



HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY 2018-2023

Introduction

The number of statutory homeless households in East Staffordshire is relatively low. However, many people experience the knowledge that they are going to have to leave their accommodation and the stress and struggle of trying to find somewhere else to live. This is illustrated by the fact that on average around 1,000 people have approached the Council each year for housing options advice.

The [Council's 2018 Review of Homelessness](#) assessed the levels of homelessness in East Staffordshire over the last 5 years from data collected by the Housing Options service.

Key findings - Housing Options users - Oct 2012-Sept 2017:

5,406 enquiries made to Housing Options

4,495 individuals offered advice

1,540 formal homelessness applications taken

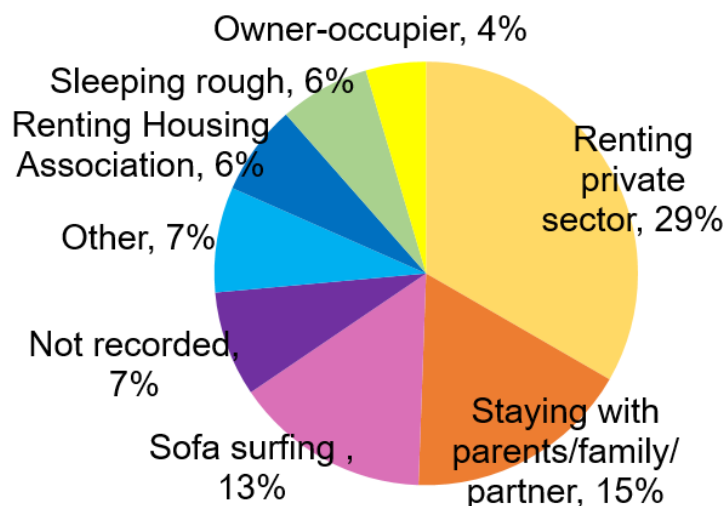
38% accepted as owed a 'main duty'

Reasons for homelessness

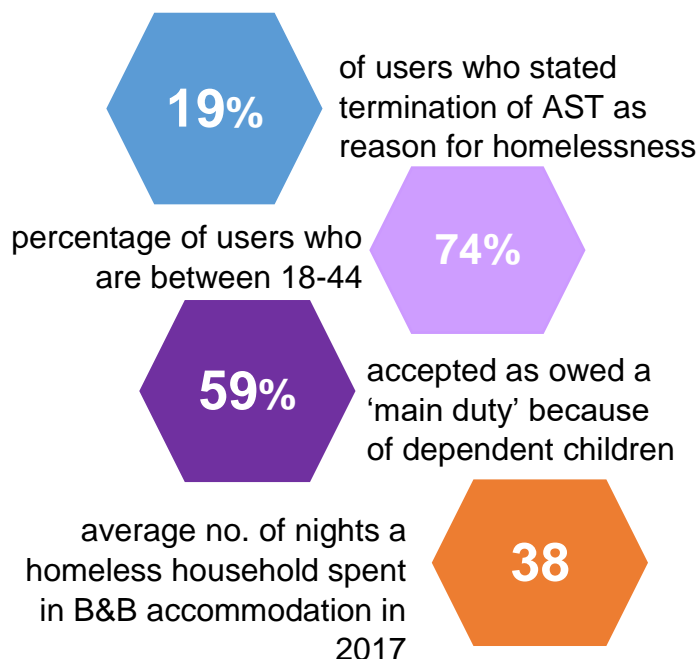
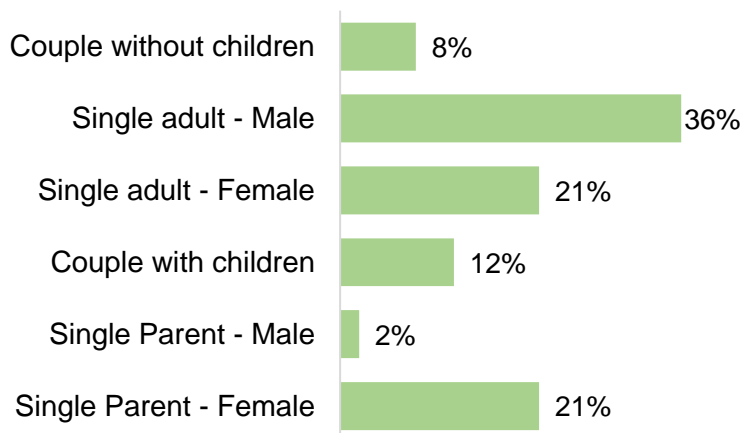
The Review identified that the main causes of homelessness in the Borough continue to be:

- Parents, relatives or friends no longer able or willing to accommodate.
- The ending of private rented tenancies, including for rent arrears, and increasingly for termination of Assured Shorthold Tenancies (AST).
- Breakdown of relationship with partner, in more cases non-violent rather than violent.

Housing status



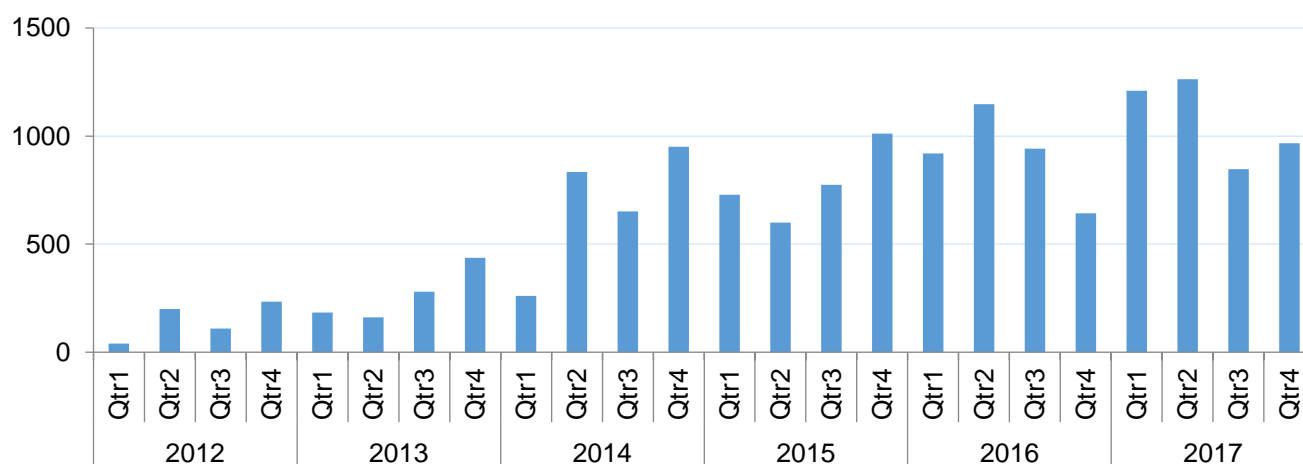
Household type



Introduction

(continued)

Number of nights spent in B&B accommodation



*The average profile of a Housing Options service user is:
single male/female, with no dependants between the ages 18-44 renting in the private sector
 or **single female parent 18-34 years old with 1-2 children.***

FUTURE CHALLENGES

Availability & Affordability of housing in East Staffordshire:

1. In comparison to many places, there is housing for sale in East Staffordshire that is relatively affordable for those able to purchase. However the reality is that house purchase is unaffordable to 65% of households.
2. Private renting is increasingly not an option for people who rely on welfare benefits, have low and insecure incomes or substantial debts.
3. The Social Rental Sector in the borough is also under pressure.

On average
there are



to



3 applications 1 T&D allocation

National Policy Implications for Homelessness:

1. **Universal Credit (UC)** – There are concerns about the difficulties that some of the arrangements for UC pose for vulnerable households.
2. **Local Housing Allowance (LHA) freeze** – Rates are restricted to the lower 30th percentile of rents and have remained the same since 2015, which limits the number of properties available to benefit claimants.
3. **Benefit cap** – There is potential for this policy to lead to homelessness for households with 2 or more children.

On average every year around

30%

of Housing Benefit claimants
are subject to LHA restrictions

Context

National context

10 local challenges

The Government published its Homelessness Strategy [Making every contact count](#) in 2012. It includes “[10 local challenges](#)” which it presents as the “Gold Standard” for tackling homelessness in local authority services. The Council will continue to measure its services according to this Gold Standard.

Homelessness Reduction Act (HRA) 2017

The HRA introduces a number of changes to current homelessness legislation in terms of the duty owed to those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness which will have a substantial effect on the way the council delivers the Housing Options service.

- **Changes to those considered as threatened with homelessness** – extension of the period during which someone qualifies as being threatened with homelessness from 28 days to 56 days.
- **Changes in duty owed** – extension of the existing duty to provide free homelessness advice and information to any person as well as to take reasonable steps to prevent or relieve homelessness. Councils will be required to carry out an assessment in all cases where an applicant is judged homeless, or at risk of becoming homeless and agree on a homelessness plan. Councils will have a duty to take reasonable steps to prevent homelessness for any individual who is at risk, regardless of priority need status, intentionality and whether they have a local connection. This means either assisting them to stay in their current accommodation, or helping them to find a new place to live. The act also places a duty on councils to actively endeavour to relieve homelessness for all eligible households, regardless of priority need status, intentionality. This involves taking reasonable steps to help the applicant to secure suitable accommodation.

Staffordshire/Local context



Staffordshire County Council (SCC) is the Children's Services Authority and therefore has primary responsibility for accommodating homeless young people aged 16 and 17 and for supporting young people leaving care. East Staffordshire Borough Council (ESBC) is signatory to the 2015 protocol to assist Homeless 16-17 year olds across Staffordshire.

SCC also commissions and funds the only outreach/floating support available to ESBC which is a Domestic Abuse outreach service provided by The Pathway Project since October 2017.

ESBC is pleased to have been involved in the **Staffordshire & Shropshire Prevention Partnership** and worked alongside other partnership members to commission and deliver a number of schemes to tackle homelessness, including a rough sleepers outreach team and an ongoing shared supported housing initiative.



In 2016 a detailed Needs Assessment of the scale of Domestic Abuse in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent was undertaken. This considered data and information from Staffordshire Police, current specialist service providers, service users (victims and perpetrators) and wider stakeholders. This research informed Staffordshire's ['Breaking the Cycle' 2017-20 Strategy](#) for tackling Domestic Abuse.

Context (continued)

Local/East Staffordshire context

Corporate Objectives

- **Value for Money Council Services** - *protecting your money*
- **Promoting local Economic Growth** - *to benefit local people by turning aspiration into reality*
- **Protecting and Strengthening Communities** - *love where you live*

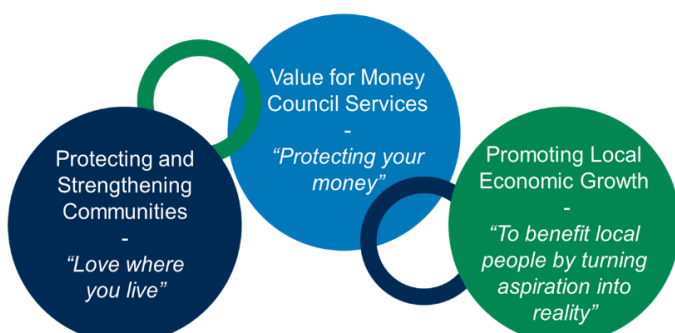
Tackling homelessness will help us towards protecting & strengthening communities, and an effective service will provide value for money.

Links to other strategies

In January 2013 the Council adopted its first **Tenancy Strategy**. In the strategy the Council set out its support for the use of fixed term tenancies in order to make best use of the social housing in the Borough, but with very clear provisions to avoid affected households becoming homeless which remains in effect.

The Council periodically reviews and revises the [Housing Allocations Policy](#). The last revision was in 2015. We are currently looking at making further changes to accommodate the new duties brought about with the HRA.

The Council's current [Housing Strategy](#) was adopted in 2015 and will be revised in 2020, taking account of this Homelessness Strategy.



Working in Partnership

ESBC recognises the role that other partners play in addressing homelessness within the Borough and is keen to continue to work collaboratively.

ESBC is delighted to work in partnership with **Burton YMCA** and their great work in East Staffordshire preventing and relieving homelessness through the Reconnect Hostel, the Winter Night Shelter and outreach projects such as the Family Mediation Scheme, the Young People's Schools project and the Council commissioned rough sleepers outreach team.

ESBC also wants to acknowledge the big part played by **Trent & Dove Housing**. It continues to maintain the housing register and to make allocations on behalf of the Council. It also employs dedicated staff who actively support their tenants to maintain tenancies. T&D & ESBC are committed to working together to respond to the new challenges presented by the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.

ESBC is pleased to work in partnership with **Money Spider Credit Union** to deliver the New-tenancy Finance Scheme.

ESBC is also pleased to have begun a new partnership with **Fusion Credit Union** in order to deliver the Jam Jar Scheme. The Council would also like to acknowledge the support of **Citizen's Advice**, **Trent & Dove** and a number of local bank branches in delivering the scheme.



The Strategy

Avoidance

A distinction is made in the strategy between avoidance and prevention of homelessness. Avoidance in this context is about targeted early intervention so that people don't reach a housing crisis and aren't forced to approach the Housing Options Service for advice.

ESBC will promote, support and engage in schemes that aim to tackle the root causes of homelessness such as family relationship breakdowns and will work in partnership to establish pathways and protocols for at risk groups which provide tailored advice and support, and promote planned move-ons.

Avoiding homelessness will ensure that East Staffordshire is a great place to live work and visit and contribute to our corporate values by:

- Protecting and strengthening communities – building resilient families and individuals that do not end up in a housing crisis.
- Value for money – early intervention and avoidance of homelessness will lead to reduced pressure and eventual cost savings for all local authority services.

Achievements since the last strategy:

- ☆ Provided a wide range of advice regarding the causes of homelessness and on how to find accommodation through various means including in person, through publications and on our website.
- ☆ Identified and offered advice and support to residents most affected by welfare changes.
- ☆ Offered information regarding Universal Credit and welfare reform to landlords through the [Landlords Forum](#).

The Council will

1. Housing Pathways

- Form housing pathways and protocols with key partners that include support and appropriate planned move-on for identified at risk groups.
- Establish local agreements and joint working arrangements with regard to referrals.
- Ensure clear and effective communication and coordination across other universal and specialist service providers.
- Plan for the successful implementation of the new Housing Support funding model where Local Authorities will be directly responsible for managing and administering housing support funding in negotiation with supported housing providers and landlords.

2. Support for welfare changes

- Work with ESBC's Revenues and Benefits department, DWP and voluntary agencies to ensure residents are aware of Welfare Reform changes, especially the introduction of Universal Credit and minimise the impact on the sustainability of tenancies.
- Explore options and pilot more schemes, as well as promote and grow existing schemes to help mitigate the impact of these reforms, for example the Jam Jar Account.
- Work in partnership with all relevant agencies, such as T&D and Citizen's Advice to actively identify at risk households, offer advice and refer them to prevention schemes where needed.

3. Young people – Avoiding eviction from parental homes

- Continue to encourage organisations that do schools work, educating children and young adults about the realities of moving out of the parental home.
- Continue to make referrals to the YMCA family mediation service and support where possible.

The Strategy

Prevention

Prevention of homelessness is about dealing with an already present cause of homelessness so that the home is not lost, or more typically enabling someone to find themselves alternative accommodation.

ESBC will work with key partners to offer a range of homelessness support and prevention options focusing on keeping people in their current homes where appropriate and safe to do so or otherwise helping them to find suitable alternative accommodation.

Preventing homelessness will ensure that East Staffordshire is a great place to live work and visit and contribute to our corporate values by:

- Protecting and strengthening communities – making sure people don't become homeless will protect households from the negative effects of actual homelessness.
- Value for money – by funding homelessness prevention activities the council will be reducing eventual referrals to higher tier interventions and taking demand out of the system for all partners.

Achievements since the last strategy:

Offered advice to over 4,000 households.

Continued to deliver homelessness prevention initiatives as part of the Housing Options service.

- Helped 71 households through the New Tenancy Finance Scheme.
- Made use of the Homelessness Prevention Fund to prevent homelessness of 76 households.
- Supported the Target Hardening scheme to enable 10 households at risk of domestic violence to keep their homes.

Initiated the Jam Jar Scheme which aims to help people manage their finances so that they do not become at risk of losing their homes through rent arrears.

The Council will

1. Housing Options Service

- Continue to offer the Housing Options service as the primary front-line service for providing advice and assistance to people facing homelessness in the Borough. The Council will monitor its service delivery against the Gold Standard.
- Increase the numbers of people that receive advice and support at the earliest possible stage to prevent them from reaching a housing crisis.
- Implement the extension of duties introduced by the HRA and ensure support is in place to deal with higher caseloads by employing an additional housing options officer.
- The Council will continue to work with the County Council on implementation and review of the Staffordshire Protocol for Young Homeless People.
- Integrate the HCLIC requirements to better understand the causes of homelessness and improve national reporting on homelessness.

2. Help people to stay in their current accommodation or move into new accommodation

- Continue to identify and refer households that would benefit from existing homelessness prevention schemes such as:
 - Discretionary Housing Payments
 - Homelessness Prevention Fund
 - New-Tenancy Finance Scheme
 - Target Hardening
 - Jam Jar Account Scheme
- Introduce a Rent Arrears Loan scheme.
- Ensure personal housing plans are meaningful by exploring further options and tools to combat well-known causes of homelessness.
- Encourage and improve access to local services, such as Children's Service Local Support Team and Citizens Advice.
- Update the Housing Register Allocations policy to take into account the new duties introduced by the HRA and ensure homeless households have sufficient priority.

The Strategy

Accommodation

Securing new accommodation is often the main solution for residents facing homelessness. Therefore, ensuring there is sufficient and suitable accommodation for people to move on to is key in preventing homelessness.

Improving the accommodation offer in the borough will ensure that East Staffordshire is a great place to live work and visit and contribute to our corporate values by:

- Protecting and strengthening communities – providing adequate accommodation for our residents is key in developing strong communities.
- Value for money – reducing reliance on expensive B&B accommodation for homeless households will provide better value for money for the Council.
- Promoting local economic growth – by providing affordable housing for all households we are ensuring the financial sustainability of the housing market and of individual families in the borough.

Achievements since the last strategy:

- ★ Commissioned and delivered a scheme to address single person homelessness as well as a pilot rough sleepers outreach service as part of the Staffordshire & Shropshire Prevention Partnership.
- ★ Held a quarterly [Landlords Forum](#) where landlords are kept informed about any legislative or welfare changes and are offered advice on a range of tenant management and property management matters.
- ★ Welcomed the provision of 337 affordable homes by market-led developments.
- ★ Commissioned our own rough sleepers outreach service from the YMCA with S106 commuted funds.
- ★ Successfully leased and managed 3 properties from T&D as self-contained temporary accommodation for homeless households.

The Council will

1. Emergency accommodation

- Continue to support the YMCA's delivery of outreach support, emergency help and accommodation for rough sleepers.

2. Temporary accommodation

- Reduce reliance on B&Bs by increasing our stock of self-contained temporary accommodation (TA) for performance of homelessness duties.
- Explore options to work with T&D to secure settled accommodation at the earliest opportunity.
- Aim to not place any families in B&B accommodation unless in an emergency and then for no longer than 6 weeks.
- Support homeless households to move-on more swiftly and successfully from TA by employing a Housing Outreach Officer.

3. Settled accommodation

- Deliver a [selective licensing scheme](#) to improve the quality of private rented property and tenant management practices within the designated area and if successful look at extending it.
- Improve the Private Rented Sector (PRS) offer and housing supply for homeless households by:
 - pursuing landlord engagement through the landlord forum;
 - continuing to offer a tenant finding service for landlords who wish to house homeless households;
 - developing and offering tenancy security and guarantees such as:
 - a Deposit Guarantee** through the New-Tenancy Finance Scheme.
 - a rent payment guarantee** through our Jam Jar Account scheme which will ensure money goes directly to landlords for vulnerable households.
 - an insurance scheme** against rent arrears and court costs (in the first 2 years).
 - a Housing Outreach Officer** to help sustain the tenancies of households referred through the tenant finder service.

Strategy

The process

The legislation requires a Homelessness Strategy that is:

“a strategy formulated by a local housing authority for-

- (a) preventing homelessness in their district;
- (b) securing that sufficient accommodation is and will be available for people in their district who are or who may become homeless;
- (c) securing the satisfactory provision of support for people in their district –
 - (i) who are or may become homeless; or
 - (ii) who have been homeless and need support to prevent them becoming homeless again.”

The process that culminated in this strategy began with an initial assessment of Housing Options data on homelessness in the last 5 years.

[A Brief](#) of our findings was then produced and circulated to:

- Local voluntary and not-for-profit agencies including: Burton YMCA, Citizen’s Advice, the Eaton Foundation, Burton Hope, NACRO.
- Staffordshire County Council.
- Other public agencies: National Probation Service, Staffordshire Police, Staffordshire Fire Service, Criminal Justice System.
- Housing associations and supported housing providers such as: T&D, Derventio, Midland Heart, Orbit, Rethink, Derwent living, Sanctuary Housing, Waterloo Housing.

The full [Review](#) was then circulated to the above named partners for feedback. This strategy was drafted from the findings of the review and feedback received.

Implementation

The Council will produce and monitor an annual action plan to secure delivery of this strategy.

Abbreviations

B&B – Bed & Breakfast

DHP – Discretionary Housing Payment

DWP – Department for Work and Pensions

ESBC – East Staffordshire Borough Council

HB – Housing Benefit

HCLIC – Homelessness Case Level Information Collection (this will replace the old P1E reports)

HO – Housing Options

LHA – Local Housing Allowance

OPCC – Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner

PRS – Private Rented Sector

SMHA – Strategic Market Housing Analysis

T&D – Trent & Dove

TA – Temporary Accommodation

UC – Universal Credit

Further reading

[*The homelessness monitor: England 2017 – Crisis, March 2017*](#)

[*Universal Remedy: ensuring Universal Credit is fit for purpose – the Resolution Foundation, October 2017*](#)

[*Draft Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities – Department for Communities and Local Government, October 2017*](#)

[*Selective Licensing for Local Authorities. A Good Practice Guide – Shelter, 2006*](#)