



# Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy

2019-2024

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**Foreword from the Portfolio Holder for Housing, Health and Older People- TO INSERT AFTER ELECTION**

## 1.1 Executive Summary

Stevenage Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2019-2024 sets out the Council's priorities to prevent homelessness, eradicate rough sleeping and stresses the importance of working in partnership to address the wide range of issues that can be linked to homelessness.

### Our Priorities

This 2019-2024 strategy identifies our four priorities;

- 1. Prevention and Relief of Homelessness (pages 28-32)**
- 2. Provision of Temporary Accommodation (pages 33-34)**
- 3. Housing Development (pages 35-37)**
- 4. Support of Homeless Households (pages 38-40)**

The strategy sets out Stevenage priorities in order to achieve these aims and will be supported by an action plan to implement and drive forward the strategy. This strategy will be the basis in which we will achieve our vision.

A glossary of terms is included at the end of this strategy for ease of reference.

### Our Vision

**Working co-operatively to prevent and reduce homelessness, and end the need for anyone to sleep rough in Stevenage**

## Stevenage context

Stevenage was built as a New Town in the 1940's and 1950's. We are one of four of ten local authorities in Hertfordshire to retain our own housing stock, albeit one that has been significantly reduced by the Right to Buy.

We are currently going through an ambitious development and regeneration plan and we are confident that it reflects the aspirations of our residents and community.

Government figures show that the number of families considered homeless in England has increased by 11% in a year.<sup>1</sup> In the first three months of financial year 2019/2020, there were 25,130 families with children identified as homeless, compared with 22,700 the previous quarter.<sup>2</sup> The data also reveals that the number of children living in temporary accommodation hit a 13-year high at 126,020, up 83% since its lowest point in June 2011. Separate analysis by the Campaign to Protect Rural England suggests the number of households classified as homeless in rural England almost doubled over the past year. The group said 173,584 families were on

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<sup>1</sup> Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government Homelessness statistics  
[www.gov.uk/government/collections/homelessness-statistics](http://www.gov.uk/government/collections/homelessness-statistics)

<sup>2</sup> The Independent 12 September 2019 [www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/homeless-families-children-housing-temporary-accommodation-a9102416.html](http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/homeless-families-children-housing-temporary-accommodation-a9102416.html)

waiting lists for social housing in areas where councils built just 1,336 homes for social rent in 2018.<sup>3</sup>

Homelessness is rising locally as well as nationally. In Stevenage, the last financial year 2018/2019 saw a year on year increase of 33% in the number of households approaching the Council as homeless.

This strategy continues the work guided by the 2015-2020 Stevenage Homeless Strategy and looks to go further to achieve the governments aims of eradicating homelessness. Since the 2015-2000 priorities were set there has been a lot achieved and we will detail our successes in the next section.

The Corporate Plan, “Future Town Future Council (2016-21)”, is our main strategic planning document. It is the key five year plan for Stevenage Borough Council and outlines our vision and the outcomes and objectives we wish to achieve whilst working co-operatively with and for our residents.

There are five ambitions in the FTFC strategy, of which the three priorities for Housing Development, Connected to our Customers, and Co-operative Neighbourhood Management have been identified in this Homelessness and Rough Sleeper strategy. These reflect our ambitions by increasing the number of homes in the town, improving the customer experience and to having a better understanding of our community’s needs and priorities, including co-operative working with our customers to design and deliver services.

## Homelessness Review

This strategy is based on a review of the current and likely future levels of homelessness in Stevenage and the activities and resources available to prevent homelessness and support homeless people. The strategy acknowledges that homeless is on the rise, whilst noting that predicting and analysing future levels is problematic, particularly when trying to forecast the levels of rough sleeping.

The review included the following:

- the most common reason for applying to the Council as homeless was eviction from private rented accommodation, followed by eviction by friends or family
- the Council has implemented a number of partnership and multiagency initiatives and more effective ways of working together that have been very successful in securing appropriate accommodation and support for people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness
- There has been a substantial increase in the emergency use of bed and breakfast accommodation

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<sup>3</sup> Campaign to Protect Rural England [www.cpre.org.uk/media-centre/latest-news-releases/item/5181-the-hidden-housing-crisis-rural-homelessness-on-the-rise](http://www.cpre.org.uk/media-centre/latest-news-releases/item/5181-the-hidden-housing-crisis-rural-homelessness-on-the-rise)

The 'plan on a page' detailed in appendix ii outlines how the action plan outcomes will achieve our priorities in this strategy and our priorities identified in our Future Town Future Council strategy.

The Council will use this strategy in striving to eradicate rough sleeping, minimise any use of Bed and Breakfast accommodation, reduce time spent in emergency and temporary accommodation and achieve our priorities through taking steps identified in the action plan. We aim to turn the curve for the number of cases requiring homelessness assistance by increasing our prevention work. This action plan will be monitored against the measure details on p44 of this strategy.

### **How we will achieve this**

The action plan on pages 41-46 details the actions the council which will undertake to achieve these priorities, as well as how this will be measured. The strategy will be reviewed on an annual basis and, as a cooperative council, we will ensure that we include feedback from our customers as well as other stakeholders, and this will continue to inform our action plan going forward.

### **Strategic Priorities**

Customer and other stakeholder questionnaires along with extensive analysis of demand and trends in the causes of homelessness, opportunities for homelessness prevention, service provision and gaps in services has informed the basis for our priorities for Stevenage's Homelessness Strategy 2019-2024.

### **Priority 1 Prevention and Relief of Homelessness**

#### **We will;**

- Continue to improve our homelessness prevention and relief work
- Continued collaborative working with our partners at strategic and operational level
- Avoid unnecessary evictions and recurring homelessness by maintaining a dedicated resource – private rented sector "PRS" tenancy sustainment
- Ensure that all customer contact is effectively managed and appropriate housing and homelessness advice is provided in a timely manor
- Effective liaison with Housing Associations to prevent and relieve homelessness
- Explore the implementation of a 'Housing First' approach model within Stevenage
- Effective communication with the public on homelessness and rough sleeping including myth busting
- Continuous provision of Advice and Support to single non-priority homeless applicants
- Provision of advice on housing affordability to ensure sustainability outcomes for all customers
- A streamlined and effective experience for all customers whilst they are given appropriate housing and homelessness advice

- We aim to reduce the number of days applicants are waiting in TA by utilising the option to discharge cases owed a duty by the Council into the Private Rented Sector where suitable
- Effective working with our partners via the Homelessness forum

## **Priority 2- Provision of Temporary Accommodation**

### **We will;**

- Increase our portfolio of temporary accommodation options of a size & types including the provision of a Local Authority hostel in conjunction with our Housing Development aspirations
- Increased supply of interim Emergency and Temporary Accommodation using properties that are pending redevelopment
- Minimise the use of Bed and Breakfast
- Value for money and transparency of service charges

## **Priority 3- Housing Development**

### **We will;**

- Provide 500 new affordable homes over 10 years with 300 of these homes being built by 2020/21
- The development of specialist emergency and temporary accommodation
- The development of high quality accommodation that will create necessary churn within the existing housing stock to allow for move on accommodation
- To provide new accommodation which offers security of tenure, sustainability and reduced running costs
- To utilise private sale schemes within the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) to cross subsidise further development of affordable accommodation

## **Priority 4 - Support of Homeless Households**

### **We will;**

- Ensure effective tenancy sustainment to reduce incidences of homelessness
- Better cross-tenure support between interim and permanent accommodation
- Continued partnership working with Hertfordshire County Council "HCC" for the provision of support for homeless families
- Continue to support families and vulnerable adults to maximise their income and mitigate the effects of welfare reform
- Develop our support services to become income generating - thus helping to sustain tenancies

Improved working with a wide range of external support providers to address the needs of customers

## 1.2 Our key achievements since the 2015-2020 strategy

Since the introduction of the 2015-2020 strategy the council has worked to prevent and reduce homelessness within the borough by working with partners and stakeholders as follows;

### Stevenage Borough Council achievements

- 174 new homes have been built within Stevenage
- Increase in the number of homeless preventions
- Increased use of properties in the Private Rented Sector (PRS) in order to prevent homelessness
- Regular and varied training on homelessness, case law and support provided for staff members
- A Business Unit review of the Housing Advice and Homeless service was completed in March 2018. The outcome of this review was to redesign the service into two strands: Housing Options and Housing Supply. Housing Options support applicants through out the process from the initial approach, to decision, to rehousing. The Housing Supply team source properties in the private rented sector in order to aid homeless prevention and maximise access to stock. The team then provides ongoing support to customers in private sector accommodation in order to sustain tenancies and reduce any repeat homelessness

### Partnership Achievements

- We have been actively involved in the development and monitoring of the Joint Housing Protocol (JHP) across Hertfordshire to ensure that there is an effective partnership working approach to cases. The JHP introduced effective pathways for specific groups who will access services across both the county and districts
- An increase in effective partnership working practices with internal and external partners including;
  - The Council's No More service and Hertfordshire Constabulary's Operation Urban
  - Herts Young Homeless (HYH) young person's education programme
  - Stevenage Against Domestic Abuse (SADA) and the safe spaces
  - Working with the Haven to assist their residents into the PRS
  - Update to the Joint Housing Protocol (JHP) with Hertfordshire County Council
- National Landlord Association (NLA) attends and contributes to our regular council lead landlord forum
- Stevenage Borough Council and North Herts District Council (NHDC) hold a joint Homelessness Forum in which a variety of partners attend



## 1.3 Consultation

Throughout 2019, and in preparation for this strategy to be devised, the Council consulted with our stakeholders including professional partners and customers.

During the Spring and Summer of 2019 we carried out an online survey with our professional stakeholders, as identified in the glossary.

In July 2019 we completed face to face surveys with customers of the service including those currently resident in council emergency/temporary accommodation. We also interviewed some residents living in the Stevenage Haven, our local night shelter. Those consulted with at the Haven included those who had also had a period of rough sleeping.

In September 2019 we completed a survey over the phone with some cases currently open to the Housing Options Service and with applicants who had approached the service since 1<sup>st</sup> April 2019 stating that they had “no fixed abode”.

Our aim of the surveys was to seek customer feedback on what they felt the Council’s priorities should be to eradicate homelessness, as well as what the barriers to accessing housing that they faced.

### Professionals’ Feedback

Just over 30% of the professionals that were approached responded to the online survey and identified the following:

The top four priorities (two priorities scored the same) identified by our professional stakeholders are as follows;

1. Continuous improvement in our homelessness prevention work
2. Avoid unnecessary evictions and recurring homelessness by maintaining a dedicated resource for private rented sector tenancy sustainment
3. To ensure that all customer contact is effectively managed and appropriate housing and homelessness advice is provided
4. Closer working with our partners

The top three barriers to achieving our strategic outcomes were identified as:

1. Lack of affordable housing
2. Reduced funding from Government
3. Welfare reform impacts

### Face to face customer feedback

During July 2019 we completed the face to face consultation with customers at the Stevenage Haven and those currently residing in the Council’s emergency and temporary accommodation and we asked them what they felt should be the Council’s priority around homelessness. The main priorities identified were:

1. Clear and consistent communication during casework
2. More social housing and hostel places – in particular for those that are single and classed as non-priority homeless
3. Education in relation to life skills

The top four barriers identified (two barriers scored the same) were:

1. Lack of social housing accommodation and high rents in the private rented sector
2. Number of different proofs required by the Council to confirm local connection as well five out of seven years resident in the borough
3. Fewer services available – mental health/drug/alcohol support
4. Sofa surfing not recognised as being homeless.

### **Telephone customer feedback**

In September 2019 we completed consultation with applicants who had approached the service from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2019 stating that they had “no fixed abode” and further consultation with some cases that were currently open to the Housing Options service.

Top four priorities (two priorities scored the same) identified are as follows;

1. To ensure that all customer contact is effectively managed and appropriate housing and homelessness advice is provided
2. Continuous improvement in our homelessness prevention work
3. Closer working with our partners
4. Avoid unnecessary evictions and recurring homelessness by maintaining a dedicated resource for private rented sector tenancy sustainment

The top three barriers to achieving our strategic outcomes were identified as:

1. Reduced funding from Government
2. Lack of Affordable Housing
3. Welfare Reform impacts such as the ‘Benefit Cap’ and ‘Local Housing Allowance’ (LHA) rates

A copy of the consultation survey and questions can be found at appendix iii.

All the priorities identified above have been incorporated into our action plan, and it became clear from across all of the consultation that the priorities to complete continuous improvement in our homelessness prevention work, and to have clear and consistent communication with customers were felt especially important. Additionally, the one barrier identified by all consulted groups was the lack of affordable housing. These three main themes therefore formed the basis for our priorities in this strategy.

## 1.4 Innovation

### Stevenage Borough Council Innovation

- **Working with our customers to design and deliver services-** In order to meet the demands placed on the Council by the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 (HRA17), a service redesign was completed for the Housing Advice and Homeless service in 2018, and in order to decide on how the services would be provided, we used information captured by our Customer Feedback team. This highlighted that many customers felt they had to explain their story numerous times and that it was not clear who they needed to speak to about their case. Therefore, as part of the new Housing Options and Housing Supply services, a customer is now allocated a caseworker who will deal with the case from start to finish. This has resulted in more streamlined working, fewer hand offs and a more consistent approach.
- **Operation Urban-** was introduced to address rough sleeping and begging issues within the town. The findings so far from this operation have been that not all individuals that have been reported to be rough sleeping are actually “homeless” but, however, choose to identify as a rough sleeper in the process of begging. The Vagrancy Act 1924 introduced powers for Police to take action in relation to rough sleeping and begging, such as Community Protection Notices being issued. Hotspot areas have been identified by the Police, which has highlighted that to address the issues of rough sleeping and homelessness within Stevenage it is important for the council and police to work jointly.
- **Stevenage Against Domestic Abuse (SADA) service-** In March 2019 the Communities and Neighbourhoods team launched a resource pack for partner agencies and a Survivors Handbook which is available on our website and websites of our partners. This resource aids our residents in receiving the necessary support and our partners to support our residents.
- **Best use of stock-** In order to meet the demands across our services the Council has utilised stock to allocate the use for emergency, temporary or general needs. This is further supported through the link with the Open Market acquisition (OMA) programme which is detailed on page 23 of this strategy allowing for additional emergency/ temporary accommodation units to be provided.
- **Rough Sleeper Outreach Worker-** funding secured through the Rough Sleeper Initiative has provided additional resource in the form of an Outreach Worker to engage with rough sleepers in Stevenage in order to prevent homelessness.

We regularly review our provisions for rough sleepers and have considered an initiative to provide lockers to store their belongings in. Winter Comfort, a day centre based in Cambridge, do provide this service, however, it is only

available during restricted opening hours and the service user has to remain on the property whilst items are stored.

After discussions with our Community Safety team concerns have been raised in relation to the feasibility of managing this, particularly in relation to locations as we enter a period of regeneration of the town; we will, however, continue investigate other innovative solutions.

- **Cold weather provision-** The Council provides short term cold weather provision for rough sleepers regardless of priority need during the time of year where the temperature drops below freezing. The local night shelter, Stevenage Haven, provide eight bed spaces for this provision and have the option to use our EA/TA stock. For additional provision, the Council is exploring partnership working with local churches in order to increase our access to accommodation without it having an impact on the provision available to the applicants in which we have a duty to accommodate.
- **Housing First-** The council will explore the implementation of a Housing First approach and the implementation investigations will start in financial year 2020/2021. The Housing First model uses independent, stable housing as a platform to enable individuals with multiple and complex needs to begin recovery and move away from homelessness.<sup>4</sup>

## National Innovation

- National initiatives include the Housing First pilot. This is based on the Finland model where accommodation is provided first then wrap around support is put in in to sustain the tenancies/licenses. The Finland model is based on the principle that the customer does not need to solve their problems first before they are provided with accommodation. Since taking this approach, Finland has been the first EU country to see a decrease in homelessness. Housing First pilots are running during 2019/2020 in Tower Hamlets, Manchester, Welywn/Hatfield, Hertsmere and in a joint project between Dacorum and St Albans, in addition to other Local Authorities.
- Manchester in particular demonstrates good practice in relation to homelessness and rough sleeping – not only do they have a dedicated Rough Sleeping team separate to their Housing Options team, the Mayor of Manchester has launched a fund to tackle homelessness.<sup>5</sup> The aim of the fund is to support schemes such as
  - Bringing empty properties back into use
  - Building specialised supported accommodation for young people with access to education, volunteering and employment opportunities
  - Expanding mental health and rehabilitation programs.

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<sup>4</sup> Housing First England 'About housing first' <https://hfe.homeless.org.uk/about-housing-first>

<sup>5</sup> [www.greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk/news/a-bed-every-night-campaign-helps-more-than-700-rough-sleepers-into-accommodation](http://www.greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk/news/a-bed-every-night-campaign-helps-more-than-700-rough-sleepers-into-accommodation)

- A number of Local Authorities provide various schemes such as No Second Night Out.<sup>6</sup> Manchester's 'A Bed Every Night' campaign<sup>7</sup> has helped more than 700 Rough Sleepers during November 2018 – January 2019 into accommodation as part of their Cold Weather Provision. This campaign is open to the public/corporations to donate to and as at April 2019 the total raised is over £233,000.

## 1.5 Background and Legislation

Local Authorities are required to work in line with the Housing Act 1996 (as amended). This strategy has been published in line with Section 3 of Homelessness Act 2002 which requires Local Authorities to develop and publish a Homelessness Strategy.

The Council is required to provide a Housing Advice and Homeless service alongside a number of other statutory functions such as the provision of an allocations policy.

As per section 2(1) of the 2002 Act, a local authority is required to complete a homelessness review which means a review by a housing authority of:

- (a) the levels, and likely future levels, of homelessness in their district;
- (b) the activities which are carried out for any the following purposes (or which contribute to achieving any of them):
  - (i) preventing homelessness in the housing authority's district;
  - (ii) securing that accommodation is, or will be, available for people in the district who are, or may become, homeless; and
  - (iii) providing support for people in the district who are homeless or who may become at risk of homelessness; or who have been homeless and need support to prevent them becoming homeless again; and,
- (c) the resources available to the housing authority, the social services authority for the district, other public authorities, voluntary organisations and other persons for the activities outlined in (b) above.

The above considerations have been addressed when setting our priorities based on the consultation undertaken with stakeholders.

The work completed by the Housing team is bound by legislation and therefore the terminology used in legal, decision letters are as a result of this. These decision letters are a requirement in order to ensure compliance with the law.

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<sup>6</sup> [www.nosecondnightout.org.uk](http://www.nosecondnightout.org.uk)

<sup>7</sup> <https://bedeverynight.co.uk>

## **Homelessness Reduction Act 2017**

The Housing Act 1996 (as amended) defines the responsibilities required by a Local Authority under part 6 and part 7. The legislation that has been introduced further to the Housing Act has amended requirements and added to them.

The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 (HRA17), was implemented in April 2018 and the Rough Sleeper Initiative Strategy published in the Autumn of 2018 have prompted our review of the 2015-2020 strategy in order to set out our strategic priorities for 2019-2024.

The HRA17 introduced additional powers and duties for Local Authorities for the prevention and relief of Homelessness. The Housing Act 1996 (as amended) details the duties and powers placed on Local Authorities. These were augmented by the requirements placed on Local Authorities through the HRA17 in relation to prevention and relief duties.

The prevention duty is triggered when an applicant is threatened with homelessness within 56 days of their approach to the service and is eligible for assistance. This duty is applicable regardless of local connection. If a duty is triggered, to complete an assessment of the applicant's needs a Personalised Housing Plan (PHP) must be produced detailing what the applicant must do, and what the Local Authority will do, in an attempt to prevent the applicant's homelessness.

This duty will last for at least 56 days and if the applicant's homelessness cannot be prevented, and an applicant actually becomes homeless, the Relief duty is triggered and lasts for at least another 56 days. A revised PHP must be completed under the relief duty as soon as possible. If at the end of this second 56 day period, or later if the Council's enquiries are not completed, the applicant's homelessness cannot be relieved and the Council have an obligations to issue a s184 decision under Part VI of the Housing Act 1996 in the same way as prior to the implementation of the HRA17.

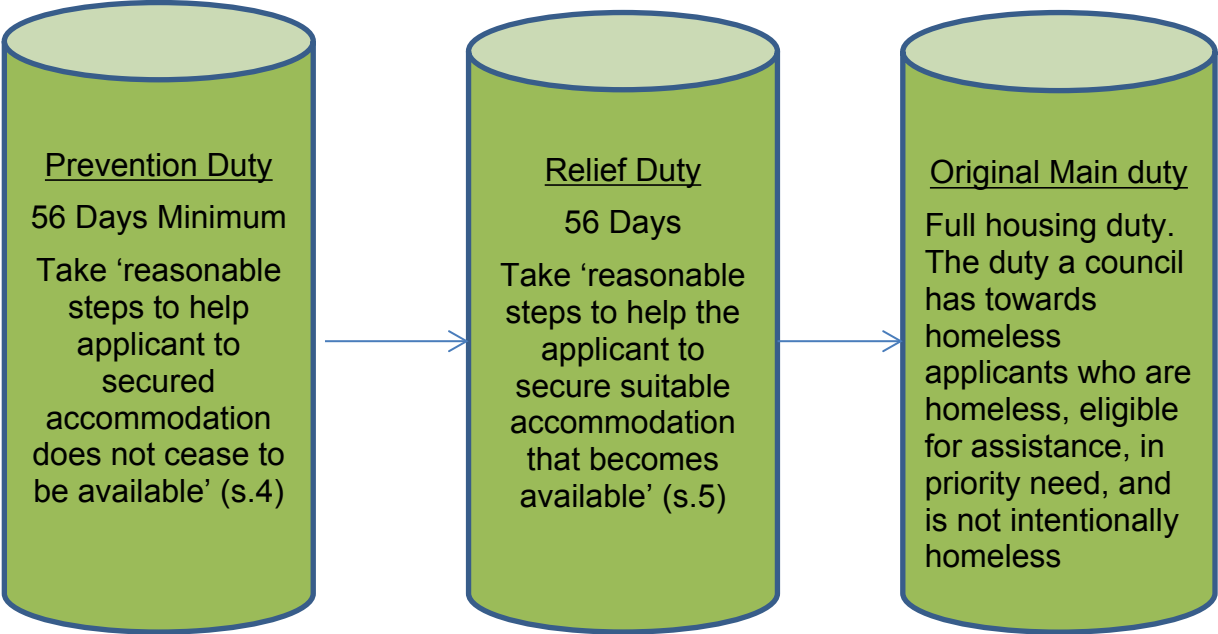
The Act put an emphasis on a joint responsibility between Local Authorities (LA's) and applicants to assist in finding suitable accommodation for applicants. The Act empowers Local Authorities to assist applicants threatened with, or that are homeless, into accommodation in the Private Rented Sector "PRS", which maximises access to accommodation. The Act acknowledges that Social Housing is not always available at sufficient levels to meet the demands of homeless households. This is supported by the changes introduced in The Localism Act 2011 which gave the opportunity to discharge the main duty into the PRS in order to meet the demand for housing.

The introduction of the HRA17 has had an impact on the time taken dealing with a case, the number of cases each caseworker has, as well as an impact on our emergency and temporary accommodation availability, as applicants can be in emergency accommodation or temporary accommodation for a longer period than previously. This is mainly due to those cases that cannot be prevented or relieved as no main duty can be accepted to an applicant until the 56 day relief duty has ended. Local Authorities have the responsibility to provide emergency accommodation

during the full relief duty, if the applicant is homeless, eligible and in 'priority need'. If a main duty is owed TA will be provided beyond the 56 days.

Overall, the HRA17 builds on the existing provisions of Part 7 of the 1996 Housing Act (as amended by Homelessness Act 2002), as it extends the Council's duties to those who are homeless and focusses on prevention. The key changes brought about by the Act include:

- Improving the advice and information available to all homeless applicants and the prevention of homelessness.
- Extending the period that a household is 'threatened with homelessness' from 28 days to 56 days
- Introducing new duties to prevent and relieve homelessness for all eligible applicants, regardless of priority need, intentionality and local connection
- Introducing needs assessments for those homeless and threatened with homelessness by completing Personal Housing Plans which set out the actions authorities and individuals will take to secure accommodation.
- Encouraging public bodies to work together to prevent and relieve homelessness through a Duty to Refer, which commenced in October 2018.



The Government has provided Local Authorities with varying amounts of grant funding to meet the demands placed on them by the HRA17. Due to the increased demands placed on the Housing Options and Supply team we are currently using a

portion of this funding to ensure there are adequate staffing levels for the service. There is no guarantee of this government funding continuing after March 2020.

## **The Rough Sleeper Initiative 2018**

The Rough Sleeper Initiative Strategy (RSI) was published in the autumn of 2018 and although it hasn't given the Local Authority any additional powers in relation to legislation, it has made funding available to address rough sleeping. The Government has committed to halving rough sleeping in this parliament and to end it for good by 2027. The Council and its partners will endeavor to ensure rough sleepers are supported to access the right help and support. Local Authorities also need to consider the lack of services available to assist these 'difficult to reach' customers as many may have complex needs that have not been previously acknowledged. These issues can often be masked by self-medication in respect of drugs and/or alcohol.

The Council completed a funding bid in 2019 for a Rough Sleeper Co-coordinator and Support Worker post which was successful. The project is funded for one year from 7<sup>th</sup> October 2019 and this worker will engage with the town's identified rough sleepers to support them into sustainable housing. Their objective as part of this pilot will be to halve the town's rough sleeper population, however we will strive to eradicate rough sleeping completely within Stevenage.

Customer feedback on the Rough Sleeper initiative

"I cannot go through another winter, I don't think I have it in me."

The project worker completed a referral to the Housing Supply team who sourced accommodation in the private rented sector and offered sustainment in the prevention of homelessness. The Housing Supply team assisted the resident in sourcing the property and provided a deposit, and further to this, the rough sleeper project worker assisted with the viewing and in claiming Universal credit. This is a positive example of joint working and successful prevention.

The Rough Sleeper Co-coordinator and Support Worker and the Housing Options team will continue to work with partners such as the No More service and Hertfordshire Constabulary on projects such as Operation Urban.

There have been a number of successful outcomes for cases dealt with through Operation Urban. In one case a resident with a history of drug use, offending and anti-social behavior who was regularly found to be rough sleeping was referred to the Council's No More Service (NMS) who provided intensive support and found him accommodation in the local night shelter; Stevenage Haven. The resident has complex needs and is being provided with ongoing support.



## 1.6 Homelessness and Rough Sleeper definitions

The legal definition of homelessness is broad and does not just apply to people without a roof over their heads or who are sleeping rough. There are several categories as detailed below:

Statutory homeless	Households deemed to be homeless, eligible for support from their local council and in priority need.
Single homeless	Those who are homeless but do not meet the priority need criteria to be housed by their local authority under homelessness legislation.
Vulnerably housed	People without accommodation, people in temporary, insecure or poor quality accommodation including those that are overcrowded, or those threatened with homelessness.
Rough Sleeping	People sleeping, about to bed down (sitting on/In or standing next to their bedding) or actually bedded down in the open air. People in buildings or other places not designed for habitation (such as stairwells, garages, car parks, cars or stations)
Hidden homeless	People not recorded in official statistics, who tend to sleep on the floors or sofas of friends and families, or sleep rough in concealed locations.

## 1.7 Health & Wellbeing

Stevenage takes the health of its residents seriously and has had a Health and Wellbeing partnership as a thematic group of the local strategic partnership for several years.<sup>8</sup> The health and wellbeing of the homeless or rough sleepers is one focus of this strategy which links into the Health and Wellbeing strategy described below.

The Healthy Stevenage Partnership is a multi-agency forum which includes the representatives of the following organisations; Stevenage Borough Council, Hertfordshire County Council, Public Health, East and North Herts Clinical Commissioning Group, East and North Herts NHS Trust, Mind in Mid Herts, Healthwatch, Stevenage Football Club Foundation, Citizens Advice Stevenage, Children Centres, Stevenage Leisure Limited, Stevenage Sporting Futures among many others.

The purpose of the partnership is to

- Achieve better alignment of partners and their efforts to address shared priorities for health and wellbeing
- Work together to maximise resources, skills, knowledge and evidence
- Deliver or commission local projects based on evidence and needs of the local population
- Increase opportunities to improve health wellbeing for local residents
- Champion health and wellbeing and promote positive health-related behaviours
- Secure additional resources and investment for health and wellbeing projects in Stevenage

The partnership has worked together to developed a four year strategy (2018-2022) which sets out their priorities.<sup>9</sup> The strategy action plan sets out some of the key projects to be delivered over this period. It is important to note that the strategy and action plan will be a live document which will develop as the health and wellbeing agenda evolves. It will reflect local needs based on evidence and take account of changing aspirations over time.

As mentioned above, one of the purposes of the Healthy Stevenage Strategy is to commission local projects based on evidence as to the needs of the local population.

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<sup>8</sup> [www.local.gov.uk/stevenage-borough-council-public-health-transformation-six-years](http://www.local.gov.uk/stevenage-borough-council-public-health-transformation-six-years)

<sup>9</sup> [www.stevenage.gov.uk/content/committees/182083/182087/182091/Executive-14-February-2018-Item5-AppA.pdf](http://www.stevenage.gov.uk/content/committees/182083/182087/182091/Executive-14-February-2018-Item5-AppA.pdf)

Stevenage contributes £5k per financial year to the Herts Young Homeless “Home truths” programme which educates school children across Hertfordshire on a variety of health and wellbeing aspects, including homelessness and housing options. This is to ensure the young people of Stevenage can make well informed choices for the future and aims to reduce risk of homelessness.

Herts Insight have published the projected population growth of Stevenage and other Hertfordshire Districts over the next 25 years.<sup>10</sup> The projection is that there will be a population increase of 13.8%. We should therefore expect that for Stevenage the number of presentations of homelessness and Housing Register applicants to increase. The table below (produced by Herts Insight) indicates the projected population increase over the 25 year period (2016-2041) at District level.

<b>District</b>	<b>Projected population – all persons, all ages 2016-2041</b>
Broxbourne	13.62%
Dacorum	16.14%
East Herts	18.89%
Hertsmere	12.83%
North Herts	15.75%
St Albans	12.18%
<b>Stevenage</b>	<b>13.75%</b>
Three Rivers	15.86%
Watford	17.39%
Welwyn Hatfield	22.07%

In order to focus on health and wellbeing of applicants who have experienced domestic abuse and/or domestic violence, the Council’s Community Safety service provide the safeguarding Stevenage Against Domestic Abuse (“SADA) service. SADA works with survivors of domestic abuse and their families. The service offers crisis intervention along with customer led support and signposting to other agencies to suit the individual’s needs. Over the last year we have seen the service grow and gain recognition for its work.<sup>11</sup> The SADA Domestic Abuse Forum is run by survivors of who want to make a difference, the drop-in service which runs weekly in Stevenage and North Herts offers extra support to victims, survivors and their families.

<sup>10</sup> [www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/microsites/herts-insight/topics/population.aspx](http://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/microsites/herts-insight/topics/population.aspx)

<sup>11</sup> [www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/22.39%20Modern%20slavery%20case%20studies\\_web.pdf](http://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/22.39%20Modern%20slavery%20case%20studies_web.pdf)  
Homelessness & Rough Sleeper Strategy 2019-2024

SADA continues to source external funding to enhance the work with domestic abuse survivors and their families in Stevenage and North Herts. We have expanded our work further following a successful funding bid from Letchworth Heritage Foundation and Violence against women and girls “VAWG”. This funding has enabled the service to offer one to one support for those people that have experienced complex needs including self-medicating with drugs and alcohol and to access support for those experiences mental health issues. The service will continue to work with partners and seek further funding to secure and expand the service past 2020.

The council’s Community Safety service launched its Modern Slavery Service in October 2018 and has been working closely with partners to offer training to front line staff and held a conference in February 2019 enhance the learning

The service has two “Safe Space” properties which can give respite for those people who are fleeing domestic abuse or need time to consider their options. The properties are available fully furnished and referrals are received through the SADA Service. The service is currently looking to further expand its accommodation provision with more support for survivors who need further assistance including those with no recourse to public funds.

This work is completed in partnership with the Housing Options team to ensure applicants have access to resources that will improve their health and wellbeing alongside the prevention and relief of homelessness.

## 1.8 Statistics and context

The estimated number of rough sleepers in England has also increased every year since 2010, Stevenage has seen an increase of 63% in rough sleepers since 2010. In 2018 our count was 11 rough sleepers – compared to the previous year of 6; this indicates an increase of 83%.

The table below details the rough sleeper Count since 2014.<sup>3</sup>

Year	Estimated Count
2014	8
2015	5
2016	17
2017	6
2018	11

Under the HRA17 the statistical returns that the Council is required to make has changed. A number of Local Authorities, including Stevenage, have had challenges relating to the implementation of the new format owing to IT systems and our need to adapt these. We have implemented new systems within the service to accommodate the requirements of the HRA17, however, as a consequence of this, we are currently unable to produce a like for like analysis with our peers.

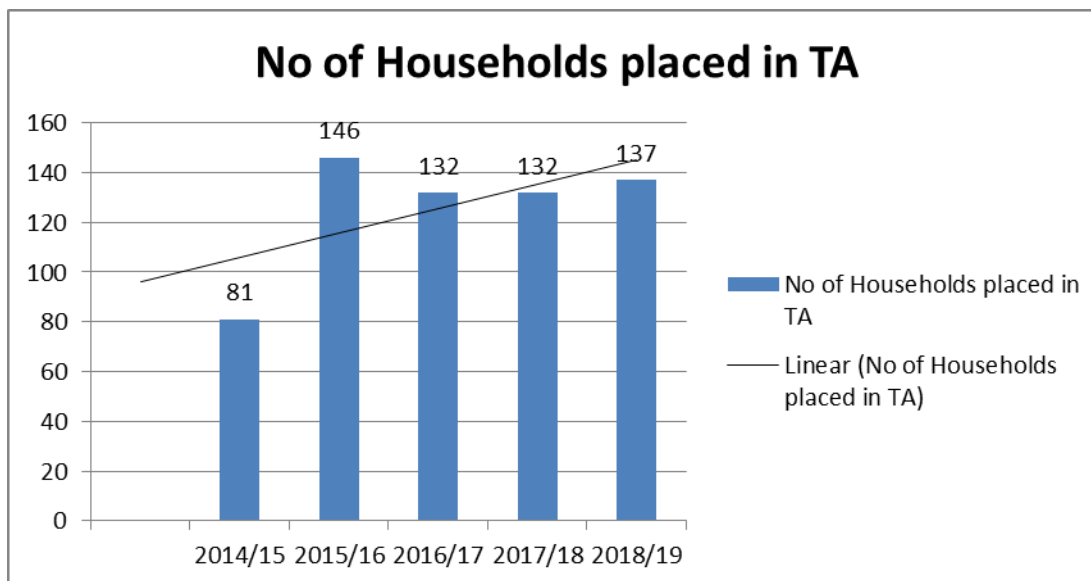
This is equivalent to our reporting Q1 as the MHCLG run their reporting on a calendar year rather than a fiscal year. A caveat on this data on the .Gov website also advised that it is experimental statistical release data and based on full or partial information from Local Authorities.

The data obtained through the previous national data report system is detailed below.

### Temporary Accommodation

It has been noted that in the 1<sup>st</sup> quarter of the HRA17 the number of households in "TA" was up nationally by 5% based on the previous year and since 2010 it is increased by 70%.<sup>4</sup>

Stevenage has seen a 69% increase from 2014/15 to 2018/19 as evidenced by the table below when reviewing those placed in TA.



The increase in temporary accommodation is not just local issue to Stevenage as discussed by Association of Retained Council Housing (ARCH) following the latest Government figures<sup>12</sup> released on 12 September 2019 showing that, despite the introduction of the **Homeless Reduction Act 2017**, the number of homeless households living in temporary accommodation has risen again and is at its highest since 2010.

On 31 March 2019 the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) published<sup>13</sup> that the number of households living in temporary accommodation across England was 84,740 - up 4.7% from 80,720 on 31 March 2018 and up by a huge 76.5% 48,010 on 31 December 2010. There were 62,010 households in temporary accommodation with dependent children, including 2,190 households in Bed & Breakfast accommodation. In total there were 126,020 dependent children in temporary accommodation at 31 March 2019.

The Council regularly monitors the demands and trends on services and one of the main demands for the service is the numbers of applicants requiring temporary accommodation.

Since 2017 the housing service has been required to utilise Bed and Breakfast and hotels when all council owned emergency (EA) and temporary accommodation (TA) units are in use in order to provide applicants owed an s188 interim or s193 main duty with temporary accommodation as per the Housing Act 1996 (as amended).

There are 90 units of accommodation allocated for the use emergency/temporary accommodation for the Council. These units have been running at full capacity for a substantial period and the length of stay has increased since the introduction of the Homeless Reduction Act in 2018. We have been required to use Bed and Breakfast

<sup>12</sup> [www.arch-housing.org.uk/news/latest-news/households-in-temporary-accommodation-highest-since-2010.aspx](http://www.arch-housing.org.uk/news/latest-news/households-in-temporary-accommodation-highest-since-2010.aspx)

<sup>13</sup> [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/831246/Statutory\\_Homelessness\\_Statistics\\_Release\\_Jan\\_to\\_March\\_2019.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/831246/Statutory_Homelessness_Statistics_Release_Jan_to_March_2019.pdf)

accommodation to deal with the impact of the demand for accommodation which is not a sustainable option.

The cost of Bed and Breakfast placements is high and due to the increase in placement required, the *projected* cost of this is £220k for financial year 2019/2020. The approx. spend for Q1 and Q2 for financial year 2019/2020 is approx. £60k for Bed and Breakfast placements, compared to approx. £5k in 2018/2019.

Despite the hard work of the teams in preventing and assisting homeless applicants there is a constant and increasing demand for temporary accommodation and applicants are in temporary accommodation for longer periods.

At the time of writing there are 9 cases placed into Bed and Breakfast in addition to the 90 cases placed in EA/TA. At its peak on 7<sup>th</sup> October 2019, the Council had 26 cases placed into Bed and Breakfast

Therefore, we must consider how to increase of our access to more stock for emergency/ temporary accommodation to meet the demand and we have taken short term, medium term and long term steps to address this.

We have already completed a conversion of a general needs property into shared facility giving additional six units and there are further conversions of stock agreed in order to provide additional units which has been funded from the Flexible Homeless Support Grant (FHSG). The FHSG was issued to Local Authorities in place of the nightly let management fee in order to prevent and relief homelessness. There is no guarantee that this grant will continue past 2020 however we have received two rounds of this grant for 2018/2019 and 2019/2020 which has paid for fixed term contracts within the Providing Homes service in order to prevent and relieve homelessness.

Some properties that have been purchased through Open Market Acquisitions (OMA) programme using Right to Buy receipts, have been provided for the use of TA. Using these properties for TA over any other option does not impact the Housing Revenue Account as the rents received will balance the spend from the Council purchasing these properties.

The conversion of general needs units and properties allocated from OMA's will provide an additional 26 units for the provision of TA in order to meet the demand for accommodation.

We have monitored the demand for EA/TA and have short term, medium term and long term solutions in place to deal with this including the medium/long term provision of additional hostel type accommodation to be provided within Stevenage. The EA/ TA action is plan is being reviewed on a monthly basis to ensure that we are on track to meet our target to have no families placed into Bed and Breakfast accommodation. This will also be reviewed in the quarterly internal KPIs.

Our target is to ensure that there are no families with dependent children, expectant mothers and 16/17year olds placed into Bed and Breakfast accommodation by the start of financial year 2020/2021.

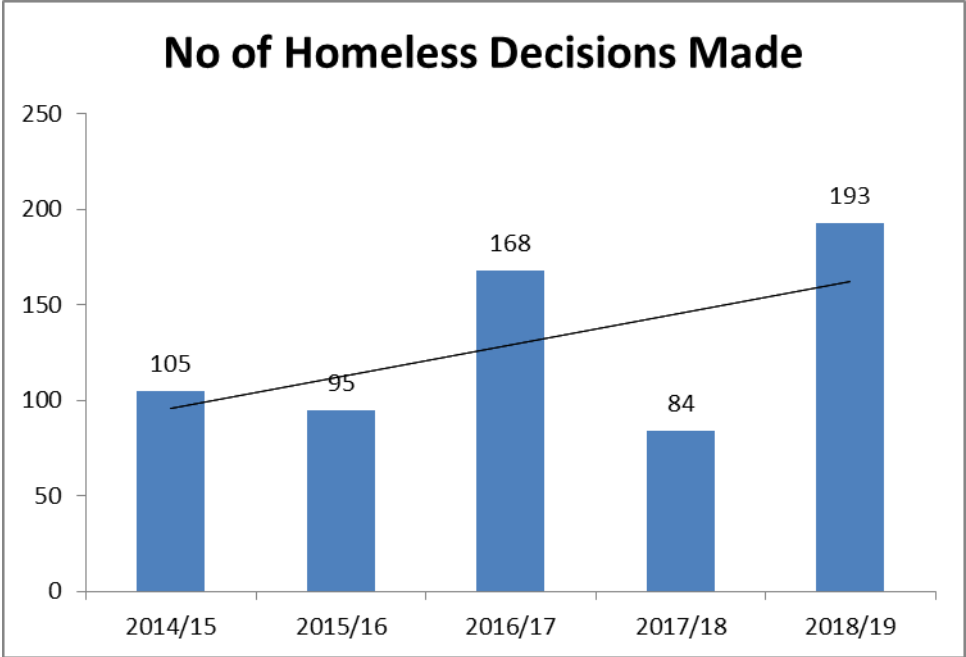
### **Homelessness Decisions**

The graph below shows the number of decision that have been made by the Stevenage Housing Options team (formerly known as the Housing Advice and Homelessness & Rough Sleeper Strategy 2019-2024

Homelessness team) over the last 5 years. The decisions referenced are those made under Section 184 of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended) which relate to whether the applicant falls under the following criteria:

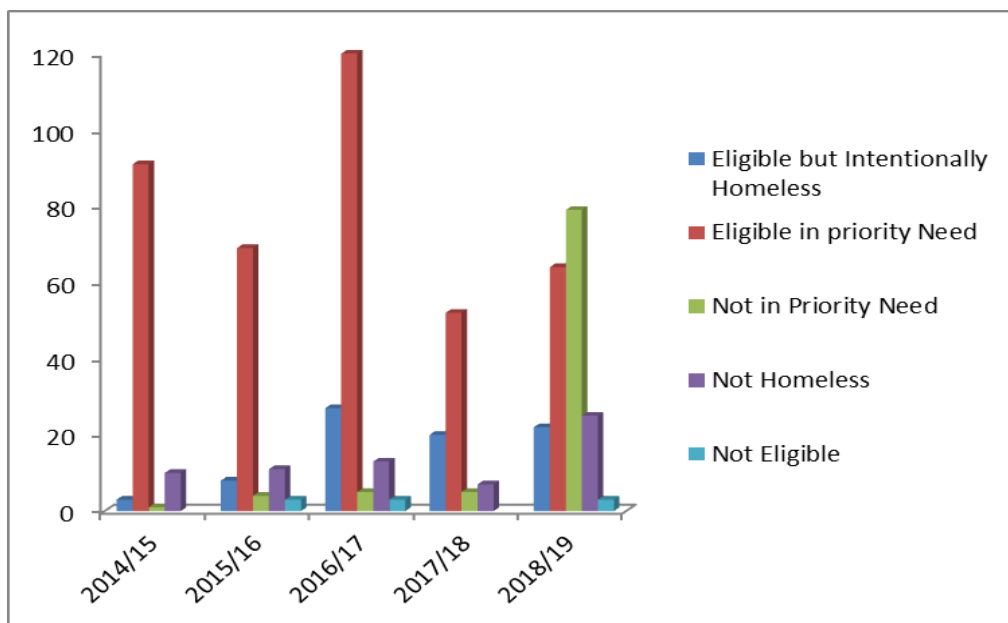
- Eligible but intentionally homeless
- Eligible and in priority need
- Not in priority need
- Not homeless
- Not eligible

There is an increase of 84% between 2014/15 and 2018/19. Comparing just 2017/18 to 2018/19 there is an increase of 230%.



The graph below show the reasons for the decisions taken over the last 5 years





The above table evidences that there has been a substantial increase in the number of 'not in priority need' and 'not homeless' decisions issued from 2018/2019. The reason for this increase can be attributed to the approach to cases by officers and further the change in legislation putting an emphasis on a decisions being made at the very start of an applicant's journey.

The length of time taken to make a decision will vary on a case by case basis however cases that are found 'intentionally homeless' will generally take a longer period of time based on the complexity of the investigations required to be evidenced in the decision letter.

Analysis of decisions made by Hertfordshire Local Authorities is detailed below. The information shows that Stevenage rank 8<sup>th</sup> in the volume of total decisions made between 2014/15 and 2017/18

The information below has been obtained for the P1E data submitted by each LA.

	Broxbourne	Dacorum	East Herts	Hertsmere	North Herts	St Albans	Stevenage	Three Rivers	Watford	Welwyn Hatfield
Eligible, Homeless, In Priority but IH	33	80		60	60	70	<b>58</b>	30	73	87
Eligible, homeless not in priority need	42	176		66	62	33	<b>15</b>	22	62	64
Eligible not homeless	372	108	88	198	119	57	<b>41</b>	15	121	70
Eligible and priority need	803	692	308	534	318	511	<b>332</b>	296	629	614
Total Decision made over 4 year period between 2014/15 - 17/18	1250	1056	396	858	559	671	<b>446</b>	363	885	835

Stevenage continues to work with partner agencies to encourage a duty to refer approach to the service and is continuing to work with partners to address the complex and multiple needs of customers. A large amount of training has been provided to partner agencies in order to educate them about the HRA17 and the duty

to refer that it has introduced. The ten Hertfordshire Local Authorities have also agreed referral procedures between Local Authorities in order to prevent any one Local Authority facing the brunt of the HRA demands locally.

Work continues proactively with partner Local Authorities and Social Services on the Hertfordshire Joint Housing Protocol (JHP) and partnership working. Hertfordshire County Council and the ten districts within Hertfordshire operate a two tier system and therefore this JHP was put in place to ensure that service users and staff have a streamlined approach across Hertfordshire. This is in place for a number of target groups: '16/17 year old' homeless, 'Intentionally Homeless Families', 'Families with no recourse to Public Funds' and 'Care Leavers'. The JHP has a steering group which focusses on the strategic vision through liaison meetings to discuss any issues with specific cases; this enables us to focus on specific cases to come up with a resolution.

As discussed in the national homeless charity Crisis's 8<sup>th</sup> annual homelessness monitor England report<sup>14</sup> it has been identified there has been an extraordinary rise since 2010 in the number of households in the UK made homeless by the ending of private tenancies, this, however, seems to have finally to have peaked. Homelessness temporary accommodation placements, however, have continued to rise, and now stand 71% higher than in 2011, with a disproportionate rise in Bed and Breakfast use also ongoing.

It is identified by Homelesslink<sup>15</sup> and evidenced in the P1E national data returns the most common main report reason for losing accommodation is that a friend or relatives are no longer able to provide support or because of relationship breakdown.

For Stevenage the main reasons reported for homeless approaches are overwhelmingly: relationship breakdown, friends and family no longer able to accommodate, and the loss of Assured Shorthold Tenancies "AST" which are tenancies in the private rented sector. The Housing Supply team is focusing on addressing the access to properties in the PRS and the Housing Options team work with parental/ family evictions to try and keep the applicants within the family home whilst assisting the applicants to seek their own independent accommodation.

The prevention figures for the service evidence the hard work that has been completed. There were **231** cases where their homelessness was prevented in 2017/2018 and **399** cases where homelessness was prevented in 2018/2019.

The number of preventions of homelessness cases that have been achieved since the implementation of the HRA17 has increased by 73% across the Prevention and Relief duty periods. Based on the H-CLIC data which has been listed as experimental data, the Council appears to out-perform other local authorities in its region and nationally in terms of homelessness prevention.

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<sup>14</sup> [www.crisis.org.uk/ending-homelessness/homelessness-knowledge-hub/homelessness-monitor/england/the-homelessness-monitor-england-2019/](http://www.crisis.org.uk/ending-homelessness/homelessness-knowledge-hub/homelessness-monitor/england/the-homelessness-monitor-england-2019/)

<sup>15</sup> [www.homeless.org.uk/facts/understanding-homelessness/causes-of-homelessness](http://www.homeless.org.uk/facts/understanding-homelessness/causes-of-homelessness)

There is a crisis in the provision of housing on a national level meaning there is not enough stock to meet the demand. In order to eradicate homelessness and meet housing demand, sufficient additional accommodation would be needed. The options for home seekers are to buy properties, which could include shared equity, or to rent whether it is in the social/ affordable or private sector.

Challenges such as the recent welfare reform changes, particularly the introduction of Universal Credit which is paid in arrears causing a delay with receiving payments. Further, Local Housing Allowance rates do not match the rents charged in the private rented sector meaning there is a substantial gap that would need to be met by the applicant which can cause the private rented sector to be unaffordable for many households.

In order for home seekers to be eligible to buy they would need to have the income to support this, again meaning this can be unachievable for some groups

There is not, however, enough social/ affordable housing to meet the demand alone and therefore in order to reduce homelessness it is imperative that we utilise the PRS and encourage landlords to accept applicants open to our service and to charge reasonable rents.

Stevenage has always provided Housing Advice for Single Non-Priority homeless customers, (these are customers who we as a Local Authority are not required to accommodate in temporary or permanent accommodation under the homeless legislation). We continue to support this customer group by providing advice and assistance. We assist with areas such as;

- Applications to our Housing Register where they meet the local connection criteria
- Referrals to other accommodation providers such as Stevenage Haven, YMCA, Hutton House
- Referrals to support providers such as CMHT, No More Service, Social Services,
- Helping customers into the Private Rented Sector

## Our priorities

### **Priority 1: Prevention and Relief of Homelessness**

Our Housing Options team provide an impartial, confidential and free advice service. Caseworkers are given scope to explore a wide range of prevention options; an approach which has a positive impact in increasing the number of successful outcomes relating to prevention and relief of Homelessness. Since the implementation of the HRA17, Stevenage has extended the offer of financial assistance for deposits and rent in advance where possible to all applicants where the PRS is affordable. We will continue to monitor the funds available to provide this assistance.

In order to reduce homelessness, early prevention work is needed at the point the prevention duty is triggered and even before this to resolve housing issues before they reach crisis point. However, we continue to have a high number of presentations at the point of homelessness where the relief duty is triggered, this could be due to customers not realising there is a problem until the last minute, or not being aware of the possible support in advance of becoming homeless.

We continue to work with partner agencies to encourage duty to refer approaches to the service, and are continuing to work jointly with partners to address the complex and multiple needs of customers. A large amount of training has been provided to partner agencies in order to educate them about the HRA17 and the duty to refer that it has introduced. The ten Hertfordshire Local Authorities have also agreed referral procedures between the authorities in order that they have the chance to address their own Homelessness issues.

The Housing Options team work closely with the Stevenage Against Domestic Abuse (SADA) team as well as the Community Safety team generally, liaising with various agencies that support victims, the public, and residents.

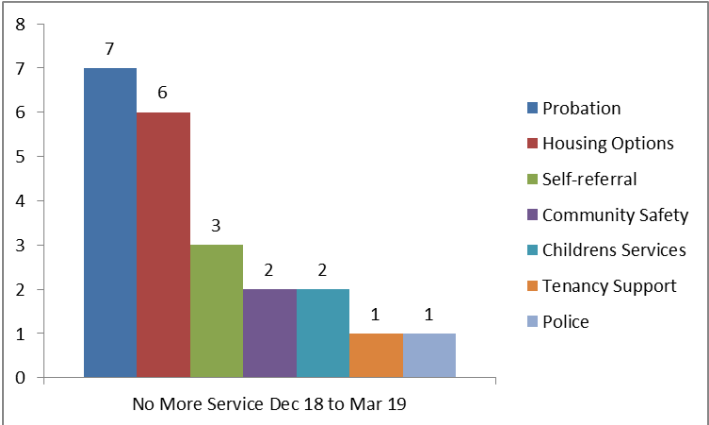
We ensure that we apply the Public Sector Equality duty when working with our customers and have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination and to advance equality. The equality duty covers nine protected characteristics: age, disability, gender, reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation. Although non-statutory, the Council has additionally chosen to implement the Socio-Economic Duty and so we also consider the impact of all our policies and activities on people with a socio-economic disadvantage.

During 2018-2019 the Housing Options service contributed £15k from the Homeless Prevention Grant to the 'No More' service "NMS" based within the Council's Communities and Neighbourhood team to fund an additional No More service worker to focus on rough sleeping and outreach work. During this pilot the outcomes demonstrated that that post would sit better within Housing Options service to work more closely with the Housing Options caseworkers. The Housing Options team continue to work very closely with the No More service to ensure there is effective joint working, creating better outcomes for customers.

We had successfully bid and have received funding from the Rough Sleeper Strategy and a rough sleeper support worker has been recruited who will engage with this cohort and continue to work closely with both our internal Housing Options team and the No More Service to address the needs of rough sleepers. The worker will build relationship with external partners who have experience of working with Rough Sleepers. We will be bidding for additional funding for this provision for period 20/21.

Since December 2018 the No More service received 22 referrals from the following service areas:

- Probation
- Housing Options team
- Self- referrals
- Community Safety
- Children’s Services
- Tenancy Support
- Police



It should be noted that these referrals were not only for rough sleepers but also those that were at risk of becoming homeless and met the No More service referral criteria.

As a Local Authority, we know that social housing alone cannot meet the demand from those residents in Stevenage who are in housing need. The private rented sector can provide an effective solution for many households, although we recognise that it may not meet the needs of some of our more vulnerable residents. One of the challenges we face is sourcing suitable and affordable accommodation for residents, this is compounded by the price gap between Private Sector Rents and Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates.

In April 2018 Stevenage formally reviewed its Housing Advice and Homeless services to ensure it continues to meet the new legal duties placed on Councils by the HRA17. The new structure went live at the end of July 2018. The Housing Supply Team assists the Housing Options Team with the supply of Private Rented accommodation.

Every customer for whom a prevention or relief duty is owed is assessed as to whether their housing need can be met within the Private Rented Section (PRS) and whether this is an affordable option for them.

Customers will be given advice on securing their own accommodation and, where possible, many will be assisted into privately rented accommodation sourced through the Housing Supply Team. The review of the service has resulted in an increase in the number of new assisted private sector lets. The target set in the last Homelessness strategy was for an average of 20 new private sector lets per quarter – 80 for the year. In financial year 2018/19 this was exceeded by at least an additional 4 lettings per quarter, totaling 97 in the 2018/2019 financial year.

The figures are provided below;

Number of new tenancies assisted by the Council:

Financial year	Total number of new tenancies created
14/15	47
15/16	50
16/17	46
17/18	57
18/19	97

The Council’s Tenancy Deposit Scheme continues to help the majority of households using the service who would not otherwise have the funds to meet the upfront rent and deposit costs. Throughout the length of these tenancies, the Housing Supply Team supports both the tenants and landlords to maintain the tenancy.

We need to take into account the needs and aspirations of both landlords and tenants to ensure a successful and sustainable working relationship that is beneficial to all parties and which overcomes financial and other barriers.

**What we aim to achieve**

- A streamlined and effective experience for customers whilst they are given the appropriate housing and homelessness advice
- Continuous improvement in our homelessness prevention and relief work
- Continued collaborative working with our partners at strategic and operational level
- Explore the implementation of a ‘Housing First’ approach model within Stevenage
- An aspiration to eradicate rough sleeping within Stevenage on a long term basis
- An increase in the number of PRS properties by engaging with private landlords
- We aim to reduce the number of days applicants are waiting in temporary accommodation by utilising the option to discharge cases owed a duty by the council into Private Sector Accommodation where suitable

- Continuous provision of advice and support to single non-priority homeless applicants
- Provision of advice on housing affordability to ensure sustainability outcomes for all customers
- Effective liaison with Housing Associations to prevent and relieve homelessness
- Effective communication with the public on the subject of homelessness and rough sleeping including figures and myth busting using a variety of media

**This will be achieved by:**

- Adopting a corporate commitment to prevent homelessness supported by all Local Authority services
- Liaising with all internal teams within the Council such as Income Services to prevent homelessness within our own housing stock.
- Promoting the commitment to refer to other housing providers to ensure early intervention and reduce the risk of homelessness
- Adopting a more integrated approach between both internal and external partners/services with regular strategic homeless prevention meetings such as the homelessness forum. This will ensure a cooperative approach towards Health and Wellbeing in Stevenage
- Monitoring the progress of our partners currently providing the Housing First pilots and research the requirements and financial commitment for Stevenage to provide a Housing First project.
- Providing high quality training across all our homelessness prevention services
- Seeking better ways of fully engaging with our partners to address homelessness
- Keeping up to date with best practice across the country to ensure that we are providing the best possible service in relation to Homeless and Rough Sleeper prevention.
- Seeking ways to improve attendance of key agencies at the Homelessness Forum
- Working closely with our accommodation providing partners such as the Haven, Aldwyck, YMCA to prevent the homelessness of single people
- Working with and supporting Herts Young Homeless to deliver training in schools around housing and homelessness.

- Review the Council's Allocation policy to ensure that the banding scheme prioritises the move on needs of customers living in supported and temporary accommodation. Therefore ensuring that we make best use of these valuable resources by moving those that no longer need support
- Building on our partnership working with Local Authorities in Hertfordshire and the County Council to keep the Joint Housing Protocol up to date and relevant.
- Using Rough Sleeper Funding gained from MHCLG to achieve the reduction in the number of customers sleeping rough and achieve sustainable housing solutions.
- Continuing to train and develop staff to ensure that all Personal Housing Plans (PHP) are relevant and achievable and customers have clarity on their own responsibilities to resolving their housing needs.
- Reviewing our Cold Weather Provision interventions to ensure that they are fit for purpose and avoid the use of B&B provision.
- Increasing the number of tenancies in PRS to reduce the demands on the social housing provision.
- Producing a feasibility study for Stevenage for setting up a social lettings agency as part of this we will seek feedback from Landlords. This would incorporate our current tenancy deposit scheme and include new incentives for landlords to let their properties to households who are homeless or threatened with homelessness
- Avoiding unnecessary PRS evictions and recurring homelessness by maintaining a dedicated staffing resource for private sector tenancy sustainment
- Promoting high standards of accommodation by providing landlords and tenants with easy access to other Council services involved in the private rented sector such as Environmental Health which have a role in ensuring quality provision in PRS
- Delivering clear accounting of the all costs involved in delivering our assisted lets model by maintaining robust financial monitoring



## Our Priorities

### **Priority 2: Provision of Temporary Accommodation**

#### **Overview**

At present all of our interim (EA & TA) accommodation is council owned accommodation. The majority of the accommodation is self-contained; less than 23% per cent of our designated interim accommodation has shared facilities. At 30<sup>th</sup> October 2019 we have 90 units of designated emergency and temporary accommodation in use.

In order to meet the significant increase in the demand of for interim accommodation, we have converted some of our general needs stock for this use. We are using general needs stock as additional interim accommodation. The Housing Revenue Account business plan also recognises the need for additional units to support this strategy. There are further general needs units identified for adaptation for the use of temporary accommodation which has been funded from the Flexible Homeless Support Grant.

We must plan for a downturn in the economy which could impact on the number of EA/ TA units required to meet the demand. If in the future we have an excess of EA/ TA stock we can be flexible and look to use this an income generating option. . We have an arrangement in place with Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council to use their excess temporary accommodation and should we be in a position to offer this in the future we can offer this across the Hertfordshire Authorities.

During 2018 – 2019 the impact from the Homeless Reduction Act has resulted in an increase in demand for emergency and temporary accommodation as detailed in section 1.7 of this strategy, which has resulted in the increased use of bed and breakfast accommodation. We will have further units becoming available by October 2019 which have been procured by open market acquisitions, working with colleagues in Investment and Development. There will be additional units provided following general needs conversation works and we will utilise any additional properties as required to meet the demand for EA/TA and avoid the need to use costly bed and breakfast accommodation. Further enquiries are being made into provision in the private rented sector and exploring the options of Private Sector Leasing “PSL” properties that can be utilised if there is a required demand for this.

The Housing Supply team is completing enquiries into what can be done to increase access to the private rented sector in order to assist in the provision of accommodation and provide a mixed tenure offer to those seeking housing. One initiative that will be piloted is an insurance scheme where the Local Authority obtains an insurance policy for a property, which can be accessed by the tenant and/ or landlord. The aim of this is to provide assurance to the landlords that there is assistance available for damage or loss of rent for the property.

SBC aim to introduce innovative housing solutions and investigations will be carried out in order to determine the most effective options.

### **What we aim to achieve:**

- An increased portfolio of temporary accommodation properties of various sizes and types including the provision of a LA hostel in conjunction with our Housing Development aspirations
- Increased supply of temporary accommodation using properties that are currently void pending redevelopment
- Minimise the use of bed and breakfast
- Value for money in the provision of our emergency & temporary accommodation

### **How we will achieve this:**

- By adapting our current designated temporary accommodation where possible, to increase the number and flexibility of units by liaising with our Housing Development team on planned redevelopment
- Looking at flexible and innovative ways to reduce any void periods in our designated temporary accommodation scheme using the accommodation in more flexible ways
- To investigate Private Sector Lease provision to enable us to avoid the use of Bed and Breakfast
- By identifying development opportunities working with the Council's Development Team in its planning and delivery of the Council's housebuilding and acquisitions programme
- Identify general needs stock that can be adapted and used for the provision of temporary accommodation including hard to let properties in order to meet the demand in the short term.
- Build/provide a bespoke hostel type accommodation within Stevenage to provide 10-20 bed spaces for homeless applicants
- Reviewing our temporary accommodation placement and procurement policy to ensure it is fit for purpose
- Maximising the collection of revenue in respect of chargeable services
- Exploring commercialisation of our TA and rent surplus units with other LA's

## Our priorities

### **Priority 3: Housing Development**

#### **Overview**

The development of new affordable housing within Stevenage evidences the significant investment that has been allocated to increase the number of social rented and affordable rented homes in the borough. This is working towards the ambition that everyone should have access to supportable housing.

One of the Council's main priorities is to develop new affordable housing and this is enshrined in the corporate Future Town Future Council "FTFC" framework that details the nine strategic priorities. The development of new affordable housing by Stevenage Borough Council helps provide long term social and genuinely affordable rents and assists people to establish a home, build links and support networks that aid resilience and contribute towards community life, and therefore reduce the risk of homelessness.

To date, the Council has delivered 211 new homes and is either on site or has planning permission for a further 320 homes. This includes sites such as Kenilworth Close, which includes plans to deliver a state of the art independent living scheme. Schemes such as this help to create churn within the existing housing stock, which in turn helps free up move on accommodation for those waiting to be housed in existing EA / TA accommodation.

Subject to Executive approval, the 30 year HRA business plan identifies 2425 homes to be built over the life of the plan, including a proposed additional 510 homes over the next five years which will help to meet the housing needs of the town. Future housing development targets will aim to make the most of brownfield opportunities and asset redevelopment, along with partnership working with the voluntary, public and private sector agencies.

To deliver on this, the Council has established a development programme that is led by the Council's Housing Development team.

The team utilise internal Housing Revenue Account (HRA) resources, public subsidy and income generated from private sale to deliver a programme of affordable housing schemes.

This programme presents a number of opportunities that can help to fulfil the strategic aims of the homelessness strategy and work is underway to ensure alignment of effort in both departments.

The redevelopment of existing housing stock can provide opportunities for short term accommodation that can be used to alleviate short term and acute housing need created by the threat of homelessness. Therefore both teams will work to forecast such opportunities that can be utilised to create additional short term accommodation.

It is important that development opportunities are exploited to the fullest to meet the wide array of housing needs that are present in Stevenage as a result of a fractured housing market that is not delivering for all. In order to ensure both teams are aware of the need and the opportunities within the town, they will liaise closely as well as sharing staff resources via secondment, where appropriate, to ensure priorities are translated into practise.

The Housing Development programme will also ensure that concerns regarding climate change are addressed through a sustainable development programme which meets the need for adequate affordable housing as well as addresses the importance of averting climate change. This can also provide savings for the tenant by improving the cost of running their homes which helps to sustain their tenancies.

#### **What we aim to achieve:**

- The provision of 500 new affordable homes over 10 years with 300 of these homes being built over by 2020/21.
- The development of specialist emergency and temporary accommodation that is built to modern standards, providing additional comfort and respite to those facing the threat of homelessness. Such as the development of bespoke medium sized developments that offer 8-10 bed spaces for the homeless as well as larger supported housing schemes.
- The development of high quality accommodation that will create necessary churn within the existing housing stock to allow for move on accommodation for those in temporary accommodation.
- To provide new accommodation which offers security of tenure to the tenants as well as aiding sustainability by offering reduced running cost as a result of designs that allow for better insulated properties.
- To utilise private sale schemes within the HRA to cross subsidise further development of affordable accommodation.

#### **How we will achieve this:**

- By building 500 new affordable homes as outlined in the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan over 10 years. This will be delivered by the Housing Development team through their acquisition and development programme.
- Identify schemes and sites that allow for the development of specialist accommodation.

- Work with architects to make sure that schemes are designed to a standard that will aid in the reduction of running costs for end users.
- Develop private sale schemes and properties to maximise returns for the HRA to allow for greater development of affordable schemes.

## Our priorities

### **Priority 4: Support for Homeless Households**

Housing support is key to be able to sustain tenancies going forward, the Council currently provides:

- Support and assistance to older and vulnerable people in the Council's own accommodation
- Support and assistance to leaseholders
- Support to homeless applicants through their transition from temporary and supported accommodation to permanent housing.
- Support to care leavers both prior to and post housing

We acknowledge that people need support at different stages in their lives and that the intensity of support needed will vary, both by the customer and the stage of that customer's life and circumstances.

It has been recognised that there is an increased need for support to be targeted at households living in all types of tenures. Our service data shows a particular need for increased support for those households in the expanding private rented sector.

The Tenancy Support team already offer floating support; this is offered to people in their own homes. All customers based in interim accommodation receive an initial visit from a support worker who carries out a needs assessment to identify support and, where necessary, sign post the customer to a specialist support service. A further assessment is carried out to ascertain that the household is ready to move on and able to sustain a tenancy. It is important to recognise that some of the applicants we see have quite intense support needs and we need to ensure that we can work with partners to meet this demand together going forward.

The support work is delivered in conjunction with our Debt Advice and Support Workers. Help is provided with issues such as:

- Health and education
- Employment and training
- Access to financial services, financial and debt management
- Benefits
- Family mediation
- Support with the development of life skills.
- Domestic Abuse survivors
- Modern Slavery cases

Referrals are accepted from a wide range of voluntary and public sector agencies for these support services.

Stevenage is able to offer this comprehensive support service through collaborative partnership with Hertfordshire County Council. As part of this partnership, we deliver

and manage Hertfordshire County Council's housing related support contract for homeless families and those in supported housing. In providing these services our Tenancy Support team operates within the framework of the Council's Safeguarding Children Policy and the inter agency Joint Housing Protocol for young people. We also work in partnership with Herts Young Homeless; a charitable organisation which provides floating support to young people including care leavers.

In addition to the support provided by the council, we work in partnership with various support providers across Stevenage and Hertfordshire who can assist in the provision of support for specific groups who have specific support needs such as;

- Turning Point- Provide support with drug or alcohol issues, a mental health concern or a learning disability, we'll give you the individual support you need.
- Hertfordshire Complex Needs Service "CNS"- provides community support to adults of working age who are recovering from mental health issues, and additional complex needs including drug and alcohol misuse, housing issues, and learning disability. They also provide support directly to carers.
- Aldwyck Hertfordshire Floating Support Service- provide a holistic package of support to vulnerable people to enable them to maintain their tenancy and independence. The service offers flexible, short-term housing support to people for a maximum of two years.

#### **What we aim to achieve:**

- Better tenancy sustainment to reduce incidences of homelessness
- Better cross-tenure support
- Increased and innovative partnership working with Hertfordshire County Council in the provision of support for homeless families
- Continued mitigation of the effects of welfare reform on families and vulnerable adults
- The development of our support services to become income generating
- Improved working with a wide range of external support providers to address the needs of customers

#### **This will be achieved by:**

- A robust pre-tenancy support process which is cross-tenure

- Developing a tool to analyse our tenant data to identify tenancies that may be at risk and may need support.
- Providing additional support/sustainment resources for private sector tenants
- Regular strategic meetings with Hertfordshire County Council (Children's Services, Adult Services and Commissioning) and ensuring that staff at all levels have both knowledge and commitment to agreed protocols/service level agreements
- Continued representation at multi-agency meetings
- Continuing professional development of all Temporary Accommodation and support staff
- Continued specialist Money and Debt advice being offered to all residents
- Offering income management and life skills training for tenants through IT systems



## 1.9 Measures of success

The strategy will be reviewed against the strategy action plan on an annual basis which details what the aim is, whom is responsible and how each aim will be measured.

Performance will continually be monitored through the Corporate Performance Monitoring Key Performance Indicators (KPI's) as well as the Government Statistical returns, HCLIC.<sup>9</sup>

Key KPI's that are related to the Strategy are:

- No of approaches to the Council
- No of Preventions achieved
- No of Preventions achieved during Prevention duty
- No of Preventions achieved during Relief Duty
- No of Household helped into PRS
- Engagement and reduction of Rough Sleepers within Stevenage
- Reduction of complaints into the service

However we recognise that these need to be reviewed in line with annual corporate performance indicator setting timelines.

### Benchmarking

We will also be benchmarking against returns which are published on as well as Housemark data where comparison data is available.

## Appendix 1 – Action Plan (to be reviewed on an annual basis)

### Priority 1 – Prevention, Relief and Homelessness

Aim	Whom	Measure
<b>Continuous improvement in our homelessness prevention and relief work</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Housing Options</li> <li>• Housing Supply</li> <li>• Lettings &amp; TA Teams</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Measured by less repeat homelessness</li> <li>• Government statistical returns (HCLIC)</li> </ul>
<b>Continued collaborative working with our partners at strategic and operational level</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hertfordshire CC</li> <li>• Local Authorities within Hertfordshire</li> <li>• Multi-agency such as Mental Health, Police, Stevenage Haven, etc</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Homelessness forum which incorporates Health partners</li> <li>• Joint Housing Protocol meetings</li> </ul>
<b>Avoid unnecessary PRS evictions and recurring homelessness by maintaining a dedicated staffing resource for private sector tenancy sustainment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Housing Options</li> <li>• Housing Supply</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Measured by the reduction of approaches from Housing Options to Housing Supply</li> <li>• Measured by internal KPI's via In Phase</li> </ul>
<b>A streamlined and effective experience for all customers whilst they are given appropriate housing and homelessness advice.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Housing Options</li> <li>• Housing Supply</li> <li>• Customer Service Centre</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Measured by less complaints received via 'Yoursay'</li> </ul>

<p><b>Continuous provision of advice and support to single non-priority homeless applicants</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Housing Options</li> <li>• Housing Supply Teams</li> <li>• Customer Service Centre</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Measured by reduction in Rough Sleeping via the Rough Sleeper count</li> </ul>
<p><b>Sustainable housing outcomes for all and an increase the number of PRS properties by engaging with Private Landlords</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Housing Options</li> <li>• Housing Supply</li> <li>• Lettings</li> <li>• Development</li> <li>• Private Sector Landlords</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Measured by internal KPI's relating to no of tenancies set-up within the Private Rented Sector as well as new properties becoming available.</li> </ul>
<p><b>A reduction in the numbers of those rough sleeping with the ambition to eradicate sleeping rough within Stevenage</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Housing Options</li> <li>• No More Service</li> <li>• Multi-agency such as Mental Health, Police, Stevenage Haven, etc</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Measured by Rough Sleeper Count and verified by Homelesslink.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Explore the implementation of a 'Housing First' approach model within Stevenage</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Housing Options</li> <li>• No More Service</li> <li>• Finance</li> <li>• Multi-agency such as Mental Health, Police, Stevenage Haven, etc</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implementation investigations to be completed 2020/2021</li> </ul>
<p><b>Aim to reduce the number of days applicants are waiting in TA by utilising the option to discharge cases owed a duty into the private rented sector</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Housing Options</li> <li>• Housing Supply Teams</li> <li>• Lettings &amp; TA Team</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase in the numbers of cases discharged into the PRS</li> </ul>

<b>Provision of advice on housing affordability to ensure sustainability outcomes for all customers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Housing Options</li> <li>• Housing Supply</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Income maximisation shown in internal KPIs</li> </ul>
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## Priority 2: Provision of Temporary Accommodation

Aim	Whom	Measure
<b>An increased portfolio of temporary accommodation properties of various sizes and types including the provision of a LA hostel in conjunction with our Housing Development aspirations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lettings &amp; TA</li> <li>• Development</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More EA/TA accommodation available</li> </ul>
<b>Increased supply of interim (EA/TA) accommodation using properties that are pending development</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lettings &amp; TA</li> <li>• Development</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Measured by the reduction of Bed &amp; Breakfast usage</li> </ul>
<b>Minimise the use of Bed and Breakfast</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lettings &amp; TA</li> <li>• Housing Options</li> <li>• Housing Supply</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Measured by the Government Statistical Return HCLIC</li> <li>• Monthly monitoring of B+B spends</li> </ul>
<b>Value for money and transparency of services charges</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lettings &amp; TA</li> <li>• Income Services</li> <li>• Finance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase in Customer satisfaction</li> </ul>

### Priority 3: Housing Development

Aim	Whom	Measure
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The provision of 500 new affordable homes over 10 years with 300 of these homes being built over by 2020/21.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Housing Development</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>More accommodation available</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The development of specialist emergency and temporary accommodation that is built to modern standards providing additional comfort and respite to those facing the threat of homelessness. Such as for example the development of bespoke medium sized developments that offer 8-10 bed spaces for the homeless as well as larger supported housing schemes.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Housing Development</li> <li>Housing Options and TA</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reduction of cases placed into B+B due to additional EA/TA being available.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The development of high quality accommodation that will create necessary churn within the existing housing stock to allow for move on accommodation for those in temporary accommodation.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Housing Development</li> <li>Housing Options and TA</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Less time spent in EA/TA monitored by business unit KPI's</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To provide new accommodation which offers security of tenure to the tenants as well as aiding sustainability by offering reduced running costs as a result of designs that allow for better insulated properties.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Housing Development</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increase in Customer satisfaction</li> <li></li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• To utilise private sale schemes within the HRA to cross subsidise further development of affordable accommodation.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Housing Development</li><li>• Finance</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Less spends</li></ul>

## Priority 4: Support for Homeless Households

Aim	Whom	Measure
<b>Effective tenancy sustainment to reduce incidences of homelessness</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Housing Options</li> <li>• Housing Supply</li> <li>• Income Services</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Measured by less approaches and repeat homelessness</li> </ul>
<b>Better cross-tenure support from temporary accommodation to permanent accommodation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tenancy Services</li> <li>• Community Safety</li> <li>• Income Services</li> <li>• Specialist Support Services</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase on sustained tenancies.</li> </ul>
<b>Increased and innovative partnership working with Hertfordshire County Council in the provision of support for homeless families</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hertfordshire CC</li> <li>• Specialist Support Services</li> <li>• Lettings &amp; TA</li> <li>• Housing Options</li> <li>• Homelessness Forum</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Additional partnership practices introduced</li> </ul>
<b>Continue to support families and vulnerable adults to maximise their income and mitigate the effects of welfare reform</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Housing Options</li> <li>• Income Service</li> <li>• Specialist Support Services</li> <li>• Tenancy Services</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Income maximisation shown by KPIs</li> </ul>
<b>Develop our support services to become income generating – thus helping to sustain tenancies by offering budgeting and life style training to our residents</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Housing Options</li> <li>• Lettings &amp; TA</li> <li>• Specialist Support Services</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduction of training courses</li> </ul>

<p>Improved working with a wide range of external support providers to address the needs of customers</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Income Services</li> <li>• Lettings &amp; TA</li> <li>• Housing Options</li> <li>• Housing Supply</li> <li>• Income Services</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recording of cases supported by external providers</li> <li>• Increase in tenancy sustainment</li> </ul>
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## Glossary of terms

HRA17	Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 implemented from April 2018 amending the Housing Act 1996 in relation to Homelessness legislation
Prevention Duty	Triggered when an applicant is threatened with homelessness within 56 days. Applicants are assisted to remain in the current home or assist in finding alternative accommodation in order to stop them becoming homeless
Relief Duty	For households that are already homeless and need help finding settled accommodation
Main duty	Full housing duty accepted by the Council under s193 of the HA 96 (as amended)
PHP	Personal Housing Plan which shows what the customer and the council will do to prevent or relieve homelessness
PRS	Private rented sector
Interim Accommodation	This relates to either Emergency or Temporary accommodation
EA	Emergency accommodation provided under s188 of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended) by the Council whilst investigations are made whilst a homeless applicant is in relief duty
TA	Temporary accommodation provided under s193 of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended) whilst sourcing permanent accommodation when a main duty accepted
Priority Need	When a homeless applicant meets the criteria defined by Homelessness legislation and case law test therefore EA has to be provided
Non-Priority	When a homeless applicant does not meet the criteria defined by homelessness legislation and is not owed a s188 or s193 duty.
Landlord Forum	Group of Private Sector landlords that Stevenagework with to relieve homelessness
HRS	Housing Related Support Grant provided by Hertfordshire County Council
FHSG	Flexible Homeless Support Grant provided by Central Government
JHP	Joint Housing Protocol – agreed housing protocol across all 10 Hertfordshire districts

HRA Housing Revenue Account is the **account** in which a council's **housing revenue** (e.g. tenants' rent) and **housing costs** (e.g. property management and maintenance) are kept. By law this **account** is separate from the 'General Fund' that councils use for other.

A General fund is the primary fund used by a government entity. This fund is used to record all resource inflows and outflows that are not associated with special-purpose funds. The activities being paid for through the general fund constitute the core administrative and operational tasks of the government entity

HCLIC Homelessness Case Level Information Collection- national data returns for cases with all Local Authorities in the UK

## Glossary of terms

### List of Partners

HCC – Hertfordshire County Council

Districts – other Council's within Hertfordshire

HHOH- Herts Heads of Housing

NMS- No More Service

SADA – Stevenage against Domestic Abuse

Hertfordshire Constabulary- Police

DWP – Department of work and pensions

Hospital Discharge Coordinators

ACS- Adult Social Services

Children Social Services

Hertfordshire Constabulary

Herts Mind

Homelessness Forum – Partnership meeting chaired by Stevenage and North Herts Council focusing on the prevention of homelessness

Housing Options

Saffron Ground – Community Mental Health

Stevenage Haven

HYH- Herts Young Homeless

Aldwyck Housing Group

YMCA – Hostel

Housing Associations with stock within Stevenage