



HARTLEPOOL BOROUGH COUNCIL
HOMELESSNESS REDUCTION AND ROUGH
SLEEPING STRATEGY
2021 – 2024

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1. Introduction

The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 required council's across the country to prepare and implement a clear strategy for homelessness reduction. Hartlepool Borough Council's approach to homelessness is one of partnership with a shared commitment to reducing, preventing and tackling homelessness through a multi-agency approach. The Homelessness Prevention Partnership was established in 2019 with a focus on the premise that wherever possible homelessness should be prevented rather than alleviated and that together effective solutions can be found.

This strategy sets out the local context and how together we will tackle homelessness. It has due regard for the approved Council Plan, the Economic Growth Strategy, the Joint Health and Well-Being Strategy, the Child and Family Poverty Strategy, the Safer Hartlepool Partnership Plan (which includes community safety and domestic abuse) and the Housing Strategy 2019-2024.

Across all key strategic plans Hartlepool Council is clear: we have a duty to protect vulnerable residents through effective and targeted intervention, create an environment which fosters opportunity and prosperity, promotes equality and develops strong and healthy communities. Specifically the council has due regard to:

1.1 Protect the most vulnerable through targeted intervention including:

- 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.

1.2 The Housing Strategy 2019-2024

The Housing Strategy is a strategic document that sets out the framework for how we will work with our partners and residents to grow, improve, support and deliver our housing offer. Our ambition is to offer more housing choice by developing new homes and improving and regenerating our existing homes and communities. We are strongly committed to supporting our most vulnerable residents to access and maintain appropriate and good quality housing to meet their needs.

2. National Policy and Context

Tackling homelessness and rough sleeping is a key priority for the government and The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 significantly reformed 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. It includes a new prevention and relief duty. The government has committed to halving rough sleeping by 2022 and ending it by 2027. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-rough-sleeping-strategy>

2.1 The definition of homelessness

The definition of homelessness remains unchanged as defined in 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 anyone that requires it; in addition there is a 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.

2.2 Making Every Contact Count (2016)

Making Every Contact Count 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”. We must be clear, 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.

2.3 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. Specifically, 16 and 17 year olds should not be in B&B and if they are this should not be longer than 6 weeks.

2.4 ‘No second night out’ and ‘Everyone In’

The government’s ‘No Second Night Out’ specifically relates to rough sleepers and urges councils to ensure rough sleepers are identified and helped off the streets immediately. It includes ensuring they have a place of safety where their needs can be assessed and they can get help. Since the COVID-19 pandemic this has been extended through ‘Everyone In’ with funding support from government to ensure all rough sleepers are temporarily accommodated for the duration of the pandemic acknowledging that they are amongst the most vulnerable people. Locally we have seen a steady number of single (male) adults in need of temporary accommodation and support with problems with family/ friends, offending behaviours and substance misuse being the drivers behind their homelessness.

2.5 Housing First

Housing First is an approach to end 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 access or sustain housing. It works on the simple premise that securing safe and stable accommodation first provides the necessary foundation to enable the steps towards improved recovery.

3. The Local context

Hartlepool is a small coastal town with a population of c93,700 people. c57,500 residents are aged over 16 years and according to the mid 2019 census data there are 44,250 dwellings. 36 of our LSOAs fall within the top 10% most deprived nationally compared to 29 across the Tees Valley region. Our homeless relief duty rate is recorded in 2019 as 4.6 per 1000 and is lower than the 7.1 per 1000 average for the Tees Valley region. [https://teesvalley-ca.gov.uk/InstantAtlas/Tees_Valley_Data_Insights/atlas.html]

Hartlepool has a Housing Strategy and Advice Team that undertakes all functions associated with rough sleeping and homelessness. Our working knowledge and service user experience tells us that most people that experience homelessness can be supported successfully to secure alternative suitable accommodation and support where appropriate. However for a minority of people, homelessness is a by-product of a complex interplay of problems often outside of the individuals' control that can include (but are not limited to) poverty, physical and mental ill health and substance misuse.

3.1 Key facts

In 2020-21 the government amended housing legislation to prevent people being made homeless through eviction during the pandemic. This has therefore impacted on the general advice and relief duties for the 20-21 financial year. Tables 3.1.1 and 3.1.2 indicate the numbers of general housing and homelessness enquiries received and recorded by the Housing Advice Team and the number of those that resulted in a 'relief' duty and accommodation.

Table 3.1.1

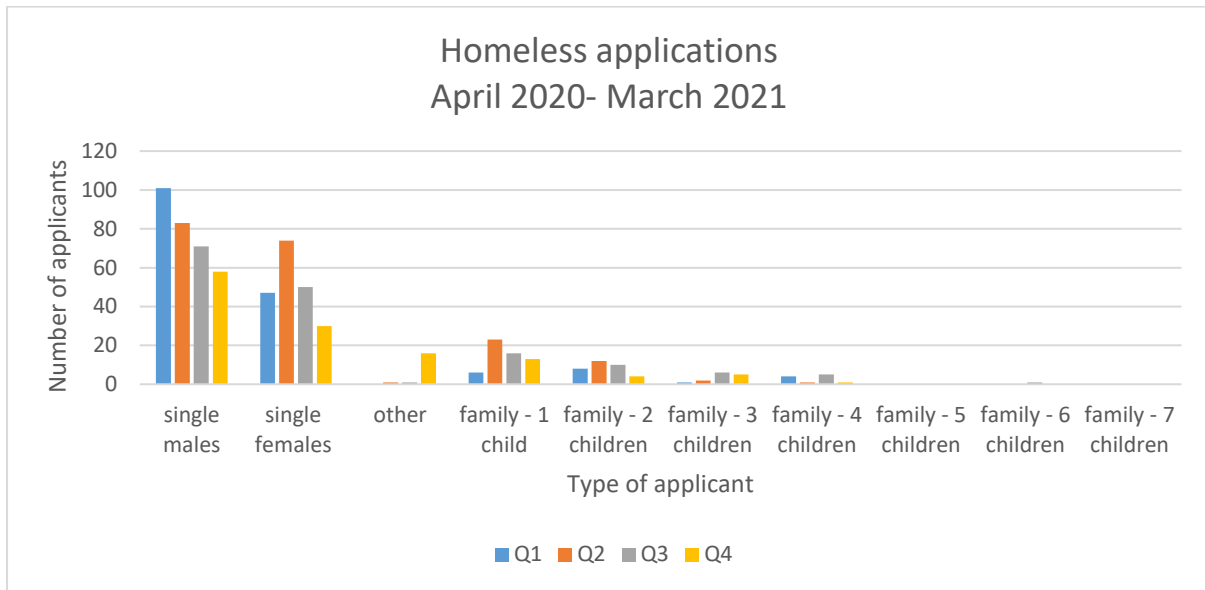
General advice – housing and homelessness	
2020-21	619
2019-20	956
2018-19	851

Table 3.1.2

Relief and accommodation duty accepted		
	Relief duty accepted	Accommodation accepted
2020-21	243	172
2019-20	268	184
2018-19	181	125

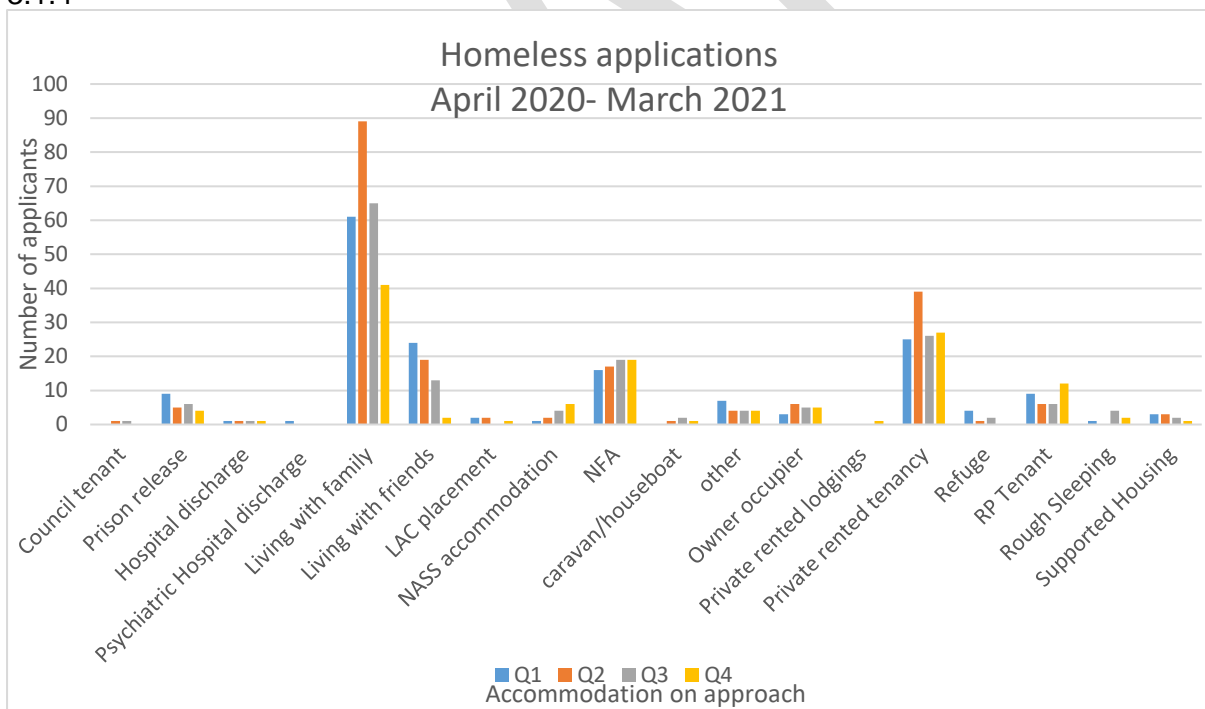
Typically single people make the largest number of homeless applications – usually more men than women. Table 3.1.3 below shows the quarterly trend over the past year and confirms that only small numbers of cases in Hartlepool involved families with dependent children. This confirms our need for one bedroom accommodation as this is by far in greatest demand. Single people tend to be in the 18 – 54 years age bracket with more than half of them being 18-34 years of age.

Table 3.1.3



Reasons for homelessness are detailed in 3.1.4 below and indicate that family no longer willing or able to accommodate is by far the biggest reason for referral for homelessness support. The end of a private rented tenancy, domestic abuse and relationship breakdown are the next greatest reported reason for homelessness.

3.1.4



4. Supporting vulnerable people and preventing homelessness

Most people that experience homelessness are supported successfully into alternative accommodation and do not require any further support. However some people have greater needs and require different levels of support in order to prevent and alleviate homelessness. These people require a multi-agency partnership approach, tailored to their needs to ensure they do not fall through the net and that their vulnerabilities are not further increased.

4.1 Young people and care leavers

A pathway is in place to support any young people aged 16-17 who are at risk of homelessness ensuring they are assessed and supported into suitable support and accommodation. This includes supported lodgings, supported accommodation and where appropriate independent living. Care leavers are supported by the council's Through Care Team to support the transition from care to independent living. This includes a Pathway Plan and ongoing support after they leave care.

4.2 Victims of Domestic Abuse

The new Domestic Abuse Act places additional duties on local authorities including the requirement to establish a multi-agency Local Partnership Board (LPB). The Act includes a duty to:

- Assess the need and demand for accommodation-based support for all victims and their children, including those who require cross-border support
- Develop and publish strategies for the provision of support to cover the locality and diverse groups of victims.
- Give effect to strategies by making commissioning / de-commissioning decisions
- Meet the support needs of victims and their children.

A new Partnership Board is in place and work to develop a local strategy and plan is currently underway.

4.3 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. The Tees Valley Allocations Policy gives an additional priority to those who are serving, or who have served with the armed forces ensuring that any homeless needs are met.

4.4 Migrants and refugees

Hartlepool has an asylum community supported by the government's commissioned provider 'Mears'. Mears provides all necessary support and accommodation to asylum seekers and there is no legal responsibility on the council. Should they be awarded Leave to Remain by the government then a notification procedure is in place to ensure that their transition to refugee status includes support from the council to access suitable accommodation that meets their family needs. With only 28 days notice to leave their asylum accommodation, the turn around can be difficult and it is not unusual for refugees to be housed in the private rented sector as this is often the quickest way in which they can secure a home.

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

Local authorities have 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. Hartlepool is an active member of the Cleveland Anti Slavery Network and has a victim care pathway in place. This includes making a referral to the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) subject to consent. Our experience of such cases is limited however across both Children's and Adults departments we are fully aware of our responsibilities and duties should a situation occur.

4.6 People with an offending history

There are a number of agencies, both statutory and voluntary, dealing with ex-offenders. Many ex-offenders experience homelessness or are 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. The prison service has a Duty to Refer ensuring that the housing advice team is fully briefed on potential homeless applications from ex-offenders in advance of their release into the community.

4.7 Service users with multiple and complex needs

A small number of adults have significant and complex needs including problems with their mental and physical health. These adults require intensive support from a range of service providers to ensure they are supported into suitable accommodation and helped to sustain it. The costs associated with not supporting such adults with a 'team around' approach far exceed those associated with providing a multi-agency response and in many cases help prevent death.

5. What have we got in place and what else do we need?

Hartlepool Council has access to a range of accommodation and support options for service users experiencing homelessness and our response is tailored to an individual's assessed needs. This includes accommodation and support for young people as well as adults. In some cases this is commissioned and in other cases providers deliver supported exempt accommodation and claim appropriate subsidy costs for their services. Appendix 1 shows the current (November 2021) position.

5.1 Working in partnership

Preventing and alleviating homelessness and rough sleeping is everyone's business. The key to sustained success requires partnership support. We work collaboratively with a number of internal and external partner agencies. This includes for example:

- Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (formerly MHCLG)
- Internal council partnerships: Strategic Housing Management and the HRA / Private Sector Housing and Enforcement Public Protection / Community Safety and ASB team / Special Needs Housing / Planning Department
- The Homeless Prevention Partnership
- The Rough Sleeper Action Group
- Tees Valley Lettings Partnership
- North East Regional Homelessness Forum
- The VCS.

5.2 What do we know is missing and needs to be developed?

Hartlepool continues to deliver an effective homelessness service however the town is seeing rough sleeping more than in previous years. Everyone In has enabled us to establish further temporary accommodation and support options and this needs to be sustained. The recent national emergency in relation to COVID-19 will inevitably mean that there will be an increase in financial hardship, in vulnerability and therefore homelessness. Additionally, complex service users are on the increase and have multiple support needs; these clients require extensive time and resources to keep them housed, safe and able to begin recovery.

6. Objectives and actions required

OBJECTIVE 1: PREVENT AND RELIEVE HOMELESSNESS

- Ensure the newly restructured team is fit for purpose and suitably trained and equipped to undertake all statutory functions relating to homelessness
- Ensure public information is up-to-date, accurate and readily available for those experiencing homelessness
- Ensure the Homeless Prevention Partnership is strong, effective and appropriately supported to deliver on the homelessness action plan
- Maximise all opportunities for funding to support the delivery of our services
- Review all supported accommodation currently available in the town and ensure it delivers services and support that matches need
- Review the allocations policy ensuring it meets the needs of those most vulnerable
- Review 'Quality Homes' to ensure it delivers the principles of social lettings
- Undertake research into the value of a landlord accreditation scheme with a view to improvements to the private rented sector where needed
- Re-inforce the Duty to Refer process with key stakeholders so that effective communication and information sharing supports the accommodation of vulnerable adults
- Re-visit the 'Team Around' process ensuring adults with complex lives are effectively supported via a multi-agency approach
- Engage service users in our work allowing their voice to influence our approach – listen to and act upon the stories they can tell and learn from them what can work well
- Work collaboratively across the Tees Valley, the wider region and country on activities that are mutually beneficial
- Undertake a Needs Assessment and ensure our data is accurate and reported appropriately so we have a thorough understanding of need.

OBJECTIVE 2: END ROUGH SLEEPING

- Continue to collaborate with key partners in the Rough Sleeper Action Group; locate, identify and bring in rough sleepers through rapid response using the skills of agencies within the voluntary and community sector
- Continue to benefit from external experts in rough sleeping and their flexible approaches to locating rough sleepers out of hours
- Investigate the opportunity to operate a 'safe place to go' in Hartlepool collaboration with a suitable partner
- Address the root causes of rough sleeping tackling identified issues in collaboration with partners
- Explore alternative accommodation solutions including the Housing First model where appropriate
- Ensure provision of emergency accommodation for cold weather months (Severe Weather Emergency Protocol), including support for people to be able to move on.

OBJECTIVE 3: PROVIDE TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION, SUPPORT PEOPLE TO MOVE ON AND INCREASE ACCESS TO HOUSING

- Continue to provide an out of hours service so that the public and emergency services can make contact and we can secure safety for homeless people
- Ensure temporary accommodation is always available, accessible and of a good standard and used appropriately while homelessness assessments are undertaken
- Use “out of borough” placements as a last resort and only because it meets client needs
- Ensure strong relationships with Registered Providers and Private Rented Sector Landlords are in place so that a wide range of accommodation options are available
- Explore alternative accommodation options for service users maximising use of existing buildings and space where appropriate
- Ensure tenancy support is in place so that service users can be helped to move on from temporary accommodation into alternative housing with support plans in place as appropriate
- Strengthen our tenancy support and Housing First delivery process.

OBJECTIVE 4: SUPPORTING COMPLEX ADULTS

- Ensure appropriate staffing is in place to meet the needs of complex service users – consider co-location of other professionals to fully support effective interventions
- Ensure the team is trained in understanding the needs of complex service users and the impact of Trauma and Adverse Childhood Experiences on lives
- Review the current Team Around the Adult (TATI) procedures to ensure they are fit for purpose and address the needs of complex adults that are experiencing multiple issues including homelessness
- Work alongside the Substance Misuse service – we are stronger together given the shared service users that span across both areas
- Hold weekly multi agency meetings for service users with multiple needs and ensure multi agency support is in place to support effective interventions (the ‘Huddle’ method)
- Assess and secure suitable accommodation for complex service users using a range of options including commissioned supported accommodation, Housing First, support in dispersed accommodation
- Provide Tenancy Support to complex service users and ensure they have a plan and are supported to achieve agreed goals
- Make sure we have regular contact with our most complex service users and be confident that they are safe; alert appropriate partners where we do not think this is the case.

7. MONITORING THE STRATEGY AND PLAN

The Homelessness Prevention Partnership will have oversight of the strategy and will develop an action plan based on the core objectives. The Strategy will be reviewed annually. The Partnership will have oversight of the action plan and monitor progress.

The plan will:

- Detail all actions required to meet our core objectives
- Detail timescales for completion and identify named lead officers/ partners
- Highlight resource implications
- Identify gaps in service provision that need attention
- Indicate anticipated outcomes and measurements of success

8. CONTACT US

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Appendix 1

Current services and provision to alleviate and support those at risk of / experiencing homelessness.

Name of provider/ provision	Service description	Lead agency
'Housing Options' – Housing Advice and Homelessness Service	<p>Delivers day to day / office hours face to face and telephone advice and support to prevent and alleviate homelessness and rough sleeping.</p> <p>Delivers out of hours emergency service including weekends and bank holidays responding police and other emergency service needs</p>	Hartlepool Council, Housing Advice Team
Bed & Breakfast/ hotels	Used for emergency temporary accommodation 'out of office hours' when someone needs to be accommodated pending an assessment. Grant funding provided by DLUHC to support costs.	Hartlepool Council, Housing Advice Team [evenings/ weekends and bank holidays]
Exempt accommodation providers (EAPs)	Accommodation that is not commissioned by the local authority, instead using 'exempt' provisions of current Housing Benefit and Universal Credit Regulations. In such accommodation, rental levels in excess of private sector Local Housing Allowance Rates can be charged where providers indicate that they provide a level of 'care, support or supervision' to claimants.	Varies – includes registered providers (social landlords) as well as private organisations and charities.
Homeless adults with mental health needs	Flats and on-site support for homeless single adults with mental health needs	Creative Support
Commissioned accommodation and support – homeless adults	Contracts in place with Registered Providers for: Bedsits, crash pad and dispersed properties for adults with low to medium level needs (e.g. ex-offenders and substance misuse service users)	Home Group

	Houses and crash pads for adults with medium to high levels needs (e.g. ex-offenders, substance misuse service users) Outreach support service for those that have moved on	
Commissioned accommodation and support – homeless young people	Bedsits and crash pads for young people aged up to 18 and young people aged up to 25	Thirteen Sanctuary Supported Living
Commissioned accommodation and support – young people with children	Flats for young people (single/ couple) and their young child/ren	Thirteen
Rough Sleeper Accommodation Programme (RSAP)	Flats and houses for medium to high level needs adults that require support	Sanctuary Supported Living New Walk CiC Community Campus
Move On	Houses for adults that need low level help in the community	Home Group
Supported Lodgings	Help for young people aged 16-18 that live with another adult and receive day to day life skills support	Varies
Rough Sleeper support [and accommodation]	Regular 'sweeps' by trained staff of areas known to be used by rough sleepers to engage and bring them in	Cornerstone
Housing First	Designed for homeless people with complex support needs the model builds on the starting block of having your own home first thus creating the right climate for engaging with other support agencies to enable change	Hartlepool Council, Housing Advice Team using HBC and other registered providers properties