

**STOCKTON-ON-TEES BOROUGH
COUNCIL**

**HOMELESSNESS
REDUCTION
STRATEGY 2018-23**

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INTRODUCTION

Homelessness Reduction Strategy 2018-23

Following the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, Stockton-On-Tees Borough Council has produced its first Homelessness Reduction and Prevention Strategy. Our Strategy details the Council's ongoing commitment to reducing, preventing and tackling homelessness, as well as how we will work with partners to implement the new duties arising from the legislation.

At the core of this Strategy is the principle that homelessness should, where possible, be prevented. It embraces the need for developing effective homelessness prevention solutions in a climate of reducing resources and unprecedented challenges to local authorities. Our Strategy also provides a framework for how we will work collaboratively with our partners and wider stakeholders (residents, council members, registered providers, developers, government agencies, private landlords and voluntary and community groups) to prevent homeless wherever this is possible and offer appropriate services to support people that do become homelessness, as we understand that homelessness can be a very damaging experience for individuals, families and to our local communities.

Our first Homelessness Reduction Strategy has been prepared giving due regard to the Councils key corporate plans which include the Council Plan (as detailed below), the Economic Growth Plan 2017-2023, the Joint Health and Well-Being Strategy 2012-2018, A Brighter Borough for All (Tackling Poverty) 2016, the Domestic Abuse strategy 2017-2022 and our Housing Strategy 2018-2023 (also referenced below).

The Council Plan 2018-21

The Council has to take decisions about the basis on which services will be delivered with the resources available. In doing this we take into account a number of factors such as reduced funding, changing demographics, increasing demand for services and new legislation and national policy direction. However under-pinning all our decisions are our **four policy principles**. We apply these principles to all our decision making. Wherever possible we will:

Protecting the vulnerable through targeted intervention

- People who are subject to or at risk of harm
- People who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless
- People who are financially excluded
- People whose circumstances make them vulnerable

Creating economic prosperity

- Ensuring that the businesses and people of Stockton-on-Tees are part of a thriving and productive Tees Valley economy

Promoting equality of opportunity through targeted intervention

- Tackling health inequalities
- Meeting the skills gap
- Improving access to job opportunities
- Tackling fuel poverty
- Improving education and training opportunities

- Improving access to affordable housing
- Financial and digital inclusion

Developing strong and healthy communities

- Providing mainstream services that are available where needed
- Providing preventive services that are available where needed

Our vision

The Council Plans sets out a vision for the borough and everyone who lives, works, lives or visits.



OUR COUNCIL

...is of a Council that prides itself on being open, honest and fair. On leading by example. On having big plans and the determination to see them through. We're facing difficult financial challenges and we can't do all we used to do so we're facing some tough decisions. Throughout this we'll stay focused on delivering genuine value for money, on setting the highest standards of public service, on communicating clearly and regularly with the community we serve and on being challenging, innovative and well organized.

AMBITIOUS, EFFECTIVE AND PROUD TO SERVE

Housing Strategy 2018-2023

The Housing Strategy is a strategic document and sets out the framework for how we will address the challenges that face us, if we are to ensure the provision of the right type of housing in the right location. Our Homelessness Reduction Strategy should be read in conjunction with this strategy.

Homelessness Reduction Strategy – our 4 core objectives

Homelessness is clearly a complex and cross cutting issue and in developing our core homelessness reduction objectives we have ensured that there is a 'golden thread' through our key corporate documents (specifically the Council Plan, the Economic Growth Plan and our Housing Strategy as outlined below).

Objective 1: Preventing and Relieving homelessness

Objective 2: Preventing rough sleeping

Objective 3: Reducing the use of bed and breakfast and temporary accommodation

Objective 4: Maximising the effectiveness of commissioned housing related support

Achieving positive homelessness reduction outcomes will directly support the Councils following core policy objectives and ambitions.....		
Housing Strategy Objectives	Council Plan Objectives	Economic Growth Plan Ambitions
Meeting Housing Needs and Supporting Vulnerable People	<p>Environment and Housing - Provide sufficient sites and premises in vibrant, connected and distinctive places that people choose to live, work, play and visit</p> <p>Health and Wellbeing - Address ill health prevention</p> <p>Adults Work in partnership</p>	<p>Priority 2B Affordable housing options are available</p> <p>Housing provision is of a high standard and quality</p>
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THE NATIONAL POLICY CONTEXT

The Councils Homelessness Reduction Strategy has been developed in the context of national policy, legislative developments and best practice as well as identified local needs. Recent key legislative changes, policy development and emerging good practice are referenced below.

The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017

The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 received Royal Assent on 27th April 2017 and came into effect on Tuesday 3rd April 2018. This Act has significantly reformed England's homelessness legislation by placing duties on local authorities to intervene at an earlier stage to prevent homelessness. It also requires housing authorities to provide homelessness services to all those affected, not just those who are vulnerable and in priority need. These include:

- An enhanced prevention duty extending the period a household is threatened with homelessness from 28 days to 56 days, meaning that housing authorities are required to work with people to prevent homelessness at an earlier stage; and
- A new relieved duty for those who are already homeless so that housing authorities will support households for 56 days to relieve their homelessness by helping them to secure accommodation.

The definition of homelessness

The definition of homelessness remains unchanged from that outlined in Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996.

In summary, someone is considered to be homeless if they do not have a legal right to occupy accommodation, or if their accommodation is unsuitable to live in. This can cover a wide range of circumstances, including, but not restricted to, the following:

- having no accommodation at all
- having accommodation that is not reasonable to live in, even in the short-term (e.g. because of violence or health reasons)
- having a legal right to accommodation that they cannot access (e.g. if they have been evicted illegally)
- living in accommodation they have no legal right to occupy (e.g. living in a squat or staying with friends temporarily)

Local councils have a legal duty to provide advice and assistance to people who are legally defined as homeless or threatened with homelessness. However, not everyone who falls within the legal definition necessarily qualifies for temporary accommodation.

Duty to refer

The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 introduced a duty on public sector bodies to refer service users who they think may be homeless or threatened with homelessness to a housing authority.

Applications and inquiries

All applications for housing assistance will be assessed to determine if we have reason to believe that an applicant may be homeless or threatened with homelessness, the Council must make inquiries to see whether we owe them any duty under Part 7 of the 1996 Act. This assessment process is important in enabling housing authorities to identify the assistance which an applicant may need, either to

prevent them from becoming homeless, or to help them to find another home. In each case, the Council will need to first decide whether the applicant is eligible for assistance and threatened with or actually homeless.

Assessments and personalised housing plans

A new duty to carry out an assessment in all cases where an eligible applicant is homeless or threatened with homelessness has been introduced. The assessment will identify the housing need of the applicant and their family members, and any support they need in order to be able to secure and retain accommodation. Following this assessment, the Council must work with the person and their family to develop a personalised housing plan which will include actions (or 'reasonable steps') to be taken by ourselves and the applicant to try and prevent or relieve homelessness.

Prevention duty

A duty to take reasonable steps to help eligible persons who are threatened with homelessness. This means either helping them to stay in their current accommodation or helping them to find a new place to live before they become homeless. The prevention duty continues for 56 days unless it is brought to an end by an event such as accommodation being secured for the person.

Relief duty

If the applicant is already homeless, or becomes homeless despite activity during the prevention stage, the reasonable steps will be focused on helping the applicant to secure accommodation. The relief duty lasts for 56 days unless ended in another way. If the Council have reason to believe a homeless applicant may be eligible for assistance and have a priority need the Council must provide the applicant with interim accommodation.

Making Every Contact Count (2016)

To address the rising numbers of households experiencing homelessness, Government published Making Every Contact Count. It is a joint approach to prevent homelessness, which recognises that intervening earlier to prevent homelessness is key to its ambitions on social justice, particularly in terms of supporting the most disadvantaged individuals and families by tackling many of the underlying problems that, if left unchecked, can contribute to homelessness. The aim of this objective is a simple one: *"to make sure every contact local agencies make with vulnerable people and families really count"*.

The Government is clear that for many people becoming homeless is not the beginning of their problems; it comes at the end of a long line of crises, interactions with public and voluntary agencies and missed opportunities, which must be changed.

Supporting this is the Public Health Outcomes Framework which sets out the desired outcomes from public health and how these will be measured with a focus on the health of the local homeless population. Homelessness is associated with severe poverty and is a social determinant of health. It is also associated with adverse health, education and social outcomes, particularly for children. Homeless households contain some of the most vulnerable and often needy members of our communities. Preventing and tackling homelessness requires sustained and joined-up interventions by central and local government, health and social care and the voluntary sector. Through this framework there is real commitment to ensure health services do more to help identify those at risk of and prevent homelessness by *"making every contact count"*.

Homelessness and Temporary Accommodation

Nationally homelessness services are facing unprecedented pressures, with demand for both permanent and temporary accommodation often exceeding supply. For most Local Authority's bed and breakfast (B&B) placements are regarded as the "last resort" in terms of placements for interim accommodation and are made in cases of emergency where no other suitable accommodation is available at the time to meet the needs of the person or family, for example, when accommodation is needed outside of office hours or during weekends. B&B accommodation must not be used where possible to accommodate families; children or pregnant women, except where there is no alternative available. Living in B&B accommodation can be particularly detrimental to the health and development of children. Under section 210(2), the Secretary of State has made the Homelessness (Suitability of Accommodation) (England) Order 2003 ('the 2003 Order'). The 2003 Order specifies that **Bed and Breakfast accommodation is not to be regarded as suitable for applicants with family commitments, therefore such accommodation should only be used as a last resort and only for a maximum of 6 weeks.**

Following the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 (and publication of the new Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities), the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government and the Secretary of State for Education have recently (April 18) jointly issued guidance to local housing authorities and children's services authorities about their duties under Part 7 Housing Act 1996 and Part 3 Children Act 1989 to secure and/or provide accommodation for 16-17 year olds who are homeless and/or in need of accommodation. This updated guidance reflects changes in both homelessness legislation and children's legislation and clearly states that B&B accommodation is **never suitable for 16/17 year olds** who are homeless and estranged from their family, highlighting this client group are particularly vulnerable and in need of support.

No second night out

In its strategy "Vision for ending rough sleeping: No Second Night Out Nationwide" Government called on every local authority to adopt the 'no second night out' standard. This is in recognition that every community is different, so how each achieves this will also be different. However, in the strategy the Government notes that this requires communities having right services in place, so that:

- New rough sleepers can be identified and helped off the streets immediately.
- The public can alert services if they see anyone sleeping rough so they get help.
- Rough sleepers can go to a place of safety, where their needs can be assessed and they can get help.
- Rough sleepers are able to get emergency accommodation and other services they need.
- Rough sleepers from outside their area can be reconnected with their community.

More recently local authorities have been encouraged to go one step further and consider adopting a "no first night out" approach which aims to predict potential rough sleepers and provide accommodation and support before a single night is spent on the streets. Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council actively seeks to tackle rough sleeping and we support the Governments vision.

Housing First

Government has recently announced the funding of a number of Housing First pathfinder projects, Housing First is an approach to ending long term homelessness for people with complex needs. It has been developed specifically to meet the needs of the most challenging client groups who have previously been unable to sustain housing. Although there are some variations in approach between different providers of Housing First, the central principles include providing a home with flexible support available for as long as needed, enabling individuals to have choice and control and to reduce harm. National models of Housing First that are not directly commissioned are working well, with robust working protocols developed.

The Welfare Reform Act 2012

The Welfare Reform Act 2012 introduced a wide range of reforms aimed at reducing public expenditure on benefits and using the welfare system to incentivise people toward employment and to 'make work pay'. A number of these have had an impact on homelessness and the availability, and sustainability, of affordable housing. The key elements of reform include:

- Local Housing Allowance (LHA) reductions including total LHA caps and the limiting of LHA to the 30th percentile of market rents.
- The Total Benefit Cap, limiting the maximum benefits that a family can receive.
- Spare Room Subsidy (commonly known as the 'Bedroom Tax'), reducing housing benefit entitlement to social housing tenants considered to be under occupying their homes.
- The Shared Accommodation Rate limit applied to single young people up to the age of 34 years old.
- The transfer of responsibility for Social Fund payments to local authorities and to Council budgets.
- Disability Benefit changes and the replacement of Council Tax Benefit with local Council Tax support, reducing benefit income to a wide range of working age adults.
- The introduction of the Universal Credit to provide a single stream-lined benefit paid to residents directly rather than to their landlords.

The Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016 further reduced the benefit cap set by the Welfare Reform Act 2012 to £20,000 per year for couples and lone parents and £13,400 per year for single people. Additionally under the Act, certain social security benefits and child tax credits have been frozen for four years from April 2016 and social housing rents have to be reduced by 1% per year for 4 years from April 2016.

Localism Act 2011

The stated policy objective of the Localism Act is to enable local authorities to better manage housing demand and access to housing within the context of local circumstances. The key changes introduced by this Act include:

- Local authorities are given the power to end their homelessness duty with an offer of accommodation in the private rented sector*
- Social housing tenure reform to allow social landlords to grant fixed term tenancies with limited security of tenure.
- The requirement for local authorities to set out their approach and response to fixed term tenancies in a Tenancy Strategy.
- Social Housing allocation reform which allows local authorities to set allocation policies appropriate to the local area.

*Government introduced the Homelessness (Suitability of Accommodation) (England) Order 2012 as a guidance to respond to concerns about the standards of accommodation that may be used by local authorities as temporary accommodation, and to end the homelessness duty. The statutory guidance includes requirements about the quality of accommodation and of landlords, as well as the suitability of the location for a household's needs and circumstances.

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OUR LOCAL ISSUES

An overview of Stockton-on-Tees

Stockton-on-Tees is a Borough of wide contrasts made up of a mixture of busy town centres, urban residential areas and picturesque villages. The Borough covers approximately 20,000 Hectares (equal to 200 square kilometres or 49.4 thousand football pitches) with a population of about 194,000 people living in 84,000 dwellings.

According to the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD 2015), the Borough is ranked 88th most deprived out of the 326 local authorities in England. The Borough's population has increased by 5.6% since the 2001 Census. In future, in total, the Borough's population is projected to increase by 7% in 2030, then by a further 3% in 2039. This equates to an additional 20,000 residents in 2039 versus 2014. Within that overall projected increase, the following 'age group' specific changes are estimated:

Age Groups (Years)	2014 (No. People)	2030 (No. People)	2039 (No. People)	Total Projected Change 2014 – 2030 (%)	Total Projected Change 2030 – 2039 (%)
0 - 39	96,000	100,000	101,000	4%	1%
40 - 64	65,000	61,000	61,000	-6%	0%
65 – 90+	33,000	47,000	52,000	42%	11%

Source: Office for National Statistics

The overall proportion of residents in the Borough who are aged 65 – 90+ years remains the smallest out of all age groups but as a single proportion of the Borough's population, it is the only one projected to grow (from 17% in 2014 to 23% in 2030 and then to 24% in 2039). In contrast, the 0 – 39 years age range is predicted to shrink from 49% of the total population in 2014 to 48% in 2030 and 47% in 2039. Also in contrast, the 40 - 64 years age range is predicted to shrink from 34% of the total population in 2014 to 29% in 2030 and to remain at 29% in 2039.

Homelessness in our Borough

Homelessness is often caused by a complex interplay between a person's individual circumstances and adverse structural factors outside their direct control. Structural causes of homelessness are social and economic in nature and are often outside the control of the individual or family concerned and can include unemployment, poverty, the state of the housing market and changes to government policy. Locally we have found that some households who have not initially presented for assistance tend to find accommodation through informal routes. This means they are not supported with practical considerations like ensuring the property is in a fit condition or that they have access to utilities and have appropriate furniture. Many may end up in shared accommodation, leaving them at risk of exploitation.

The health and wellbeing of people who experience homelessness is poorer than that of the general population. The longer a person experiences homelessness, particularly from young adulthood, the more likely their health and wellbeing will be at risk. Whilst the causes of homelessness are complex,

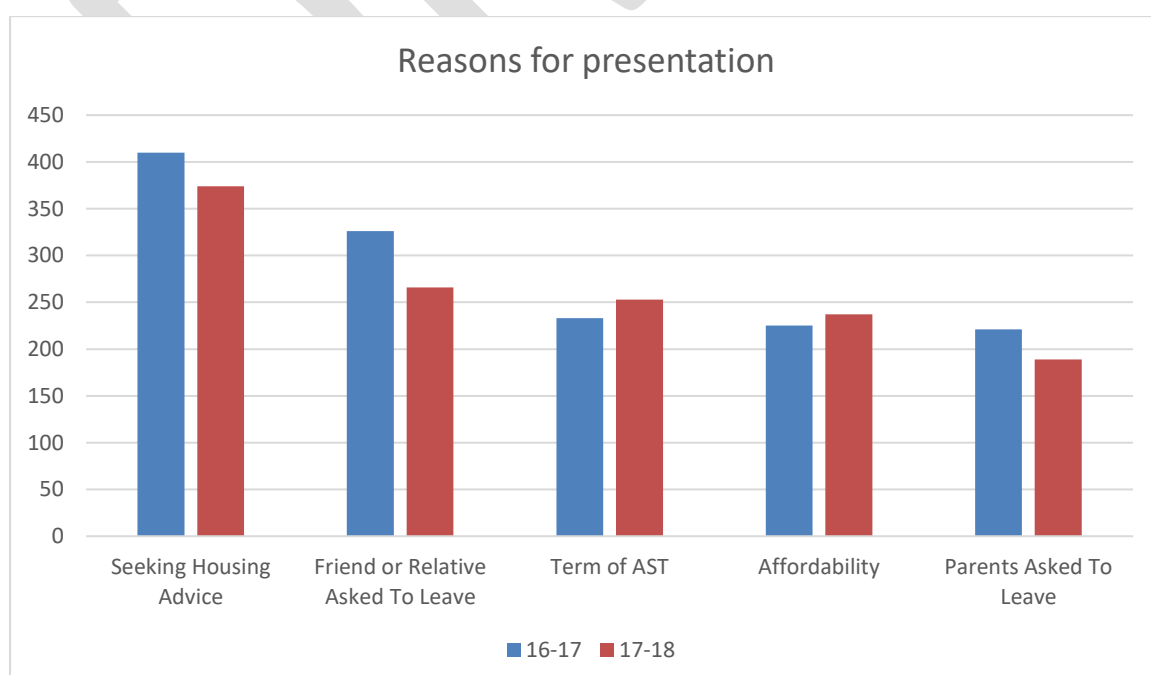
mental ill health is a major contributory factor. Becoming homeless can worsen existing mental health conditions or cause mental illness to occur. Drug and alcohol misuse can also be both a cause and consequence of homelessness and a proportion of our most vulnerable residents may experience both drug and alcohol and mental ill health at the same time. A health needs audit was undertaken in 2016 with the aim of increasing the evidence available about the health needs of people who are homeless and to help commissioners understand the effectiveness of the services we currently provide. The audit identified that around 70% of people accessing homelessness services have a mental health problem and 64% have drug and/or alcohol problems. We are committed to working closely with our colleagues within SBC Public Health and across the health system to further understand the impact of homelessness on health and wellbeing, to embed assessment of health needs within our approach to homelessness prevention and to strengthen early identification, intervention and support with those who are at risk of homelessness.

Headline facts and figures

- During 2017-2018 the total number of households who approached to the Councils Homelessness and Housing Solutions Team increased by almost **20% increase on the previous year**.
- In Stockton on Tees almost **two thirds of households placed in temporary emergency accommodation have self-identified as having a mental health issue** and **over half of those who approached the service identify as having a drug or alcohol dependency issue**.
- We have successfully maintained an **exceptionally low number of households accepted as homeless** – in the last year we took 56 homelessness applications and accepted a full homelessness duty to 36 households while **assisting 858 households from becoming homeless (homelessness prevention)**.

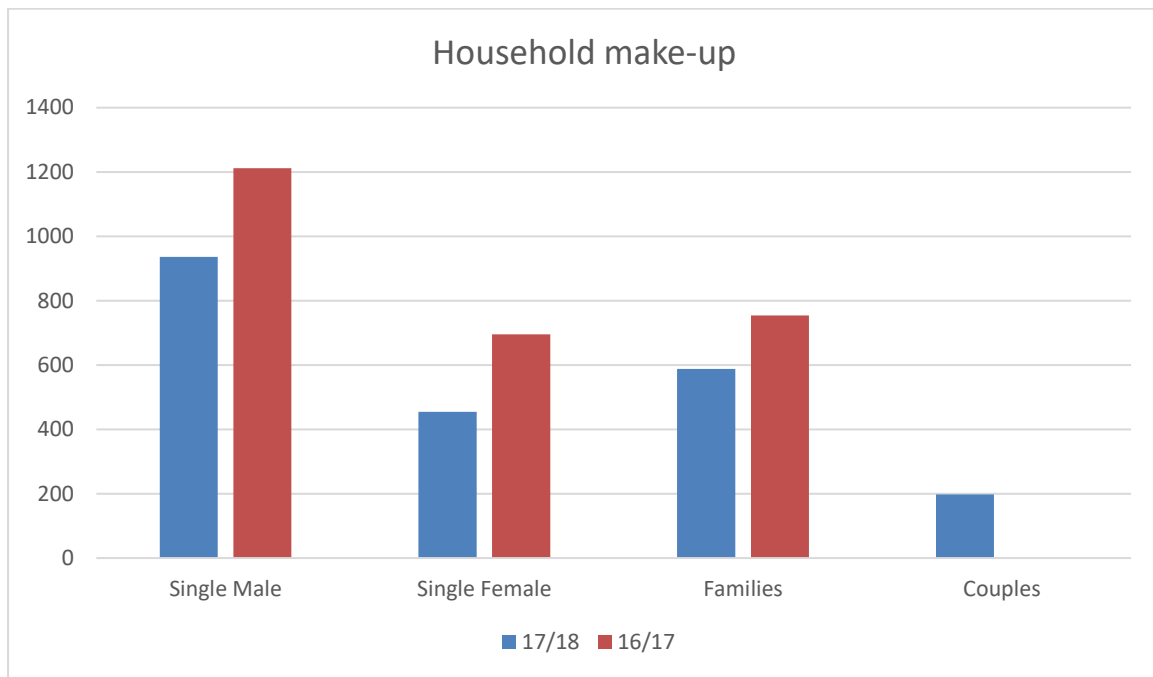
Detailed below is a comparison of two years data (2017-17 and 2017-18) highlight the reasons for presentations to the Homelessness and Housing Solutions Service and details of household make-up.

Table 1: Top 5 Reasons for Presentation



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Table 2: Household make-up



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OUR APPROACH TO SUPPORTING VULNERABLE PEOPLE AND HOW WE PREVENT AND ADDRESS HOMELESSNESS

Domestic Abuse

The Council has adopted a Domestic Abuse Strategy for 2017 - 2022 sets out how a multi-agency approach is being taken to prevent people from becoming victims and perpetrators of domestic abuse, and provide support and protection for those who need it. More than £100,000 in additional funding has been allocated to support domestic violence and abuse services available to residents of the borough and the Council continues to commission crisis refuge accommodation to support domestic abuse victims and their families.

The Homelessness and Housing Solutions Service works closely with specialist partner agencies to provide advice and access to accommodation to meet the needs of complex individuals and families who are often turned away from services. Assistance is provided to victims of domestic abuse who may present in a distressed condition. It is important to be empathetic, allowing time to fully understand their situation in a safe, supportive atmosphere. Homelessness Prevention Officers will offer relevant information to allow the applicant to make decisions about the best course of action for them and their family; this could be a referral to refuge or hostel accommodation, or a referral for outreach or floating support from a provider such as Harbour. Harbour provide a range of services including accommodation options, counselling and outreach services and facilitation of the Multi Agency Risk Assessment (MARAC) process.

Young people and care leavers

Young people who are also care leavers and young people under 18 years old are supported by the Council's Resources Team and the Leaving Care Team to make the transition from care to independent living. The Looked After Children and Care Leavers Strategy 2016-18 sets out the Council's approach to ensuring every child and young person has a safe, happy, healthy, secure and loving childhood, nurturing their aspirations and enabling them to meet their full potential.

There is an agreed protocol between the Council's Homelessness and Housing Solutions Service and the Resources team to ensure that wherever 16 & 17 year old present as homeless that they are directed to the right service to access dedicated support. The support provided ensures appropriate guidance and advice is in place through dedicated Personal Adviser support, all children and young people have an up to date and comprehensive Pathway Plan, there are a range of accommodation options, including Staying Put and Supported Lodgings and support for access into employment, education and training. The Council has commissioned supported accommodation for 16 and 17 year olds that provides support to enable young people to move towards independent living.

Former members of the armed forces

Members of Her Majesty's regular naval, military and air forces are generally provided with accommodation by the Ministry of Defence (MOD), but are required to leave this accommodation when they are discharged from the service. Prior to leaving the service, the armed forces provide housing information and advice to service personnel. This is provided through the Joint Service

Housing Advice Office (JSHAO). Some people who have served in the armed forces for a long period or are medically discharged may be offered assistance by the MOD's resettlement staff.

If a member of the armed forces is going to be discharged from the service, the MOD will issue a "Certificate of Cessation of Entitlement to Occupy Service Accommodation". A local authority housing department will consider this certificate as proof that the individual is threatened with homelessness. The Tees Valley Compass Partnership Allocations Policy gives an additional priority to those who are serving, or who have served, with the armed forces, in line with the Armed Forces Community Covenant which is a voluntary agreement between the local civilian and service community (to work together and to support and honor our Armed Forces Community past and present).

Migrants and refugees

Our migrant populations is diverse, and has many social, cultural and health needs. Migration is driven by many reasons including economic, family reunion, study, humanitarian reasons or human trafficking. As a consequence migrants may have several diverse health and social care needs and may live in more deprived and unsafe neighbourhoods, the majority of migrants rent from private landlords. Migrants can experience racism and discrimination and this often causes isolation and can lead to poor mental and physical health.

Stockton continues to be part of the National dispersal programme introduced by the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999. Asylum seekers who are declined entry are required to leave the UK once all appeals have been concluded; they then automatically become destitute as all forms of support can be withdrawn including accommodation and subsistence payments. A number of services exist within Stockton on Tees to support refugees and Migrants and the complexities that exist ranging from Housing, health and advice services.

The main reason the Council uses Bed and breakfast accommodation is in response to the number of homelessness households leaving NASS accommodation (National Asylum Support Service) after being given leave to remain. The Council recognises that more preventative work is required for the refugee and migrant community as there is evidence that they are over represented in homelessness presentations and acceptances. This group face particular challenges in accessing housing if they are granted leave to remain by the Home Office. Asylum case decisions are now processed in a shorter time period and on receipt of a decision they have a limited time period in which to find a new home and access mainstream services following support being ceased by the Home Office. This is a difficult task for a group who experience difficulties including not being familiar with the area, language and have a lack of understanding of services they can access. In most circumstances bed and breakfast accommodation provides the fastest option for meeting the housing needs of homeless NASS families on the day that they present to the homelessness service. From then the Council works with the family to secure more suitable accommodation.

Modern Day Slavery, Human Trafficking and Those with No Recourse to Public Funds

Local authorities are under a duty under section 52 of the Modern Slavery Act 2015 to notify the Home Office about a potential victim of trafficking or modern slavery. We do this by making a referral to the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) if the person's consent is obtained. If the person does not consent to a referral, then the local authority will be required to complete the MS1 notification form. When a referral is made to the NRM, housing and subsistence support is provided by the Salvation

Army and partner organisations during the recovery and reflection period for 45 days, during which time the person can consider their options.

A potential or confirmed victim of trafficking may request a needs assessment with a view to establishing whether they require care and support, including accommodation. Many people who have been subject to trafficking or modern slavery are reported as experiencing high levels of depression, anxiety and (PTSD) Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Therefore it is highly likely that such a person will present with an appearance of need, and so would need to be assessed as usual under the Care Act 2014. Where a potential victim of trafficking has eligible care and support needs, the local authority will need to consider whether to provide accommodation in order to meet their needs.

Whilst there have only been a limited number of such cases in the borough, we are aware that this is a national issue and is likely to be significantly under reported both nationally and locally. In recognition of this we need to ensure effective protocol arrangements (and pathways) are in place with colleagues in both Adults Social Care, Children's Service, other statutory bodies such as the police, the Home Office and local voluntary and community organisations who actively support trafficking victims.

People with an offending history

There are a number of agencies, both statutory and voluntary, dealing with ex-offenders. Many ex-offenders experience homeless or threatened with homelessness. There is a need for prisoners and ex-offenders to be aware of their housing rights, both in respect of maintaining their accommodation where appropriate on sentence and accessing accommodation on their release.

Whilst the Council is an active partner in the recently established Tees Valley/Durham project group aimed at preventing and addressing homelessness for this client group, this is an area we have identified as requiring further development.

Hospital discharge

Homeless people are more likely to use Accident and Emergency, spend time in hospital, use mental health and substance misuse services, than the general population. Partnership working is key to effective and timely hospital discharge for all patients to ensure delays are avoided and that there are suitable services and move on accommodation available for those who need it. While there are a range of effective practices in place there is a need to take a multi-agency approach for all. In undertaking a review of our service delivery model, we have identified this hospital discharge as an area for further development.

Working in partnership

We work collaboratively with a number of internal and external partner agencies. This includes for example:

➤ Registered Providers and Compass Choice Based Lettings

The five local authorities in the Tees Valley have a shared common allocations policy. The five Tees Valley Local Authorities and registered providers, including Thirteen, North Star, Home Group, Coast

and Country, work together to deliver the Compass Choice Based Lettings (CBL) service. Working collaboratively in this manner ensures that we can offer a broad range of accommodation types and locations in the borough.

➤ **Private Sector Landlords**

The Council's voluntary Landlord Accreditation Scheme recognises the positive contribution of the private rented sector and accredits those landlords who provide professionally managed, high quality rental accommodation. Accredited landlords can advertise their properties for free on CBL and also have access to our rent/bond guarantee scheme.

We aim to work proactively with private sector landlords as they provide a vital source of accommodation which plays a key supporting role in address our local housing needs.

➤ **DCLG Trailblazer Project 'Key Steps'**

The Key Step scheme (provided by the Thirteen housing group) provides holistic support for people who may be homeless or at risk of homelessness, aged between 18 to 34 years of age. It provides a more targeted approach to preventing homelessness. People are identified at risk of homelessness as early as possible and the service improves their lives by offering advice, support and opportunities from finding a job or a home, to building their resilience and independence and will enable people to take greater control of their lives. This is another example of how a key partner works closely with the Council to prevent and address homelessness.

➤ **The voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector**

There are a number of VCSE organisations within our Borough who actively support and assist those who are homeless or threatened with homelessness. We value the vital services they provide and work closely with partner VCSE organisations to ensure a bespoke and holistic service to clients who are often the most vulnerable in our local community.

➤ **Internal partnerships**

As previously noted the root causes of homelessness are complex and to ensure that the Council is able to respond in an effective manner it is vital that we ensure a joined up, seamless service for those who may find themselves seeking our support. Our Homelessness and Housing Solutions Service therefore works in close collaboration with colleagues across a range of internal service departments including for example Adult Services and Children's Services (particularly in relation to safeguarding), Private Sector Housing (to both address the threat of homelessness and also to secure accommodation through the Landlord Accreditation Scheme) and the Benefits Service (to ensure we can maximise our tools to both prevent and address homelessness i.e. through the effective use of Back on Track and discretionary housing benefits).

CORE OBJECTIVE 1: PREVENTING AND RELIEVING HOMELESSNESS

In Stockton we have, for a number of years delivered a service which has focused on homelessness prevention. However with the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 we took the opportunity to undertake a detailed review of our delivery model. In preparation for the legislation we have:

- Reviewed existing service delivery and customer interfaces and implemented service delivery change to ensure we are able to respond in a timely and appropriate manner.
- Identified gaps in service delivery and highlighted the need to develop different pathways for some client groups.
- Reviewed our current methods of homelessness prevention (i.e. what tools do we have / and what tools will we need).
- Explored potential new service initiatives (and have implemented a number on a 'pilot' basis).
- Ensured our staff are adequately trained.
- Prepared a stakeholder engagement/communication strategy: and delivered a number of bespoke sessions with a variety of stakeholders and wider partners.
- Worked collaboratively with our Tees Valley Local Authority partners to identify (and implement) activities which would be best undertaken on a sub-regional basis.
- Ensured all DCLG data collection requirements are recorded.

Looking ahead we have identified a number of priorities if we are to successfully prevent and relive homeless:

- 1. Undertake the statutory homelessness prevention and relief duty.**
- 2. Monitor trends in homelessness and evaluate customer profile.**
- 3. Provide timely and accessible information and advice focused on homeless prevention.**
- 4. Develop sustainable housing options in the Social Housing and Private Rented sector.**
- 5. Support households to remain in their home.**
- 6. Establish robust and effective pathways with partners (Duty to Refer).**

CORE OBJECTIVE 2: PREVENTING ROUGH SLEEPING

As noted previously No Second Night Out has been operating in Stockton-on-Tees since 2012. The Council has access to temporary accommodation with the aim of ensuring no one has to sleep rough and in line with national guidance we adhere to the No Second Night Out approach and Severe Weather Emergency Protocol.

Our most recent rough sleepers estimate was completed in November 2017 and identified 2 individuals. Like many other Local Authorities we are committed to helping rough sleepers.

Looking ahead we have identified a number of priorities if we are to successfully prevent rough sleeping:

1. Provide a rapid response to those affected by rough sleeping.
2. Address the root causes of rough sleeping as part of a partnership approach to tackling unemployment and exclusion.
3. Better identify the needs of rough sleepers and those at risk of rough sleeping through a multi-agency approach, including hospital and prison discharge and care leavers.
4. Explore alternative bespoke accommodation solutions including Housing First Model, crash pad provision.
5. Ensure provision of emergency accommodation for cold weather months (SWEP), including support for people to be able to move on.
6. Develop a bespoke approach for EA migrants and failed asylum seekers and those with no recourse to public funds (NRPF), such as potential victim of trafficking or modern slavery.

CORE OBJECTIVE 3: REDUCING THE USE OF B&B AND TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION

The Homelessness Code of Guidance 2018 sets out the circumstances in which Bed and Breakfast (B&B) accommodation may be used:

- Where emergency accommodation is required at very short notice or;
- Where there is no better alternative accommodation available and the use of B&B accommodation is necessary as a last resort.

In addition there is a responsibility for Council's to ensure B&B accommodation is of a good standard and is used for the shortest period possible. The Homelessness Code of Guidance 2018 also advises that where B&B accommodation is used to house homeless households it falls within the definition of a House of Multiple Occupancy (HMO) accommodation and it is paramount the accommodation must be of a good standard.

On occasions the Council may have no alternative but to make a placement "out of borough". Placements such as these will always be kept to a minimum with the aim of moving the household back to the Borough as soon as possible, unless it is not safe for the household to return.

The Council also works with a number of private sector landlords who provide short term housing options for homeless customers in a range of self-contained units and Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs).

The Council has made significant progress over recent years to reduce the use of temporary accommodation for vulnerable homeless households, with particular focus on reducing family placements and the overall use of B&B as emergency accommodation. Robust mechanisms are in place locally to monitor households with children placed into B&B with regular reports presented our Local Safeguarding Children's Board.

Looking ahead we have identified a number of priorities if we are to successfully reduce the use of B&B and temporary accommodation:

- 1. Evaluate the suitability of an additional priority status for rough sleepers and people in temporary accommodation (including B&B) on the Compass CBL Allocations Policy for accessing social housing waiting lists.**
- 2. Work with housing providers (across all tenures) to explore alternative accommodation options and maximise access to long-term sustainable accommodation.**

In recognition that we will (on emergency occasions) continue to use temporary accommodation we will also:

- 3. Ensure that any family placed in B&B is moved to alternative, suitable temporary accommodation as quickly as possible.**
- 4. Work to ensure a sufficient supply of appropriate temporary accommodation (other than B&B).**
- 5. Reduce the use and time spent in B&B.**

6. Ensure that any B&B used complies with the suitability requirements of the Homelessness Reduction Act.

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CORE OBJECTIVE 4: MAXIMISING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF COMMISSIONED HOUSING RELATED SUPPORT SERVICES

In 2017 the Council renewed its commitment to supporting our most vulnerable homeless residents by commissioning a number of service providers to deliver short term accommodation based housing related support to enable vulnerable adults, homeless families and young people to gain and maintain suitable sustainable accommodation. The service provides a range of accommodation, support and signposting, to address the linkages between homelessness and the prevalence of multiple needs and provides a vital alternative to traditional temporary accommodation (specifically B&B and short term hostel accommodation).

The Gateway Service

The Housing Solutions Gateway Team manage the Councils commissioned short term accommodation services. The aim of the service is to provide supported accommodation (generally up to a 26 weeks) to enable the individual and/or family to address any housing barriers, before moving onto sustainable and independent accommodation. Under exceptional circumstances homeless households with high level support needs may remain within the service for an extended period of time as identified within their support plan.

The table below provides a summary of the number of households who can be accommodated and the weekly hours of support each may receive.

HOMELESS HOUSEHOLD TYPE	NO. OF ACCOMODATION UNITS	NO OF HOURS OF SUPPORT PER WEEK
Families	26	5
Adults	120	3 -7

All homeless households placed in a commissioned unit are assessed to identify their support needs and are provided with an indicative support plan. Homeless households with identified support needs which may include for example mental or physical health, learning disabilities, substance misuse issues will be offered 3 or 7 hours of weekly support while in a commissioned unit. The number of hours will be determined by the level of the individuals needs as identified in the indicative support plan.

When the Homeless Household is ready to move on, the Gateway Service will instigate a move on plan. The introduction of a new "home finder" post will ensure a seamless transition from this accommodation to settled permanent accommodation.

Looking ahead we have identified a number of priorities if we are to successfully maximise our commissioned housing related support services:

1. Ensure clear pathways for all households placed into commissioned housing related support.
2. Identify and address the support needs of homeless people in commissioned housing related support services to enable them to live independently.
3. Ensure timely move on to sustainable accommodation
4. Ensure effective engagement by all stakeholders in the delivery of the service.

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MONITORING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF OUR FIRST HOMELESSNESS REDUCTION STRATEGY

Each of our 4 core objectives and our identified priority actions will be monitored through a SMART (Specific, Measureable, Achievable, Relevant and Time Bound) action plan. In summary the supporting action plan will:

1. Detail all actions that will be taken in order to deliver our stated core objectives and service priorities.
2. Detail timescales for completion.
3. Identify named lead officers.
4. Highlight any resource implications.
5. Reference our anticipated outcomes / success measures.

The Action Plan will be updated quarterly and an annual review undertaken to ensure they remain relevant and appropriate (and replace those which have been achieved).

Reviewing this Strategy

Our Homeless Reduction Strategy will be reviewed annually or in response to any significant policy or legislative change. The views of stakeholders and partners will be considered as part our annual review.