARS. He was encouraged to accept temporary accommodation through the 'Everyone In' campaign.

A local Housing Association had become aware of his case through the weekly Vulnerability HUB. The Housing Association invited T for an assessment and accepted him and his dog, Max. T received the keys to his flat in November 2021.

Since then, T has engaged with Tenancy Sustainment with support varying to meet his needs at the time. Tenancy Sustainment have helped T to open a bank account, get copies of ID, previous Landlord references, set up utility bills, attend health appointments, apply for grants and maximise income including applying for PIP.

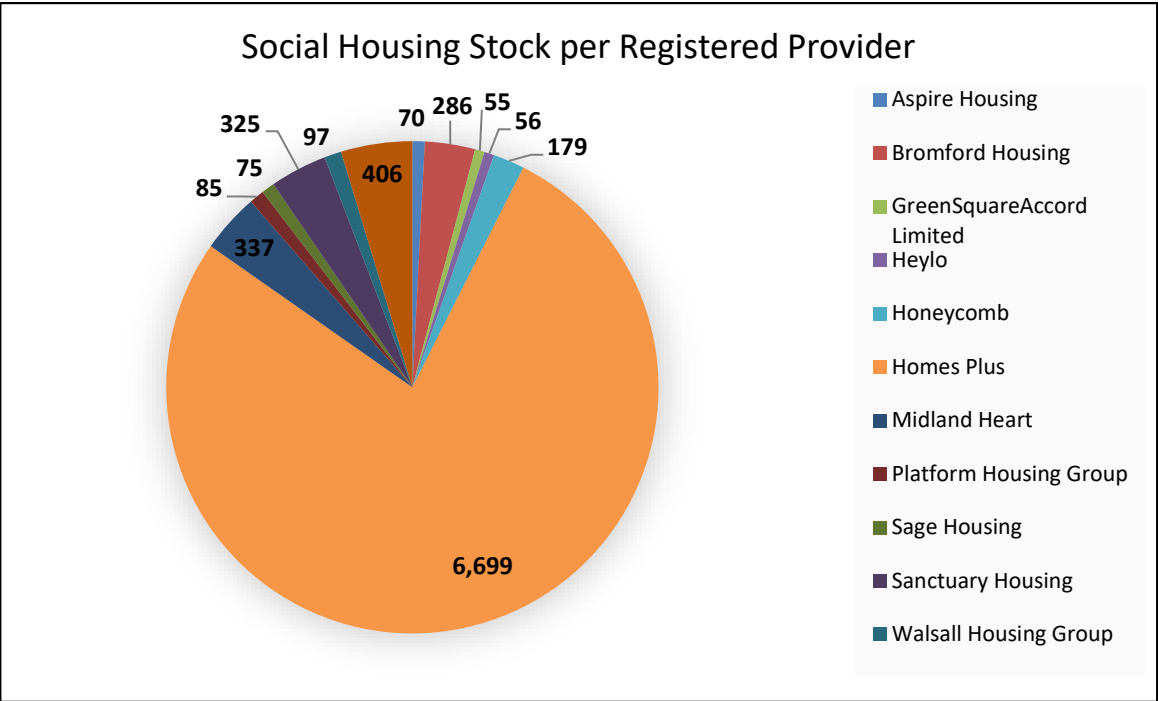
A case like this was not going to be easy but when you see what it means to them, it's worth all the effort to make a difference to someone's life. T's tenancy has just been reviewed and signed off by Bromford, he has now been accommodated by them for 3 years and will spending another Christmas in his own home. T's is at the point of living independently, but we will always be here to provide support if he needs us.'

7. Supply of Affordable Homes

Social Housing Stock Numbers

There are approximately 8,800 recorded social housing properties across Stafford Borough (March 2023). Homes Plus is the largest housing provider owning 75% of social housing stock within Stafford Borough. A breakdown of all registered providers of social housing with stock in the Borough is below:

Figure 17 - Pie chart showing the amount of stock held per Registered Provider within the Stafford Borough area:



We have obtained bedroom size data for 90% of housing stock in the Borough. Below is a breakdown of bedroom type against waiting list demand that demonstrates the demand for one bedroom properties is higher than existing housing stock.

Figure 18 - Graph showing the bedroom need based on the demand of the waiting list compared to the proportion of the housing stock bedroom sizes:

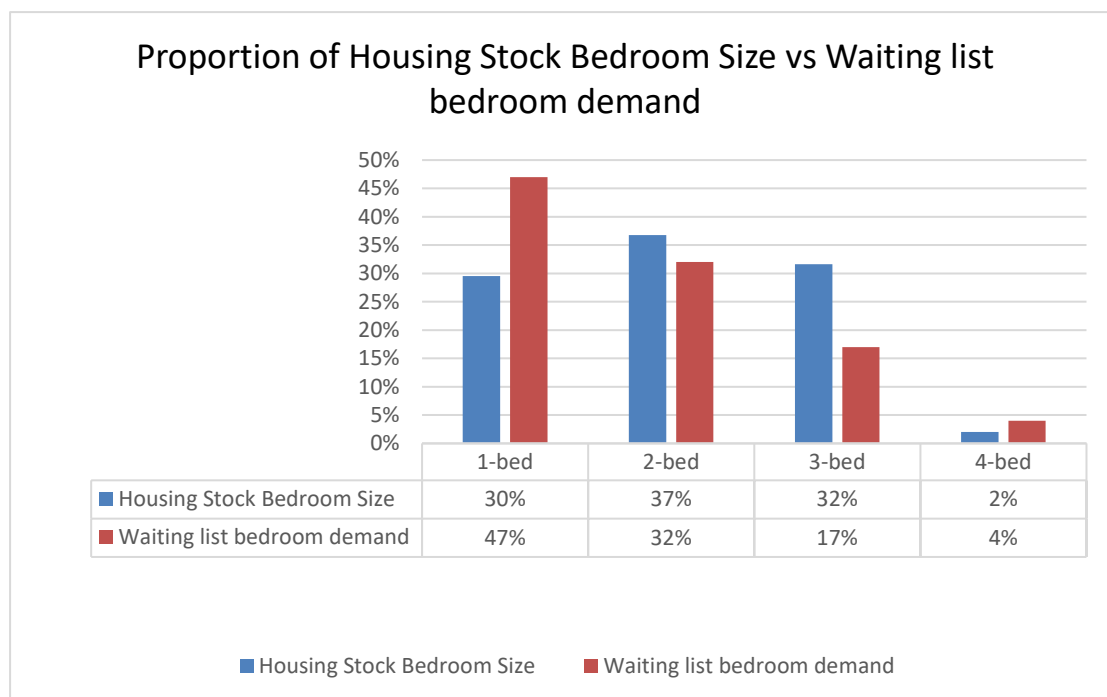
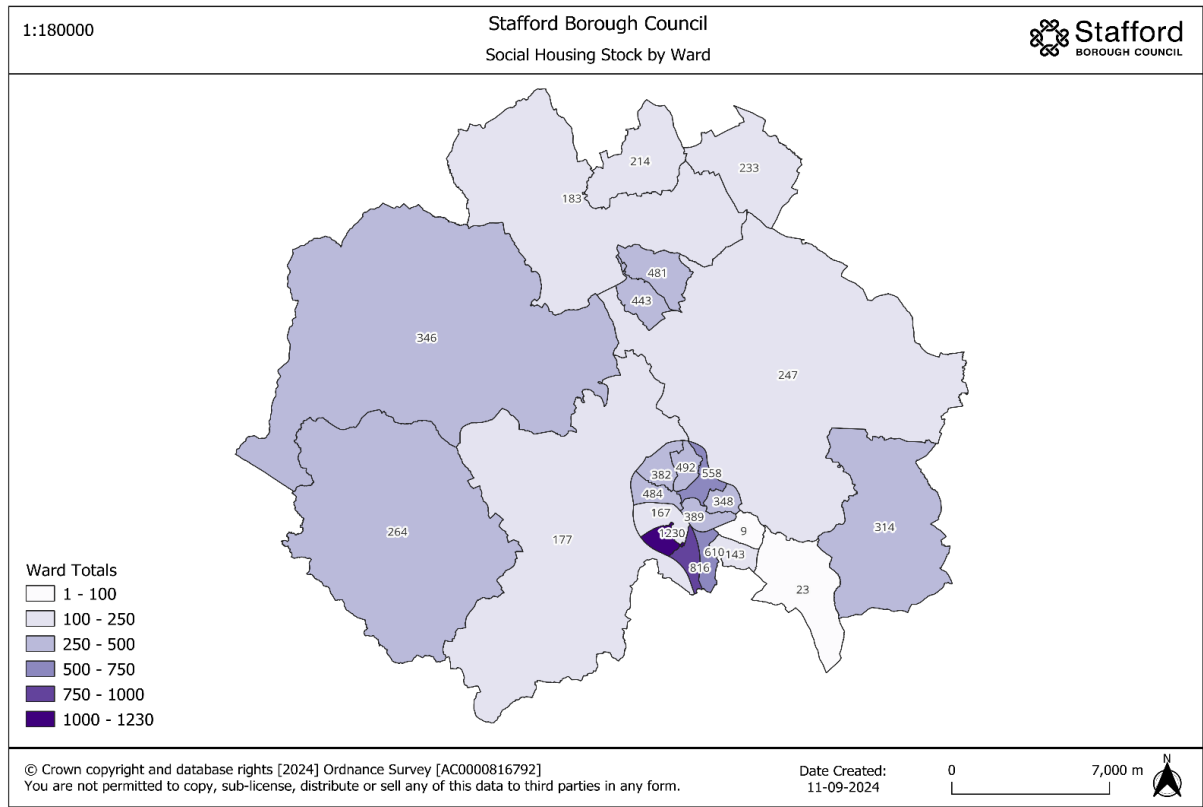


Figure 19 - Table showing the breakdown of stock by bed size:

1-bed	2,269
2-bed	2,821
3-bed	2,429
4-bed	154
5-bed	3
Total	7,676
Unknown	903

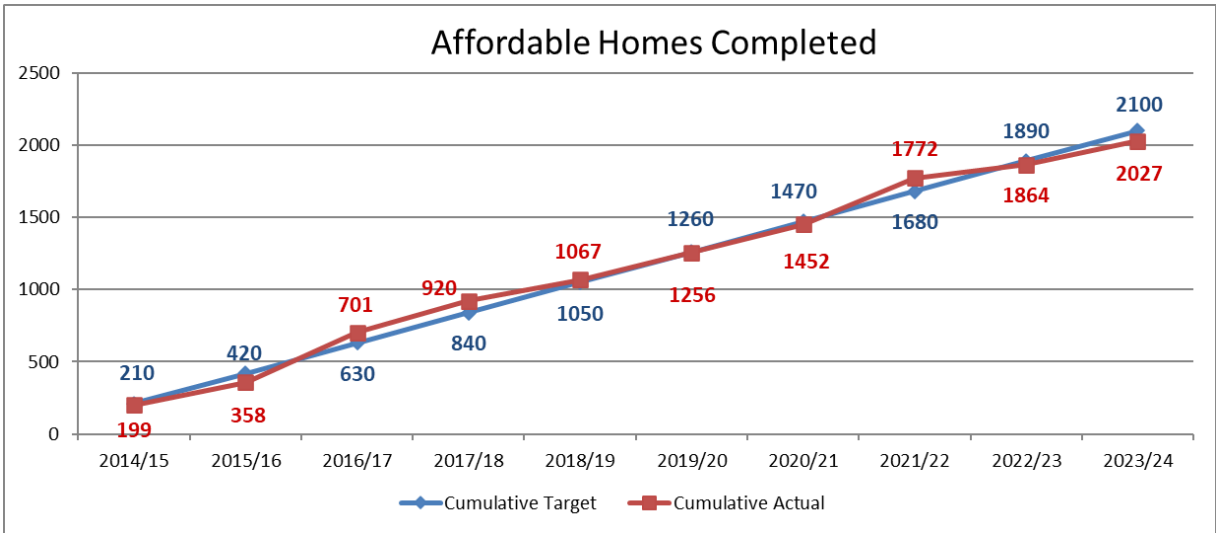
The current rough stock distribution across the borough can be seen on the map below:

Figure 20 - Map of the Stafford Borough area showing the number of social housing dwellings broken down by ward:



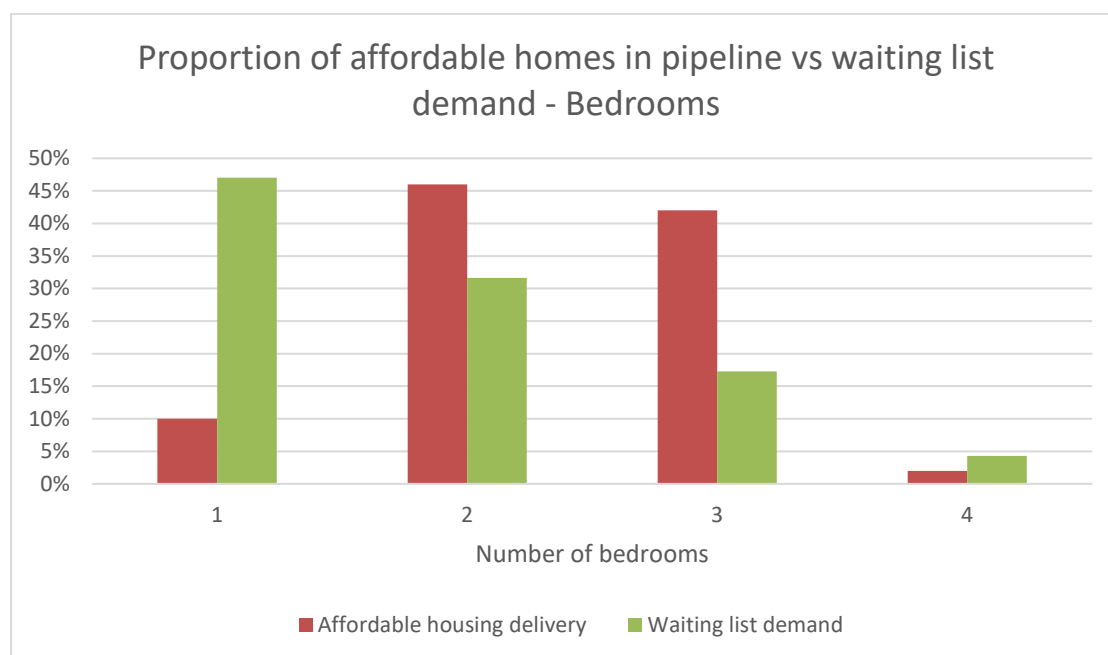
Since 2014, completion of affordable homes has been in line with target however we recognise the pipeline in the short-term is reduced.

Figure 21 - Graph showing the cumulative target compared to the cumulative completions of affordable housing:



Data provided on bedroom type of future affordable home delivery demonstrates that property type being delivered does not always meet the demand for property type on our waiting list, especially for one bedroom property. The graph below outlines the disparity between percentage demand for property type on our waiting list and percentage property type proposed by future affordable housing delivery.

Figure 22 - Graph showing the disparity between the delivery of affordable housing and waiting list demand based on bedroom size demand:



Supported Accommodation

Supported accommodation is housing that provides housing related care, support or supervision to help vulnerable adults live independently, often known as exempt accommodation.

Stafford has a mixture of commissioned and non-commissioned providers. Models are based on intensive housing management with residents claiming Housing Benefit to cover the cost of the accommodation and associated support. Residents are often expected to pay a service charge to cover ineligible costs.

Supported accommodation that requires additional funding from social or health services are not included in this Strategy. Stafford Borough Council is a two-tier authority with the upper tier, the County Council, having responsibility for adults with care and support needs under the Care Act and other relevant legislation. As a local housing authority, Stafford Borough Council is unable to access accommodation that requires additional funding from health and social care for care and support.

For households who approach the Borough Council as homeless with care and support needs, the two tiers must work together to find accommodation solutions - with the Borough being responsible for the bricks and mortar and the County being responsible for the support. This can be challenging when households do not meet eligibility criteria for social care or health provision, or, where they are Care Act eligible, there is differing professional opinion on the individual's ability to live independently.

Stafford Borough Council recognises that if we do not bridge this gap, we risk vulnerable people being either unable to access accommodation and rough sleeping; or losing accommodation and requiring repeat homeless assistance. Stafford Borough have utilised ring-fenced grant funding for homelessness to commission specialist provision for households experiencing homelessness that provide additional support beyond that which can be funded through intensive housing management. Grant funding is often short-term and risks uncertainty around future provision, meaning it can be difficult for providers to set up high quality, sustainable models. There is a requirement for the funding of supported accommodation to be reviewed, in line with the Supported Housing Act.

Previously, these models were funding through Supporting People.

In Stafford, there are seven main providers of supported accommodation that are accessible to the Housing Options Team: Eagle House; Rethink; League of Friends; Yellow Ribbon; Turning Point, Waythrough and Derventio Housing, with three out of six providers being commissioned to provide medium to high level support for those experiencing homelessness and rough sleeping. In total there are 140 units of supported accommodation.

Where support needs exceed existing provision, we risk placements coming to an end and residents being evicted (often at short notice), and the system contributing to the cycle of repeat homelessness, non-engagement and increasingly complex support needs.

The table below outlines the number of units provided by each organisation and the level of support provided.

Figure 23 - Table showing the supported housing units available in the Stafford Borough area:

Name of Supported Housing provider	Number of Units	Level of Support
Eagle House	12 bedsits 21 flats	Medium to High Need
Rethink	5 self-contained flats • All 1-bed 1 house • 6-bed	Low - Medium Need
League of Friends	55 units	Low - Medium Need
Derventio Housing	8 houses • 7 x 4-bed • 1 x 2-bed	Low - Medium Need
Yellow Ribbon	2 x 4 bed houses	Low - Medium Need
Turning Point	6 units in purpose designed accommodation	High Need
Waythrough (previously Humankind)	5 dispersed self-contained flats	Medium to High Need

Private Rented Sector Local Housing Allowance Disparity

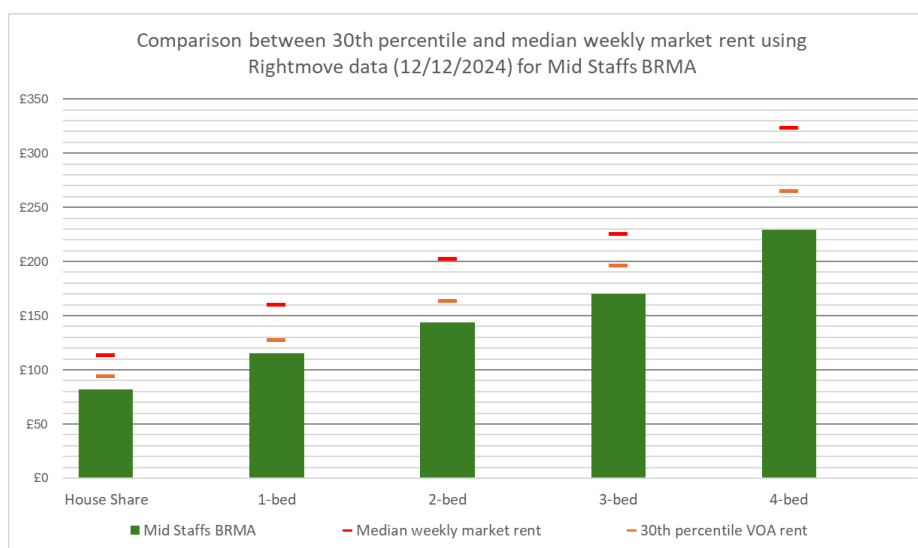
There are 9336 number of private sector units in Stafford Borough.

Household on low incomes rely on local housing allowance to support with rent payment in the private rented sector. Local Housing Allowance is capped depending on the size of the property. Whilst rents in the private rented sector have been increasing in recent years, local housing allowance has been frozen resulting in a disparity between the rents charged by private landlords and the amount of benefit low income households receive towards their housing cost. When rolled out in 2008, LHA was set at the median (or 50th percentile) rent cost as calculated by local valuation offices. In 2011, the reference point was reduced to 30th percentile and a national cap was introduced so that housing cost support could be restricted, irrespective of local rent costs. In 2012, the application of the lowest LHA rate, the shared room rate, was extended from under 25s to under 35s. LHA rate was frozen in 2020. During this period, the disparity between market rents and local housing allowance created a void that excluded low income households from accessing the market.

In April 2024, a four year freeze on Local Housing Allowance was ended and LHA was relinked to the 30th percentile for local rent costs for a single year. However, as demonstrated by the RightMove snapshot in the table below, the 30th percentile is not always reflective of the local market which fluctuates with local demand.

The average percentage disparity across all property types is 27.6%, compared to 19.6% in 2019. This demonstrates that despite the freeze on local housing allowance being uplifted in April 2024, the gap between market rents and local housing allowance has increased. A future freeze on Local Housing Allowance will increase the disparity between market rents, placing additional pressures on low income households and homeless services who are often reliant on private sector housing to fulfil their homeless duties where there is a shortage in supply of social housing.

Figure 24 - Graph highlighting the disparity between median market rent, 30th percentile VOA rent and the local housing allowance:



From a search on Rightmove 12 December 2024:

Figure 25 - Table showing snapshot of cost of properties available to rent on Rightmove in the Stafford Borough area compared to the local housing allowance:

	Number of properties	Properties at/below LHA rate	Median weekly rent	Mid Staffs LHA	Percentage disparity
Room Share	20	0 - Cheapest is £92	£113	£81.80	£31.20 (28%)
1-bed	22	1 - £104 in Stone	£160	£115.07	£44.93 (28%)
2-bed	46	2 - £127 / £133 both in Stone	£202	£143.84	£58.16 (29%)
3-bed	20	0 - Cheapest £196	£225	£170.30	£54.70 (24%)
4-bed	20	0 - Cheapest £276	£323	£228.99	£94.01 (29%)
Total	128	3	-	-	-

The table shows that out of 128 properties on the market, only 3 would be accessible to households in receipt of welfare benefits.

Demand for private sector properties is high, with letting agents reporting waiting list for certain areas and property types, providing landlords with choice over tenants. Anecdotally, we have been told that Landlords often accept rent offers above those that are advertised due to high levels of competition in the market. Demand for private sector accommodation is a symptom of challenges faced by first-time buyers who struggle to access home-ownership in the current economic climate. Whilst home ownership remains only an aspiration for many middle to low income households, there will be disproportionate demand on the private rented sector which in turn pushes demand into social housing and housing advice services.

We know that one of the main causes of homelessness is 'no fault' evictions from private sector tenancies, with the main reason for Landlord's serving notice is due to the landlord wishing to sell or re-let the property. Research completed in 2022, shows that often Landlord's are required to sell due to their own finances, particularly if they live in more expensive areas far away from Stafford. Half of those Landlords interviewed as part of the research referenced the expectation that EPC ratings need to be improved to 'C' as part of their decision to sell their properties, particularly for those landlords with older properties.

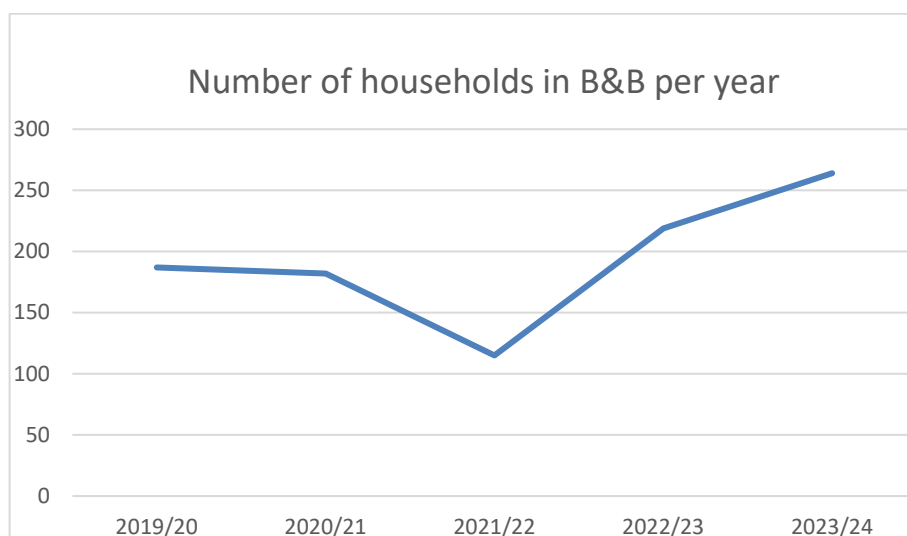
Letting agents also raised concerns around the reduction in supply of private rented properties and all agreed that there had been an increase in demand for private sector properties. One letting agent mentioned that they are 'too scared to list a property' is as they know that as soon as it goes on, they will have 30 plus viewing applications within the first 24 hours.

All letting agents confirmed that they had no issue in letting a property once a tenancy comes to an end. Rent prices are increasingly considerably and as demand is so high, landlords can easily 'pick' the household in the most favourable financial position.

8. Temporary Accommodation

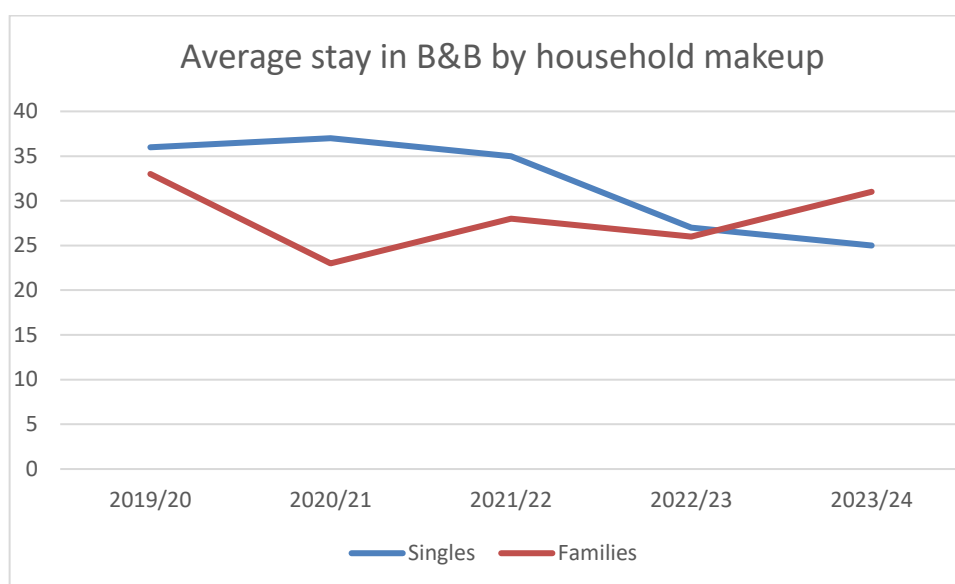
Since 2021/2022, Stafford Borough has seen a 120% increase in homeless application. Increase in homeless approaches has been reflected in increase in use of emergency accommodation, including bed and breakfast which has seen a 130% increase over the same period. Relatively, there has been more of an increase in bed and breakfast accommodation compared to homeless application which is a reflection of the numbers of cases approaching the service at crisis point and the additional pressures on single person accommodation in the Borough.

Figure 26 - Graph showing the number of households in B&B throughout the years:



Despite increased demand and wider pressures on the housing market, average nights spent by households in bed and breakfast has decreased for both families and single homeless. This is testament to the dedication of the Housing Options Team in working with housing providers to move people out of temporary accommodation at the earliest opportunity. In 23/24, time spent in temporary accommodation has increased for families which reflects delays in void periods when families are offered suitable accommodation.

Figure 27 - Graph showing the average stay throughout the years, comparing the duration of single households to families staying in B&B:



Households spending more than four weeks in bed and breakfast has increased since the last evidence review. The data, read in conjunction with average nights in bed and breakfasts, indicates that there are more short-term placements, such as single night or weekend placements, which reflects the numbers of single homeless coming through the service who may require brief stays whilst nearest available accommodation is sourced.

Figure 28 - Table showing number of households that stayed in B&B for over 4 weeks throughout the years:

	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Number in B&B > 4 weeks	9	24	42	63	32	52	57

Time spent in bed and breakfast spiked in 2020/2021. Both for average time spent in bed and breakfast by single homeless households and the number of households staying in bed and breakfast for more than four weeks. This is direct impact of Covid-19 and 'Everybody In' where those who were roofless that night were offered emergency accommodation, regardless of priority need. 56% of 'Everybody In' placements resulted in move on to medium or long-term accommodation.

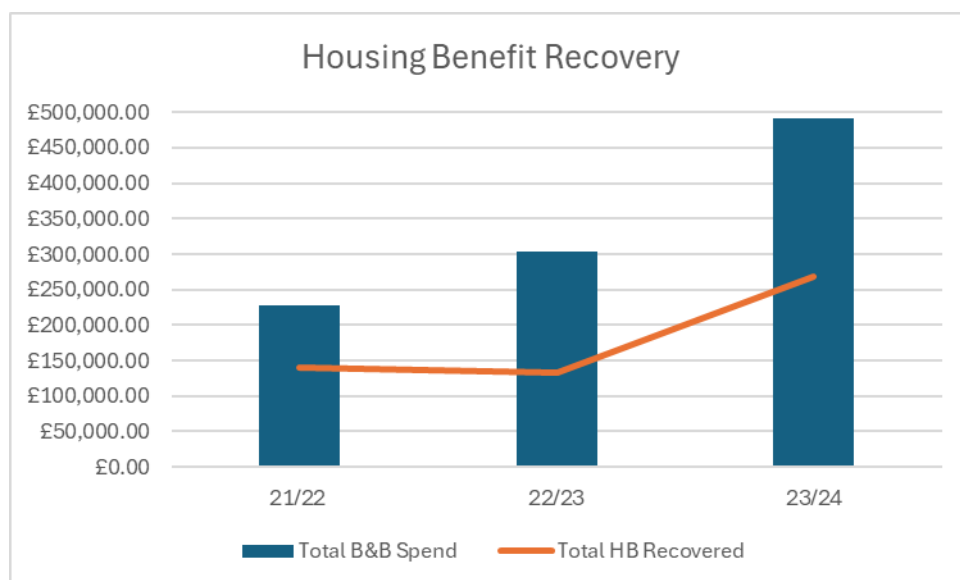
Estimated Cost of B&B placements

B&B accommodation can costs on average £80.00 per night per household.

Stafford Borough recovers Housing Benefit for those placed in emergency accommodation. Depending on the individual circumstances of the applicant this is not always possible, for example where applicants are unable to provide proof of income or stay for only one night.

Housing Benefit does not cover the full cost of the placement due to ineligible charges. Housing Benefit claims for Bed and Breakfast accommodation attract a nil subsidy which means there are wider costs to the Council, not demonstrated in the graph below.

Figure 29 - Graph showing the total B&B spend compared to the amount that has been recovered through housing benefit:



Nearly 50% of households who went into Bed and Breakfast moved onto a medium or long-term accommodation option, including registered provider tenancies, private sector and offers of supported accommodation placements.

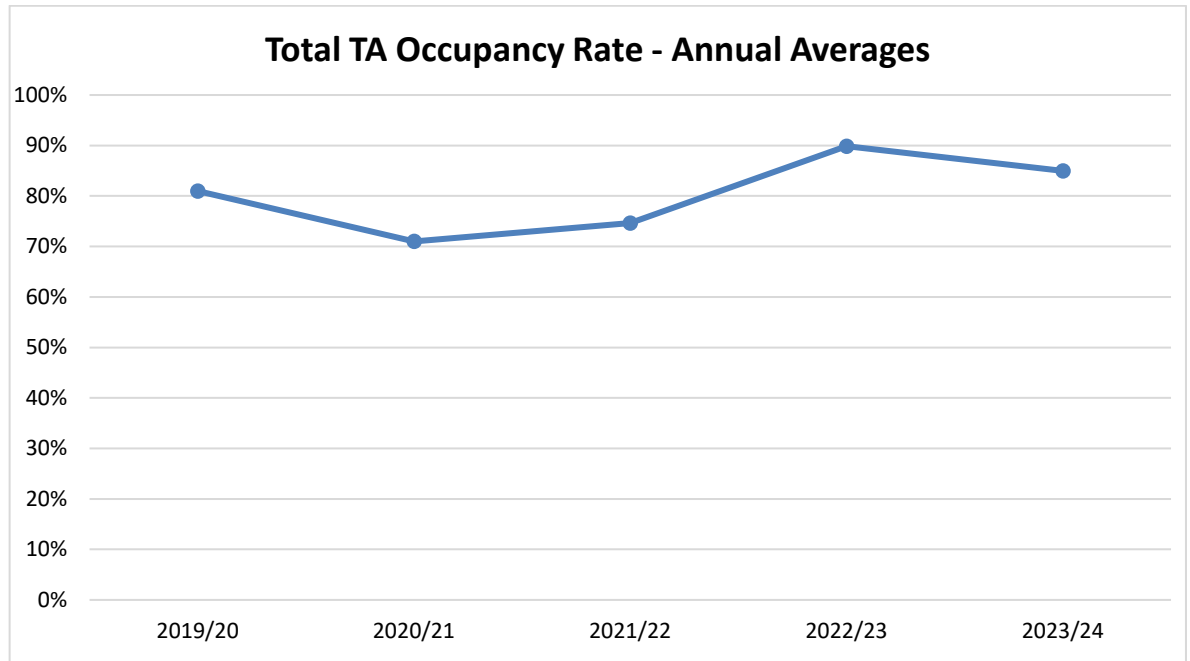
26% placements ended due to being abandoned or outcome not known.

Temporary Accommodation Units

In November 2023, Housing Options requested permission to increase the number of leased temporary accommodation units from nine to fifteen by leasing an additional six units from Homes Plus. Since approval, five units have been leased with the final unit identified and due to be handed over this winter. During this period, a decision was made to hand back two existing leased units due to long-standing repair issues. To date, one replacement unit has been identified with the other in the pipeline of future voids.

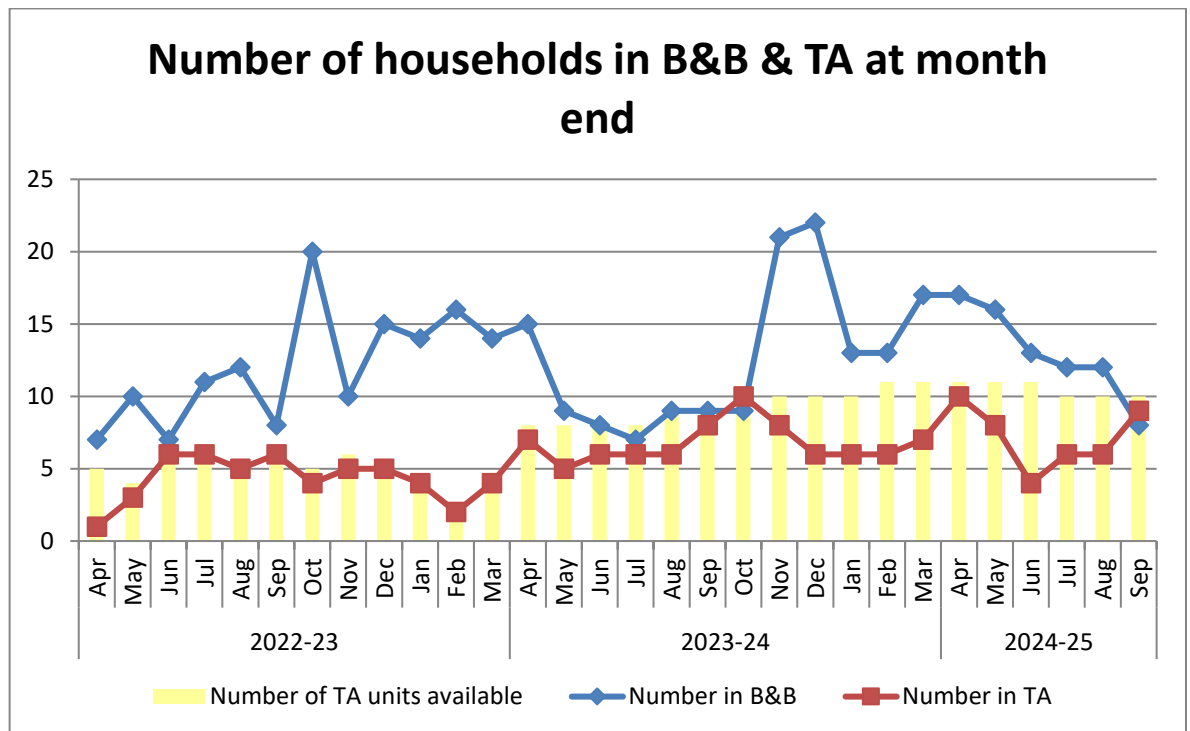
In total, there are twelve leased units available for use, with an additional two units expected to be available this winter. The below graph demonstrates average occupancy of the temporary accommodation units since 2019/2020.

Figure 30 - Graph showing the occupancy rate of temporary accommodation based on when units were available (i.e. not void) throughout the years:



Leasing the additional units has resulted in a reduction in bed and breakfast placements as per the graph below.

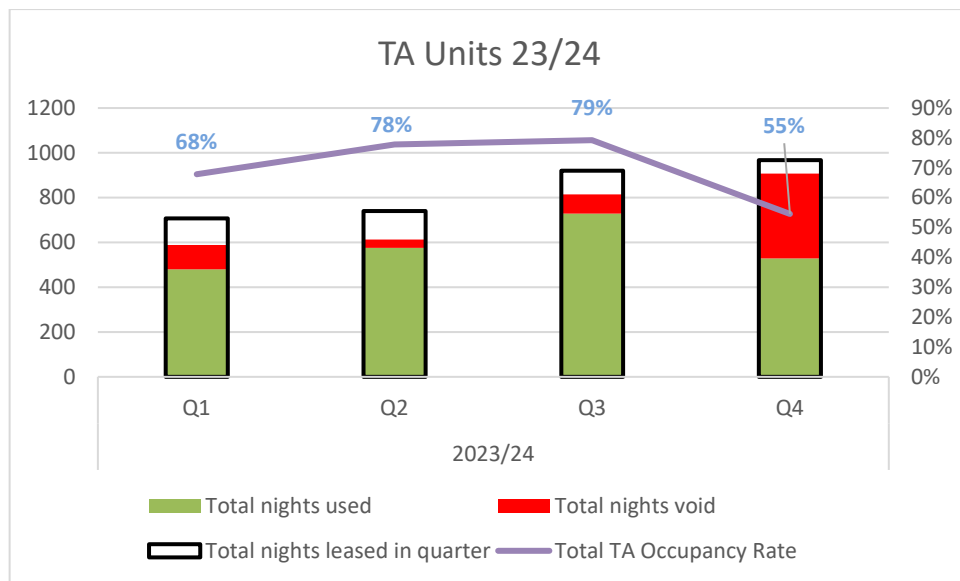
Figure 31 - Graph showing the number of households that were in B&B and TA at the end of each month compared to the number of TA units available:



Leasing additional units has helped with B&B demand however with projected demand going forward there will be a requirement to increase number of leased units. Leasing additional units is resource intensive as the units are managed by the Housing Options Team. Additional staffing resource will be required if further units are leased.

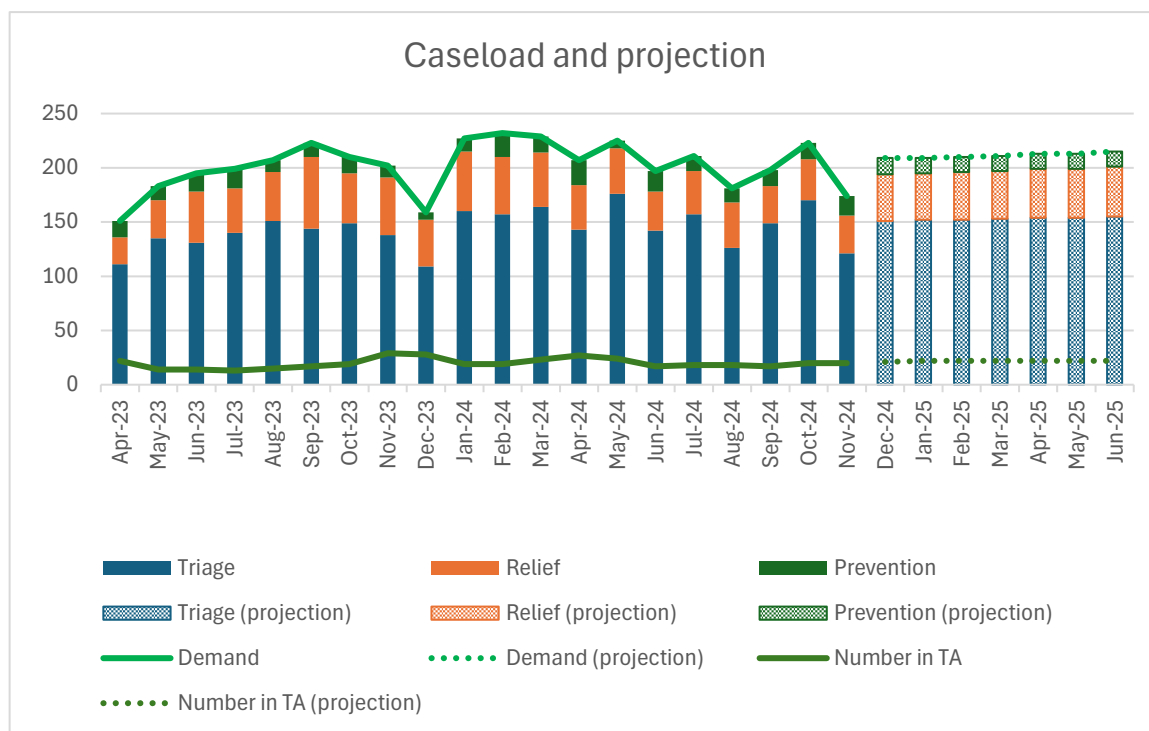
The units are leased from Homes Plus who are responsible for void management. In 23/24, turnaround time for all voids increased which also had an impact on temporary accommodation. The below graph demonstrates the impact that void turnaround has had on occupancy rates for the leased units throughout 23/24, with void time amounting to 40% of available nights for in Quarter 4 of that year.

Figure 32 - Graph comparing the total nights TA units were leased and for how many of those nights they were occupied or void, showing the occupancy rate based on the total nights leased:



The below graph demonstrates the projected demand on emergency accommodation based on current case levels. Based on most recent data, it is projected that we would require 22 units of temporary accommodation to meet need.

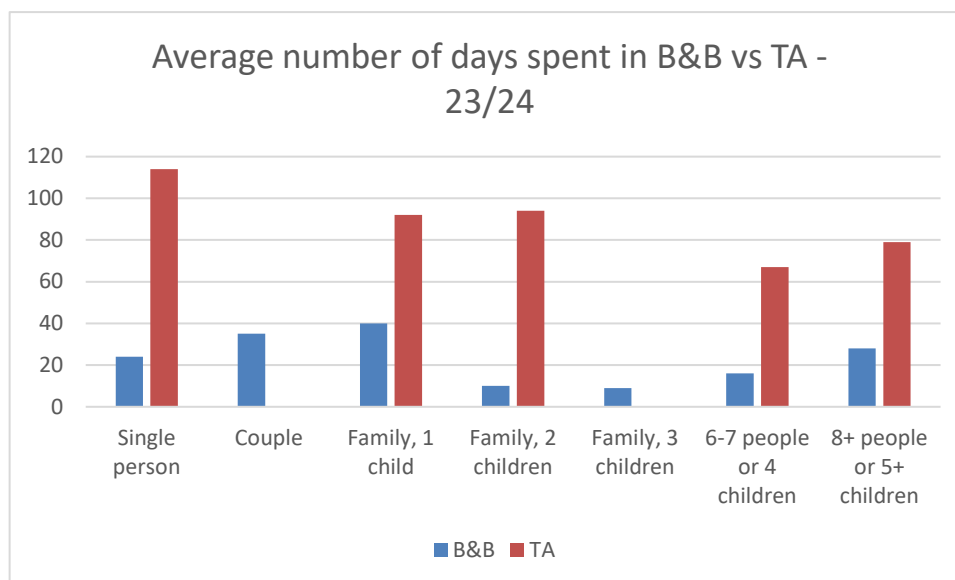
Figure 33 - Showing current demand and assumed future demand on the service broken down by case type:



Leased units provide more stability for households who are less likely to leave or abandon the placement. They also require more forward planning to move households into accommodation and are more likely to be occupied by families, as opposed to single homeless. In 23/24, 92% of households placed in temporary accommodation exit with a long-term housing solution, with 80% being offered assured tenancies.

Average time spent in leased units is longer than in bed and breakfast which reflects the above narrative. Most of the household who occupy temporary accommodation units are families who are waiting on void works for social housing properties.

Figure 34 - Chart showing the average number of days spent in B&B compared to TA broken down by household makeup:



Section 9: Nominations and Waiting List

Since 2017, Stafford Borough Council has entered into nomination agreements with all registered providers with stock in the Borough and manage their own waiting list for social housing. Holistic housing needs assessments are completed by the Housing Options Officers who provide advice and assistance to resolve that individual's housing need that goes beyond registering for social housing. In most cases, this is progressed to a homeless application.

Homes Plus, who own 75% of the social housing stock in the Borough, have 3561 households on their waiting list. Homes Plus operate an open waiting list.

Stafford Borough Council have 150 people on the waiting list.

74% of applicants on Stafford Borough Council's waiting list have a high or urgent housing need, compared to 11% on Homes Plus waiting list. Over 60% of applicants with Homes Plus are in Band D, assessed as no need to move.

Demand for property type has not changed since the previous evidence review was completed.

Figure 35 - Table showing bedroom size demand on the waiting list of Stafford Borough Council:

Stafford Borough Council:

Stafford Borough Council	1-bed	2-bed	3-bed	4-bed	TOTAL
No. on waiting list	68	52	21	7	150
% of people on waiting list	45%	35%	14%	1%	100%

Figure 36 - Table showing bedroom size demand on the waiting list of Homes Plus:

Homes Plus:

Homes Plus	1-bed	2-bed	3-bed	4-bed	TOTAL
No. on waiting list	1921	1000	475	165	3561
% of people on waiting list	54%	28%	13%	5%	100%

Demand for one bedroom properties remains the highest amongst both Stafford Borough Council and Homes Plus.

The highest property type and band in demand are people in Band B waiting for a 1-bed property (45 individuals, 30% of people on the waiting list).

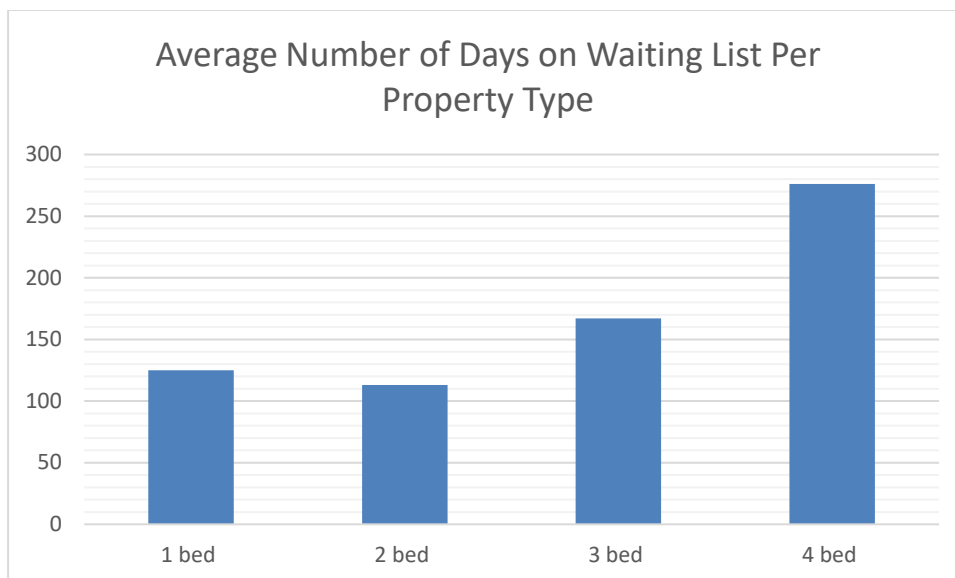
Figure 37 - Table showing bedroom size demand broken down by banding on the waiting list of Stafford Borough council:

	1-bed	2-bed	3-bed	4+-bed	TOTAL	% of Waiting List
A	15	8	2	2	27	18%
B	45	26	10	3	84	56%
C	8	18	9	3	39	26%
D	0	0	0	0	0	0%
TOTAL	68	52	21	8	150	100%

The main reasons waiting list banding in Stafford Borough relates to duties owed in relation to homelessness (67%), followed by move on from supported accommodation (8%).

Waiting times vary depending on the individual households circumstances however indicative figures for average waiting times per property type is in the graph below.

Figure 38 - Graph showing the average number of days applicants are on the waiting list before successfully securing social housing:



Stafford Borough Council's Allocation Policy requires applicants to be considered nomination ready which means they would satisfy the lettings criteria of Housing Associations with accommodation in the Borough. Those who are not nomination ready have the option of being placed on the waiting list and accruing waiting time whilst they work with Housing Options to address their barriers to accessing social housing.

In 23/24, 38 households were accepted onto the waiting list but considered 'not nomination ready.' Of those recorded, the reason they were not nomination ready was due to not having all the documentation required to be put forward for a property, followed by rent arrears.

Nominations Agreements

Stafford Borough does not hold housing stock but has entered into nomination agreements with all Housing Associations with stock in the Borough. Households are nominated to properties in line with our Allocation Policy.

Figure 39 - Table outlining the nomination agreements with registered providers

Registered Provider	% of rights within the Stafford Borough
Aspire	50% of net vacancies, 75% of first let of new builds, 50% of subsequent lets
Bromford	50% of net vacancies, 75% of first let of new builds, 50% of subsequent lets
Clarion Housing (Formerly Affinity)	50% of net vacancies, 75% of first let of new build developments, 50% on subsequent lets
Homes Plus (Formerly Stafford and Rural Homes)	75% of net vacancies, including new builds
Homes Plus (Formerly South Staffordshire Housing Association)	50% of net vacancies, 75% of first let of new builds, 50% of subsequent lets
Midland Heart	50% of net vacancies, 75% of first let of new builds, 50% of subsequent lets
Platform Housing Group	75% of net vacancies
Sage Housing	100% of net vacancies
Sanctuary	50% of net vacancies, 75% of first let of new builds, 50% of subsequent lets
Staffs Housing (Formerly Staffordshire Housing Association)	50% of net vacancies, 75% of first let of new builds, 50% of subsequent lets
Walsall Housing Group	50% of net vacancies, 75% of first let of new builds, 50% of subsequent lets
Wrekin Housing Trust	100% of net vacancies

During 23/24, there have been 248 property nominations, with applicants moving into 95% of the properties received for nomination. 8 out of 12 failed nominations were with Wrekin Housing Trust.

For nearly one third of cases, more than one household is put forward for the property. This is due to both applicants refusing an offer of accommodation and the Housing Association refusing the applicant.

54% of nominations received are for a two bedroom need, with 27% for a one bedroom need, 16% for a three bedroom need and 3% for a four bedroom need.

9. Qualitative Data from Partner Agencies and Those with Lived Experience

In July 2024, we circulated a survey to partner agencies requesting their views on homelessness within Stafford Borough. Nine agencies responded (outlined below).

The partner agencies were:

Figure 40 - Table outlining the partner agencies that responded to the survey:

Organisation Name	Type of organisation
Midland Heart	Supported Housing
Staffordshire County Council	Staffordshire County Council; Public Health Commissioning
Staffordshire Police	Police
Rising Brook	Community Church
MPFT - Social Worker - Specialist GP - Practice Lead - Tenancy Sustainment Officer	Mental Health Trust
Yellow Ribbon	Supported Housing
House of Bread	Charity
Staffordshire Women's Aid	Charity
Derventio	Supported Housing

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

The top needs identified by partner agencies were:

- (1) Multiple and Complex Needs
- (2) Drug and Alcohol Dependency
- (3) Mental illness or disability

During the previous review 'Budgeting' and 'Physical illness or disability' were among the top 3 support needs identified. Out of all 41 responses to this question, only 1 response identified one of those needs. This highlights how the support needs have changed and become more complex. A supported housing provider highlighted that over 70% of their residents during 23/24 had multiple and complex needs, including 65% of all residents suffering from mental health issue.

Additional comments from organisations stated that "multiple complex needs are often a combination of mental health and addictions". One respondent highlighted that nearly everyone who is homeless has a "challenging history usually of abuse, followed by drug and alcohol use to manage the abuse, leading to a variety of other health problems'. Dealing with these can be problematic due to "a stigma to people with mental health and substance use" and "a lack of temporary accommodation or emergency accommodation that say they can meet a person's needs". Furthermore, these multiple and complex needs mean "multi agencies support is vital with easy access".

12 out of the 12 responses said that their agency or service was impacted by homelessness.

"Being asked to leave by family or friends" was mentioned among the top 3 as consistent with what we see coming through the service, the most common reason mentioned is "end of tenancy due to anti-social behaviour (all tenures)" whilst "leaving prison" is perceived as the third most common cause.

The survey also highlighted that the main causes are not necessarily as obvious and therefore may be hard to tackle. Out of the 15 options given, all but two were given as a top-5 reason by at least one respondent, with over half of the answers being mentioned by 33% of the responses. Showing that the causes of homelessness can be complex and multi-faceted, with no one clear and obvious solution that can address the underlying cause.

All respondents answered 'yes' to whether they felt repeat homelessness was an issue.

Reasons for this response included loss of confidence in housing, mental health and addiction services, “lack of temporary accommodation in Stafford”, “lack of support in tenancy sustainment” and because people “do not engage long enough to develop any skills or work with services to manage their situations. Furthermore, rising living costs, including rent prices can make it more difficult for people to keep their homes.

Feedback suggested that individuals find themselves stuck in a cycle as they are “too high risk” and risk eviction when placed in accommodation due to addiction or mental health issues. This increases pressure on services individuals may return to hospital due to their housing situation leading to discharge issues, or may not have the support in place meaning the accommodation is often not suitable for their needs and the support they need.

One respondent identified there is “an ongoing cycle of homelessness despite attempts by partner organisations to break the cycle”, arguing that this is mainly a result due to “homeless individuals placed in short term accommodation which fails to meet their needs”. As a result, individuals either are “then evicted or leave as they feel threatened”. This is backed up by another respondent stating that “people always say they prefer to be on the streets than go to the hostels again” as there is a lack of “lower level supported accommodation and lack of emergency accommodation locally”.

However, even in cases where there is “successful housing of difficult clients in accommodation such as Turning Point or Eagle House”, other issues arise. It seems difficult to get individuals to get to the next stage meaning they either “block through-put or risk eviction for wayward behaviour”. This is often related to mental health issues. Multiple respondents identified that mental health issues are not properly supported and that there is a “lack of coping strategy” as a result of “instability in life” and “roots going back to childhood relating to self-worth”. Additionally, one respondent stated that “many people are often admitted to psychiatric hospital” and that due to their mental health they often become “stuck” in hospital, failing to move on.

Further issues around the homelessness cycle and issues after initial support is provided, were identified when we asked the partners to give reasons why tenancies fail. Again, mental health issues were mentioned as well as substance misuse and anti-social behaviour, which often are all related. Consultees suggested individuals may disengage from services, or it could lead to more serious issues such as domestic abuse, overdosing or financial exclusion.

The lack of supported accommodation was once again a key factor. One respondent identified that the private rented sector will often refuse while the housing options service “send majority of people to a hostel in Birmingham” as no local options are available. As a result, individuals have a “poor opinion of Housing Services and so engagement drops off” and “they can’t get care and treatment, away from everything they know and their support network”.

We 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:

- Multiple and complex needs (identified by 4 respondents as the top reason)
- Lack of available support services (identified as a top 3 reason by half of the respondents)
- Drug use (considered among the top 2 reasons by over 40% of the respondents)

All possible causes listed in the survey were identified as a top 3 reason by at least one respondent, with over 6 reasons identified by at least 25% of respondents. 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.

Partners were also asked about the wider impacts of homelessness on the individual, the community and other services. Most responses again identified physical and mental health issues which means individuals “become marginalised by services and society”, “lack of self-esteem, worth and stigma” or more serious risks such as self-harm or individuals could even consider to “end their life”.

This then increases pressure on services due to readmissions. This could cause delays in support due to “bed blocking” and a lack of resource and support services for the individual locally. People which are sent out of area often cannot get the right treatment, either causing a relapse of making the issues harder to resolve. GP practices are “increasingly reluctant to take on “high demanding” homeless patients” as other services are unable to support them. This overall lack of support and the subsequent decline in the mental and physical state of the individual, also gets noticed by society. One respondent points point that the attitude of society is “more extreme” whilst the “social media identification and abuse of homeless is worrying”.

Because of the increasing complexity of issues and need to work in partnership, the expected future demand on partner services needs to be understood and formed part of the survey.

Several respondents point out that this largely depends on housing solutions. They are often “not enough”, there is a “shortage of affordable housing” and one partner pointed out that if more support could be given to services like Turning Point “the demand could be dramatically reduced” as it has reduced anti-social behaviour and public order issues in town.

An increase in affordable and supported housing supply would also alleviate issues around move-on strategies. Currently, people which are ready to move on “cannot find proper housing, leading to longer stays in temporary or supported housing”, creating bottlenecks in the system.

Partners further expect demand to increase due to ongoing challenges around youth homelessness. One supported accommodation provider pointed out that they have seen an increase in applications from people aged 18-24. Young people facing this issue often lack life skills, experience disruptions in their education and therefore may find job opportunities limited. This issue will add to the housing problem as lack of suitable housing options currently make the situation worse, adding to the already high demand on services.

The Housing Options Team recognise that that is a barrier to preventing and relieving homelessness for vulnerable groups, so 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:

- Individual support needs being too high for the services involved (amongst the top 3 reason for 67% of respondents)
- Mistrust for services (the most cited top reason as well as support needs being too high)
- Substance Misuse (amongst the top 3 of 50% of respondents)
- Mental illness or disability (cited as the second biggest reason by 25% of the respondents)

We asked, ‘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 “don’t want to accept patient with higher level of needs” and that priorities and expectations of rough sleepers “do not often match the priorities and expectations of the professionals”.

Other responses suggested that homeless individuals find it difficult to “engage as previous experience has been so negative” and that “getting support from services can be very bureaucratic”.

Furthermore, there was an acknowledgement that agencies are working “under pressure” and “stripped to the bare bones, or gone all together”. This could lead to services picking “easy wins rather than try and tackle complex problems”. Partners also need to work together as one “hasn’t got all the answers”. This may become increasingly difficult if there are not enough resources available to achieve the level of partnership work that would be required.

They also acknowledged that services could 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.

As a result of an individual’s lack of engagement, individuals often end up feeling “unwanted” and become more isolated and entrenched as they feel services continually let them down. They “don’t” want to be placed in hostels out of area” meaning they often decline exacerbating those feelings as well as feeling a lack of flexibility from professionals. Major health issues may not be addressed early enough, leading to high costs to services such as the NHS or potentially even early death.

Long-term, this also means individuals become increasingly unlikely to engage in the future and you are likely to get the same outcome. As one respondent put, “If those that are homeless are unable to change, then we, as professionals have to! There needs to be trust developed so that the clients can begin to make small changes”.

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

- Personalised Support Plans, focusing on each person's unique needs and setting out clear goals and steps on how to achieve them. This includes regular feedback and adaptation so that the individual and their opinions feel valued.
- Spending time to build a relationship with the individual to encourage engagement
- Setting up Peer Support Plans so people can connect with others who have similar experiences and are more relatable.
- Working with other partner agencies to establish a joint engagement strategy including joint visits.
- Increase in resource and staffing would provide opportunity for better outreach and preventative work.

