Hertsmere Borough Council

Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Review 2024

HERTSMERE

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ABOUT THIS REVIEW DOCUMENT

This document is the first formal stage in a process that will lead to a new Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy. The strategy will set out how Hertsmere Borough Council and its partners will prevent and relieve homelessness and rough sleeping in the borough over the next five years.

This document is a critical review of current practice intended to meet the requirements of section 2(1) of the Homelessness Act 2002 and Homelessness Code of Guidance. To achieve this, it sets out and analyses a range of information drawn from the council's databases and case recording systems and those of our partners. It supplements this with information on the national housing market obtained via publicly available sources

Part of the purpose and value of the review exercise is to allow us to ask questions so that we can produce a robust Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy and services for our residents that meet demonstrated and predicted need.

INTRODUCTION

This Review and the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy that will follow from it starts from the premise that everyone is Hertsmere can and should have a home. From this it follows that anyone who, at any time, is without a settled home has confronted one or more barriers to gaining or keeping one. The Review sets out to systematically identify these barriers and to try to quantify and qualify the problem.

Housing authorities are required by legislation (Homelessness Act 2002 and the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017) to carry out a periodic review of homelessness in their area. The purpose of the review is to determine the extent to which the population in the borough is homeless or at risk of becoming homeless, assess the likely extent in the future, identify what is currently being done and by whom and identify what resources are available to prevent and tackle homelessness.

Local housing authorities should use this understanding of homelessness in their area to inform their Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy. In addition, the Homelessness Code of Guidance sets out some requirements for a Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy. It should:

- Link to the wider contributory factors of homelessness such as health, wellbeing, employment and economic factors
- Be consistent with other corporate strategies and objectives
- Involve partners in implementing the strategic homelessness objectives
- Have an Action Plan to show how the strategic objectives will be achieved
- Be monitored and reviewed during the life of the Strategy

The main provisions for dealing with homelessness are contained in Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended). The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 came into force on 3 April 2018. It made significant changes to Part 7 of the 1996 Act. Its main impact was to place increased duties on local authorities to assess an applicant's needs and to prevent and relieve homelessness.

A person is threatened with homelessness if it is likely that they will become homeless within 56 days. Where a person is threatened with homelessness, the local authority will have a duty to take reasonable steps to prevent them from becoming homeless.

A person is statutorily homeless if they have no accommodation available for their occupation which they have a legal right to occupy and is reasonable for them to continue to occupy. If the person is statutorily homeless, the local housing authority will have some form of duty towards them. This ranges from providing advice and assistance, interim accommodation or a main housing duty to secure longer term accommodation for a continuing period. The extent of the duty will depend on whether or not they are, or may be, eligible for assistance, in priority need, intentionally homeless or have a local connection.

The priority need categories are set out in Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996 and are:

1. Pregnant women
2. Households with dependent children
3. 16 and 17 year olds and not looked after by social services
4. Care leavers aged 18, 19 or 20
5. People made homeless by an emergency such as a flood, fire or other disaster
6. People vulnerable as a result of old age, mental illness or physical disability, having been in care, having served in the Armed Forces, having been in custody, having to leave accommodation because of violence or abuse or those who are vulnerable for some other special reason/s

NATIONAL CONTEXT

- At the end of December 2023, there were 112,660 households in England living in temporary accommodation, including 145,800 children[1]
- A total of 317,430 households needed homelessness support from councils in England in 2023, the highest on record [1]
- A total of 25,910 households in England needed support (either accepted as homeless or at imminent risk of it) from their council to avoid becoming homeless after receiving a Section 21 notice in 2023, which is also a record high[1]
- A total of 3,898 people were sleeping rough on a single night in autumn 2023 in England. That statistic has increased by more than a quarter on the 3,069 people in 2022. Prior to 2022, this single number figure had been decreasing since 2017[1]
- Most people sleeping rough in England are male, aged over 26 years old and from the UK. This is similar to previous years[1]

Health and wellbeing

- People who have experienced homelessness are more likely to have poor physical and mental health than the general population and is both a cause and consequence of homelessness[18]
- Chronic and multiple health needs are common and often go untreated and homeless people are also far more vulnerable to issues relating to alcohol and drug use
- Multiple health needs alongside alcohol and drug use can act as a barrier to accessing mainstream health services[18]
- A research conducted in 2022 concluded that 78% of homeless people reported having a physical health condition compared to 37% for the general population[19]
- 44% of homeless people have a mental health diagnosis, in comparison with 23% of the general population[18]
- For men experiencing homelessness the average age of death is just 45, and for women it is just 43[20]
- Evidence shows that people who experience homelessness for three months or longer cost on average £4,298 per person to NHS services, £2,099 per person for mental health services and £11,991 per person in contact with the criminal justice system[21]
- It is clear that homelessness has a detrimental impact on health and wellbeing outcomes

REGIONAL CONTEXT

- In 2020, the South West Hertfordshire Strategic Housing Market Assessment set out future development needs for housing across the Housing Market Area (HMA) which consists of Hertsmere, St Albans, Three Rivers, Dacorum and Watford[2]
- As per the census of 2021, the total population of Hertfordshire was 1,198,801 and that of the South West Herts was 607,091. It has grown by since 2019 when it was 600,834. This is projected to reach 615,624 by 2043[2]
- 51% of the population of Hertfordshire reside in the South West Herts. House prices in the HMA are 91% above the national average, 55% above the regional and just 6% below London's 2017 housing values[2, 15]
- In 2019, those aged 65 and over represented 16.8% of South West Hertfordshire's population. This is predicted to rise to 22.7% by 2041. An ageing population will increase demands for different types of housing as well as accessible healthcare and local facilities[2]
- Hertsmere has a slight higher than the area average proportion of those aged over 75 years; 5.9% compared to 5.5% in South West Hertfordshire and this trend is predicted to continue [2]

Affordable housing need in South West Hertfordshire

There is an annual need for 1,066 affordable home ownership properties across South West Hertfordshire[5]. Across South West Hertfordshire, the assessment shows an annual need for 2,258 affordable rented homes by 2041[5].

House price trends

According to the Strategic Housing Market Assessment[5], in the year to September 2022 the median house price across South West Hertfordshire was £513,000 and that of Hertsmere was £547,500

The average property prices in South West Hertfordshire are very high in comparison to the rest of England, likely due to the areas proximity to London, high demand for housing, and strategic constraints which affect the supply of land for residential development

LOCAL CONTEXT

Hertsmere

- Hertsmere is a borough located north of London in Hertfordshire covering 38 square miles with a population of approximately 107,826[3]
- The main settlements are Borehamwood, Bushey, Potters Bar, Radlett and Shenley. There are a number of smaller settlements in rural parts of the borough
- Between the last two Censuses (held in 2011 and 2021), the population of Hertsmere increased by 7.8%, from around 100,000 in 2011 to 107,826 in 2021
- The population in the borough increased at a similar rate to the overall population of the East of England (8.3%), but by a greater percentage than the overall population of England (which increased by 6.6% since the 2011 Census)
- The borough was among the top 45% most densely populated English local authority areas at the last Census
- Between the last two Censuses, the average (median) age of Hertsmere increased by one year, from 39 to 40 years of age. Hertsmere had a slightly lower median age than the East of England as a whole (41 years) in 2021 but had the same median age to England (40 years)
- The number of people aged 50 to 64 years rose by around 2,900 (an increase of 15.8%), while the number of residents between 20 and 24 years fell by just under 450 (7.2% decrease)[3]
- The share of residents aged between 50 and 64 years increased by 1.4% between 2011 and 2021[3]

Figure 1. Comparison of residents by age group in Hertsmere as per 2011 and 2021 Census data

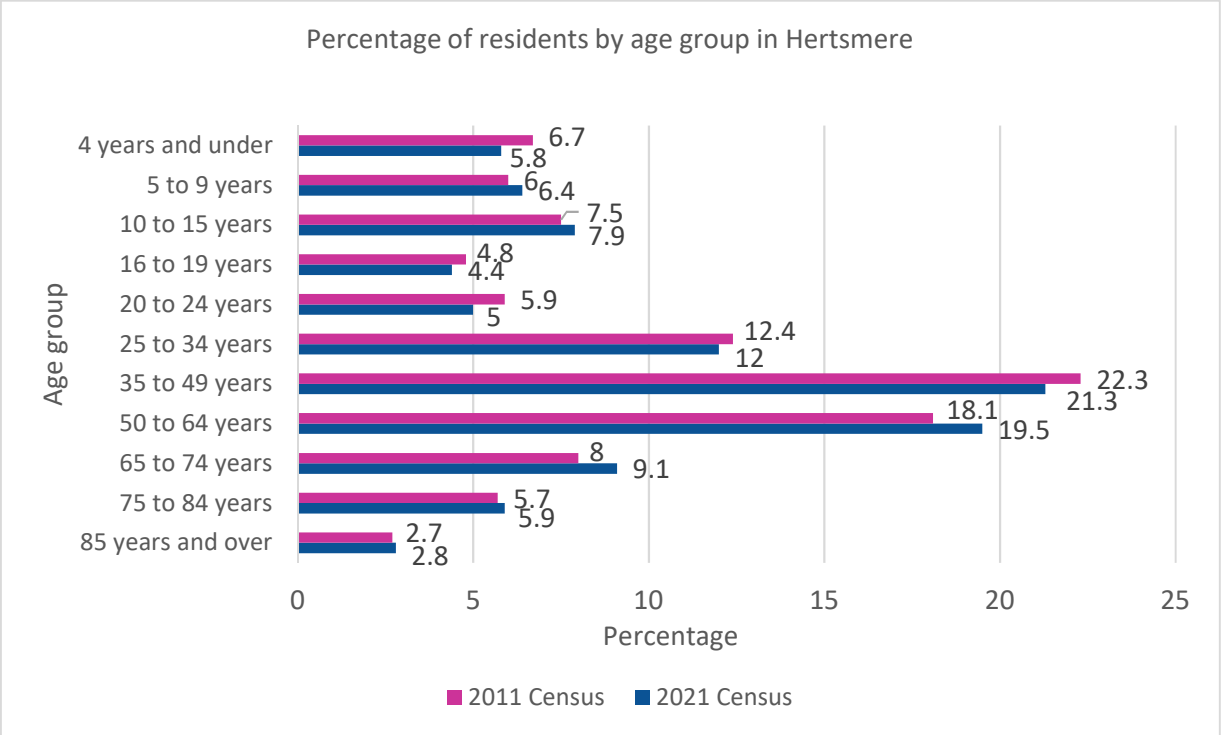
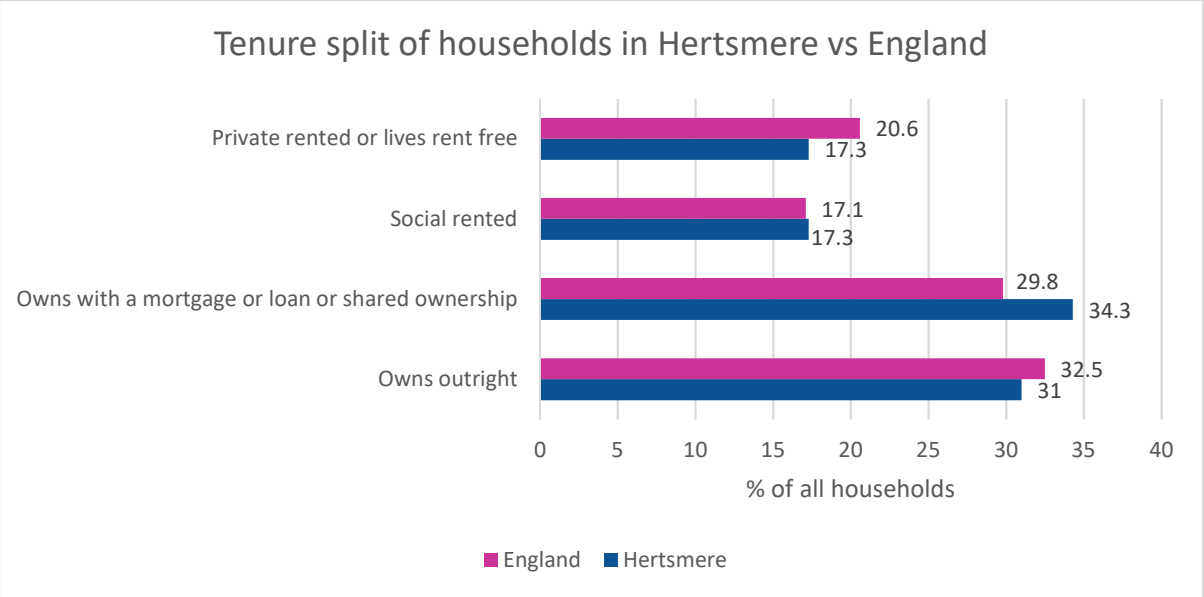


Figure 2. Comparison of tenure split of households in Hertsmere and England (Census 2021 data)



The percentage of households that own a house (mortgage, shared ownership etc.) is greater in Hertsmere as compared to the national average but those owning the property outright is lower. This may mean more households are affected by the increased mortgage costs experienced over the last year.

There are less households privately renting or living rent free than the national average although without the more detailed breakdown, it is difficult to gather more meaningful data on this as it is recognised that privately renting and living rent free are two very different situations. The Census 2021 data does not break this down any further therefore further analysis has been conducted on current housing for households that approach the council has homeless to understand this information in the context of homelessness.

The number of households in social rented properties is consistent with national averages.

Employment

- In 2023, the employment rate of Hertsmere was 70.7% which was lower than average for Great Britain which was 76.8%[22]. The employment rate is those of working age but includes those are 'economically inactive' (those who may not be seeking work for reasons such as early retirement, sickness and study)
- From December 2022 to December 2023, the unemployment rate increased from 3.1% to 3.5% in Hertsmere[24]. The average for Great Britain was 3.7%[24]. The unemployment rate is the number of unemployed people out of everyone 'economically active' in the market, which is everyone employed or looking for work
- The number of residents working 15 hours or less per week has increased from 10.6% in 2011 to 12.3% in 2021[7]
- It is harder to get and maintain employment when someone is experiencing or is at risk of homelessness[23]
- Pressures such as rising energy bills, trying to find genuinely affordable accommodation and insecure work can have a negative impact on physical and mental wellbeing[23]
- Without a decent and home, everyday life becomes more difficult and makes finding or continuing employment must more challenging. This could create a negative cycle with potential job losses or inability to get employment which further worsen the person's financial situation[23]
- Support and reasonable adjustments for employment may be available but can be difficult to access to stigma and discrimination
- Crisis conducted a survey which reported that 42% of respondents felt their employer would seek to terminate their contract if they were homeless[23]

Housing market in Hertsmere

Between June 2021 and June 2022, property prices in Hertsmere grew by an average of 1.2% (£7,411). Between 2012 and 2022, property prices on average grew by 5.9% per year.

There were 807 property sale transactions in Hertsmere during the 12 months to February 2024 [8, 9]

The average house price in Hertsmere was £490,000 in April 2024. Across the East of England, the average house price in April 2024 was £335,000. In April 2024, Hertsmere had the fifth highest average house price in the East of England.

Across Great Britain, a home sold for an average of £284,000 in April 2024.

According to research by the Office for National Statistics, average prices as of April 2024 in Hertsmere were:

- Detached properties: £1,047,000
- Semi-detached properties: £586,000
- Terraced properties: £445,000
- Flats and maisonettes: £304,000

As per the analysis conducted by PlumbNation, Hertsmere was ranked as third least affordable location to buy in 2023[10]. There has been a decrease in property prices in 2024 (see Figure 3), consistent with national trends, but prices still remain markedly higher than pre-2020.

Figure 3. Average property price change in Hertsmere[11,13]

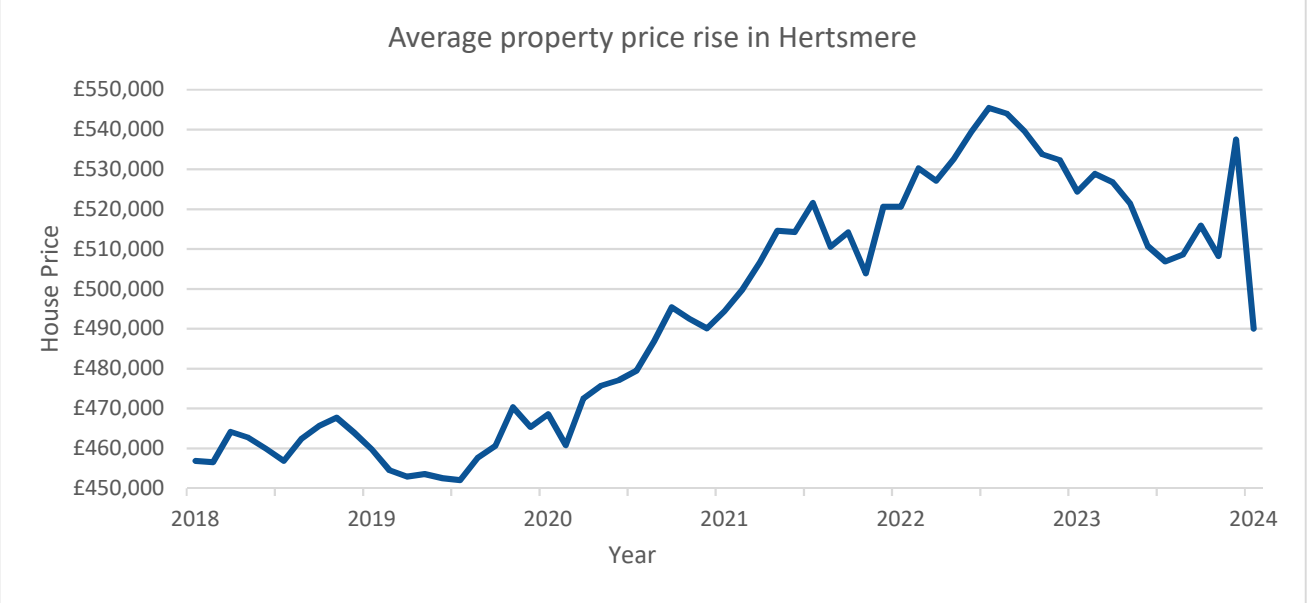


Table1: Comparison of rent levels for different products in Hertsmere[5]

Rent type /Bedroom size	1-bedroom	2-bedrooms	3-bedrooms	4-bedrooms
Social rent (2023)	£441	£523	£594	£653
Affordable rent (2023) *	£680	£865	£987	£992
Average market rent across Hertsmere	£1250 - £1350	£1600 - £2400	£1800 - £2700	£2500 - £3000
Local Housing Allowance (LHA) (South West Herts)	£947.40	£1,246.57	£1,495.91	£1,994.50
LHA (Outer North London)	£1,146.86	£1,396.16	£1,690.35	£2,193.97
LHA (South East Herts)	£832.69	£1,047.11	£1,366.26	£1,695.33

*Affordable rent homes are typically let at 80% of market rent, often capped at Local Housing Allowance rates.

Estimated household income required to buy and privately rent in Hertsmere[5]

The data below shows the estimated household incomes required to both buy and rent privately in Hertsmere:

- To buy: £79,000
- To privately rent: £42,000

Recent Land Registry data shows Hertsmere (with an average salary-to-price ratio of 14.1) as the 15th least affordable place to buy in Great Britain. The median estimated household income in Hertsmere is £43,700 compared to the £79,000 required to buy. To privately rent, a household income of £42,000 is required which is substantially higher than the lower quartile income for Hertsmere of £25,300 (South West Herts Local Housing Needs Assessment, 2020)[2,5].

Estimated proportion of households living in private rented sector able to buy and/or rent market housing without support in 2023

The data shows that 53% of the households in Hertsmere are unable to buy or rent privately without support[5].

Can afford to buy OR rent	15%
Can afford to rent but not buy	32%
Cannot afford to buy OR rent	53%

CURRENT LEVELS OF HOMELESSNESS

Demand on the Homelessness Team

The Homelessness Team are based in the council offices in Borehamwood and are available during normal working hours providing both a drop in and appointment system. An out-of-hours service is provided by the department.

Since the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 in April 2018 there has been substantial focus on preventing homelessness.

There has been a significant change in demand on the Homelessness Team with the average caseload of 40 compared to a maximum of 15 prior to the Homelessness Reduction Act. This is due to the requirement to provide homelessness prevention support for those meeting the 'homeless in the next 56 days' criteria coupled with national changes such as heightened cost of living pressures.

Table 2: Homelessness approaches made to the Housing Team

Year	No. of Homelessness Approaches
2019 - 20	822
2020 - 21	1017
2021 - 22	1339
2022 - 23	1481
2023 - 24	1731

There has been a consistent increase in the number of homelessness approaches over the past 5 years.

This can in part be explained by: increases in rent across the private rental sector making much of the housing locally unaffordable, an increase in mortgage interest rates which has implications of both owner occupiers and buy to let landlords who are subsequently increasing their rents and cost of living pressures.

It has been noted that there is reluctance from some private landlords and letting agents to rent households on low incomes and/or in receipt of welfare benefits, despite the change in law on this discrimination. The proposed eradication of Section 21 notices, whilst largely welcomed to provide security to tenants, has also worried landlords, resulting in a decreased pool of landlords.

Evictions from friends and family continues to account for a higher percentage of homelessness approaches.

Table 3: Percentage of homelessness approaches that were closed as 'advice only'

Year	Homelessness approaches	% homelessness approaches closed on 'advice only'
2019 - 20	822	52%
2020 - 21	1017	68%
2021 - 22	1339	70%
2022 - 23	1481	66%
2023 - 24	1731	47%

Whilst demands on the Housing Service continue to rise, the above table shows that the percentage of 'advice only' cases remains at a high level. However, in 23/24 there was a reduction of 19% in the percentage of homelessness approaches which could be closed as advice only and this is likely explained by the reasons for homelessness (discussed in more detail below).

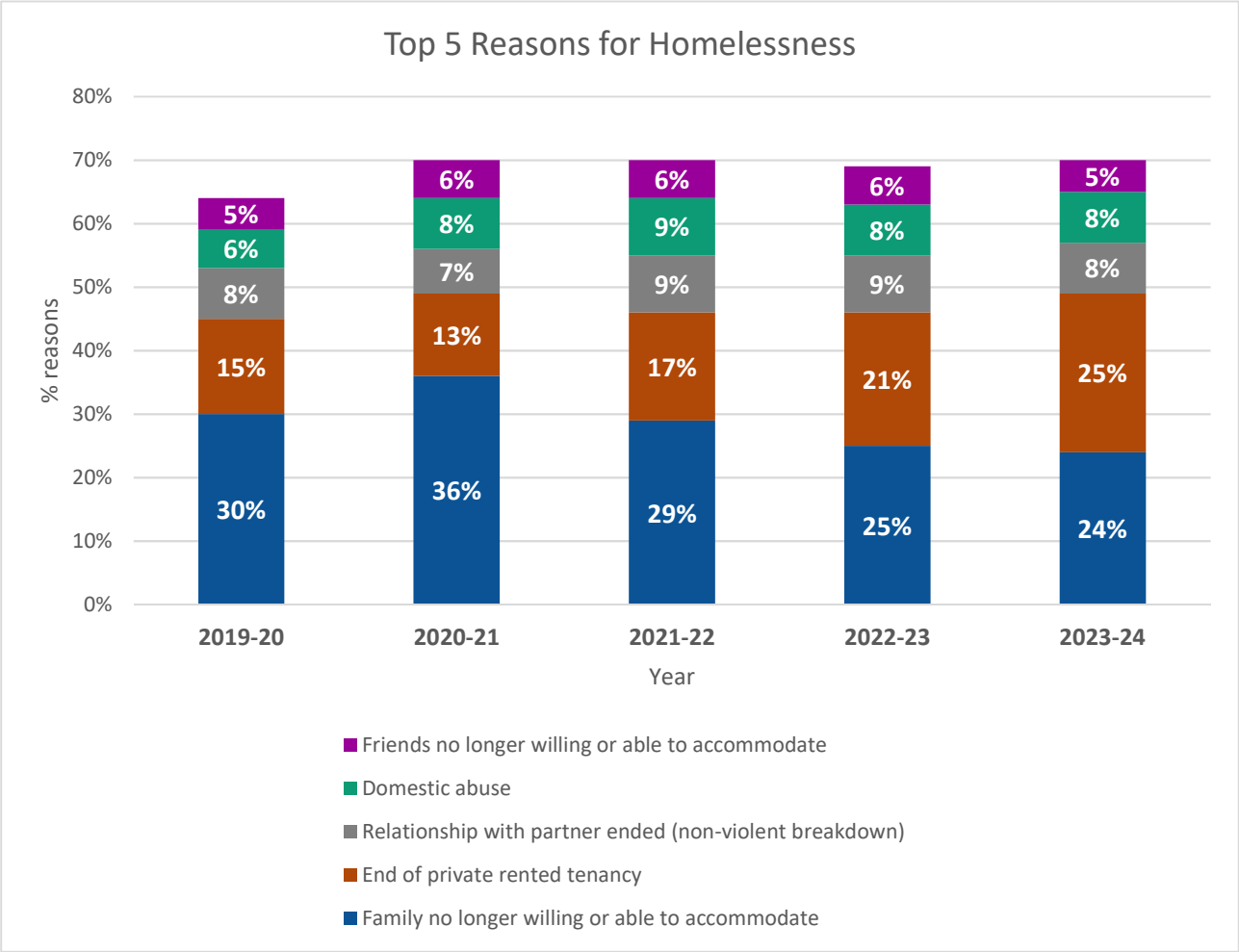
Table 4: Reasons for homelessness approaches in 2023-24

Reasons for Homelessness	2023-24
Departure from institution: Custody	30
Departure from institution: Looked After Child Placement	3
Departure from institution: Hospital (General + psychiatric)	9
Domestic abuse – Alleged perpetrator	22
Domestic abuse – Victim	138
End of private rented tenancy (due to landlord or tenant ending tenancy)	434
End of social rented tenancy	92
Eviction from supported housing	73
Family no longer willing or able to accommodate	411
Friends no longer willing or able to accommodate	88
Home no longer suitable due to disability / ill health	62
Mortgage repossession or sale of owner occupier property	38
Other forms of violence (Not Domestic)	43
Last settled accommodation not known	45
Property disrepair	18
Loss of accommodation from resettlement scheme or asylum seeker housing	48
Relationship with partner ended (non-violent breakdown)	135
Unsuccessful placement or exclusion from resettlement scheme/sponsorship	5
Voluntarily left accommodation to relocate	17
Fire, Flood or other emergency	5
Loss of tied accommodation	9
Left HM Forces	3
Others	3
Total	**1731**

The three main causes of homelessness in the borough are:

- End of private rented tenancy
- Family no longer willing or able to accommodate
- Domestic abuse where the victim is at risk of homelessness

Figure 4: Top 5 reasons for homelessness since past 5 years



Since the introduction of Domestic Abuse Act 2021, survivors of domestic abuse are automatically given 'priority need' status for housing. However the percentage of all homelessness caused by domestic abuse continues to remain relatively steady.

Table 5: Accommodation at the time of homelessness application for whom a Prevention Duty was owed in 2023-2024

Accommodation at the time of application	Prevention Duty owed in Percentage
Armed Forces accommodation	<1%
Caravan / houseboat	1%
Homeless on departure from institution: Custody	1%
Homeless on departure from institution: Hospital (psychiatric)	<1%
Living with family	34%
Living with friends	4%
Looked after children placement	<1%
National Asylum Support Service (NASS) accommodation	<1%
Owner-occupier	2%
Private rented sector: HMO (Houses of Multiple Occupation)	4%
Private rented sector: lodging (not with family or friends)	3%
Private rented sector: self-contained	39%
Refuge	1%
Registered Provider tenant	8%
Social rented supported housing or hostel	1%
Student accommodation	<1%
Temporary arrangements	<1%
Tied accommodation	1%
Total	100%

The majority of households who approached us and to whom we owed a Prevention Duty were living in private rented housing or living with family which is consistent with the main reasons for homelessness being; asked to leave by friends/family and evictions from private rented housing.

Homelessness prevention outcomes

Table 6: Prevention Duty ended through successful homelessness prevention

Time Period	Homelessness Approaches	Prevention Duty ended	Secured existing/alternative accommodation	% of Prevention Duties ended successfully
2019 - 20	822	135	43	32%
2020 - 21	1017	81	33	41%
2021 - 22	1339	144	72	50%
2022 - 23	1481	290	142	49%
2023 - 24	1731	334	168	50%

Since the implementation of Homelessness Reduction Act, considerable work has been done and processes implemented to intervene earlier to prevent homelessness.

Amongst the applicants whose Prevention Duty was ended in 23/24, 50% were supported to retain their existing accommodation or secured an alternative accommodation before they become homeless.

Table 7: The following table shows the reasons 'Prevention Duty' ended in 2023 - 24

Reason prevention duty ended	% households
56 days or more expired and no further action *(for example accommodation secured but not for 6 or more months)*	12%
Contact lost	10%
Homeless	21%
No longer eligible	1%
Refused to cooperate	<1%
Secured alternative accommodation for 6 or more months	19%
Secured existing accommodation for 6 or more months	32%
Withdrew application	5%

The main reason that the Prevention Duty was ended in 23/24 was due to the household remaining in their existing housing therefore preventing homelessness occurring. Only 21% were still homeless at the end of the Prevention Duty.

Table 8: Reasons for Relief Duty ending in 2023-24

Reason Relief duty ended	% of households
56 days elapsed	53%
Applicant has refused a suitable offer, which was not a final offer	1%
Contact lost	7%
Intentionally homeless from accommodation provided	<1%
Local connection referral accepted by other LA	2%
No longer eligible	1%
Notice served due to refusal to cooperate	1%
Refused final accommodation or final Part 6 offer	3%
Secured accommodation for 12 months	11%
Secured accommodation for 6 months	17%
Withdrew application	6%

Table 9: Accommodation outcome at the end of Relief Duty 2023-24

Accommodation outcome at the end of Relief Duty	% of households
Caravan / houseboat	<1%
Secured Council tenancy	<1%
No fixed abode: not rough sleeping	19%
No fixed abode: rough sleeping	1%
Not known	11%
Other *(for example custody)*	7%
Owner-occupier	<1%
Private rented sector: HMO	3%
Private rented sector: self-contained	9%
Registered Provider tenancy	3%
Social rented supported housing or hostel	14%
Staying with family	7%
Staying with friends	4%
Temporary accommodation own arrangement	2%
Temporary accommodation provided by local authority	18%
Tied accommodation	<1%

Those with an accommodation outcome *Not known* are mainly record as such due to their application being withdrawn and/or contact lost.

Those with accommodation outcome *No Fixed Abode* include single individuals that have been found not in priority need.

Table 10: Breakdown of Main Duty acceptances by household type

	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Main Duty accepted under section s193 (total number)	111	82	60	108	87
Family with dependent children	84	58	39	64	61
Singles	25	23	20	42	25
Family with no dependent children	2	1	1	2	1

- The majority of the households accepted as homeless are families with children
- Although the homeless approaches have gone up significantly, the number of households owed a Main Duty has dropped
- The council has nomination rights to additional provision of supported housing to accommodate single individuals which explains why there has been a decrease in Main Duty acceptances for this cohort. In addition to this, the social housing stock in Hertsmere contains a high percentage of one bedroom properties and therefore eligible individuals may be offered properties via the housing register much quicker than larger families

Table 11: Homelessness acceptances by Priority Need

Priority Need category	2019 - 20	2020 - 21	2021 - 22	2022 - 23	2023 - 24
Applicant is /household includes a pregnant woman	9	3	3	9	6
Emergency (Fire, Flood, etc.)	0	0	0	2	0
Domestic abuse	4	1	3	9	0
Dependent children	74	52	33	54	55
Vulnerable as fled home because of violence / threat of violence (not domestic abuse)	0	1	0	6	3
Mental illness/disability	9	10	9	17	11
Physical disability/illness	9	9	10	10	10
Care leaver 18-20 years old	1	1	0	0	0
Care leaver 21+	1	1	0	0	0
Old age	1	1	1	0	0
Been in custody/remand	1	1	0	1	0
Other	2	1	0	0	0
Learning difficulty	0	1	1	0	2
Total	111	82	60	108	87

- It is clear from the above table that the acceptance rate is higher in households with dependent children and/or pregnant women and households with physical and mental health problems. In order to be classed as priority need through poor mental health there needs to be quite significant health issues that impact on a person's ability to fend for themselves and cope if they are roofless It is also noted that families with children may have a household member with mental health challenges but as this isn't their main priority need this can go un-noted in this particular data set
- Despite domestic abuse being one of the main reasons for homelessness, there have been very few Main Duty acceptances due to this. This means that the majority of these households will have another priority need such as dependent children
- The absence of any 16/17 year olds accepted as homeless can be explained by the excellent partnership working between Hertsmere Borough Council, Hertfordshire County Council and County Council commissioned local charity Herts Young Homeless to whom all young people are referred for support and assistance

Table 12: Breakdown of Main Duty acceptances by age

Age	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
16-24	27%	29%	23%	18%	17%
25-44	54%	61%	55%	56%	59%
45-59	15%	7%	18%	26%	21%
60+	4%	2%	3%	0%	3%

The age profile is largely in line with the national picture[6] – the majority of households owed a duty had the main applicants' age between 25 - 44.

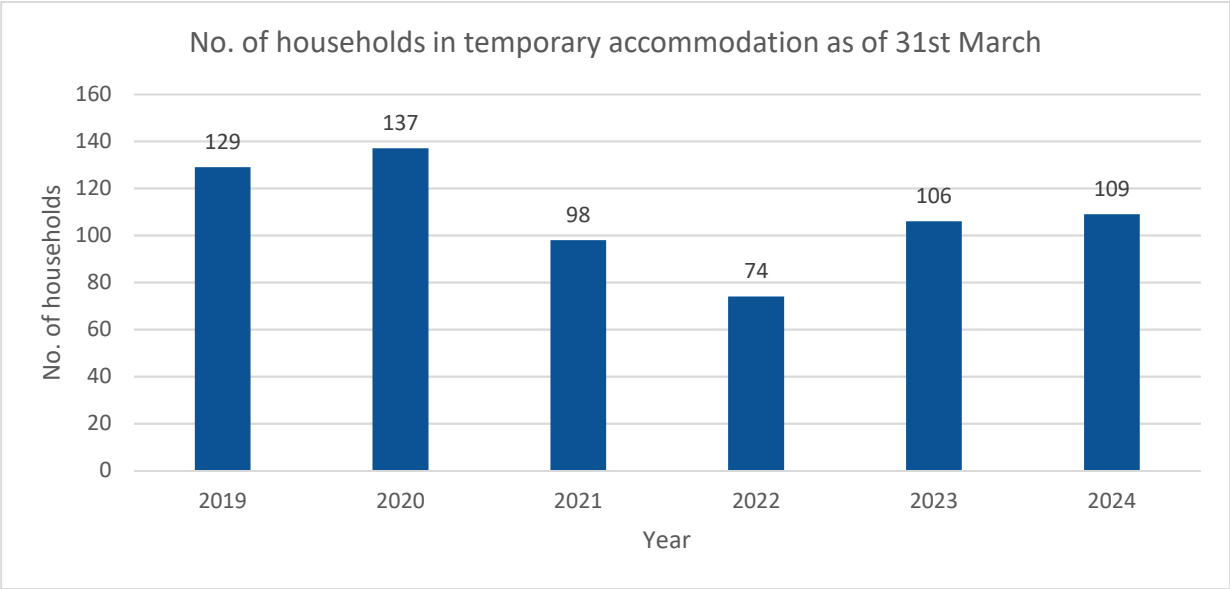
Table 13: Breakdown of Main Duty acceptances by self-reported ethnicity

Ethnic Origin	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	Ethnicity in Hertsmere's Census 2021
White (British, English, Scottish, Irish, Other)	52%	61%	62%	63%	57%	77%
White: Gypsy or Irish Traveller	1%	0%	3%	1%	1%	Not available
Mixed Ethnicity Couple	2%	6%	7%	3%	6%	4%
Black (Black British African, Black British Caribbean, Black British)	9%	11%	15%	15%	17%	5%
Asian (Asian, Asian British, Asian British Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Indian, Chinese, Other)	2%	1%	8%	11%	11%	11%
Other	1%	2%	<1%	6%	5%	4%
Prefer not to say	33%	18%	5%	2%	2%	<1%

- The above data represents the Main Duty acceptances as per ethnicity group since 2019 and the ethnic composition of Hertsmere as per the Census 2021
- When comparing the household composition of homelessness Main Duty cases and the Census 2021 data, there is a constituency between the two for some ethnicities such as those identifying as Asian, a Mixed Ethnicity Couple and Other. There are less homelessness acceptances for those identifying as a White household than the borough's census data (57% compared to 77%) and more for those identifying as a Black household (17% compared to 5%). This suggests that Black families may have a higher likelihood of becoming homeless
- It is also noted that those in the council's homelessness data registering as 'Prefer not to say' has reduced from 33% in 2019/20 to just 2% in 23/24 which shows a large improvement in this area

TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION

Figure 5: Number in temporary accommodation at the end of each financial year



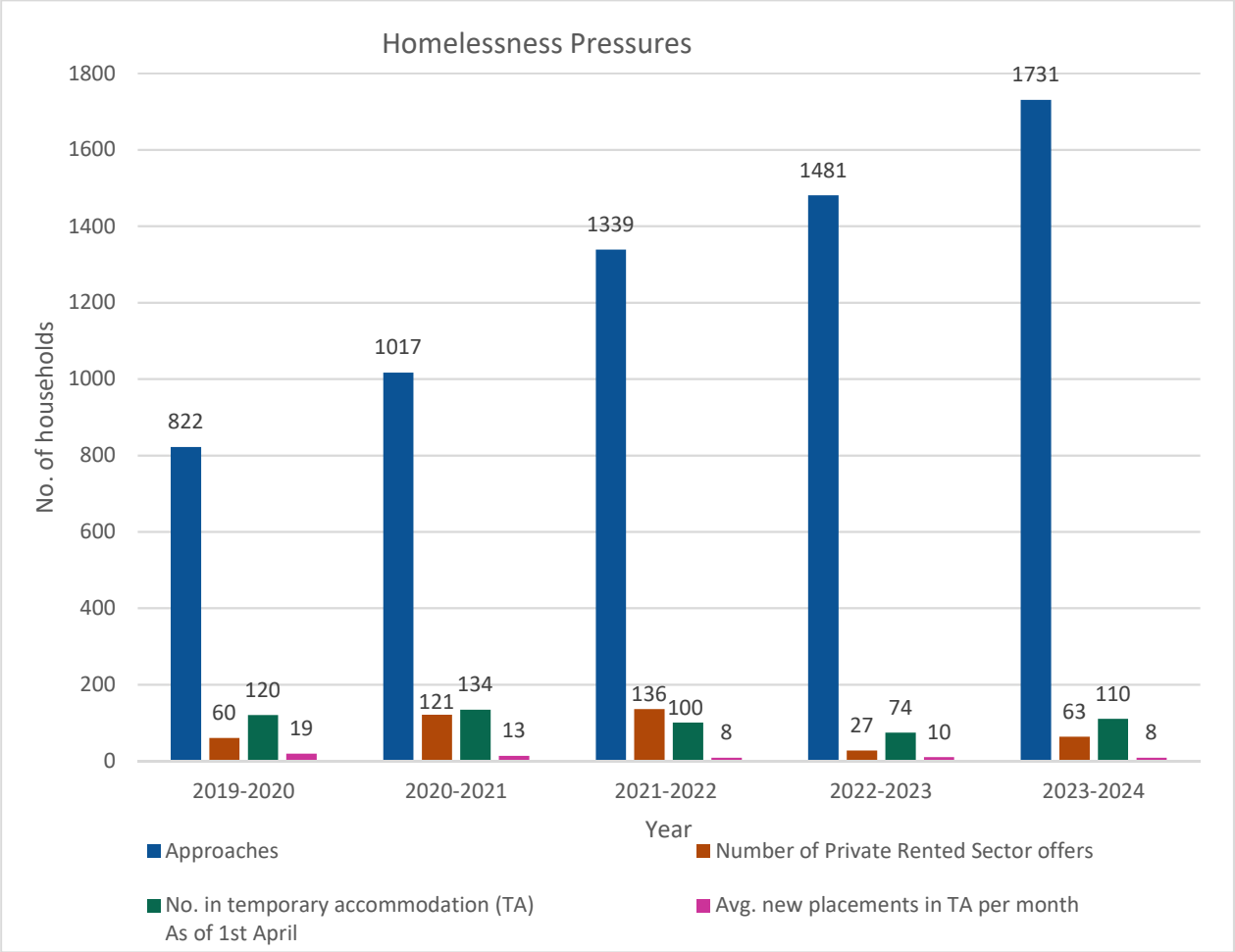
- Temporary accommodation (TA) is used by the council:

1) During the Relief stage of homelessness whilst a household's homelessness application is being assessed
2) For households where the Council has accepted a Main Duty under Section 193(2) and this accommodation is provided until a suitable offer of longer term housing to discharge that duty can be made

- Temporary accommodation could be self-contained or shared accommodation, either through a private or social accommodation provider, or within the council's limited amount of housing stock used specifically for temporary accommodation. Hotels may be used when necessary
- The council currently owns 70 properties which are used for temporary accommodation

- The focus on homelessness prevention has meant that, although homelessness approaches have increased significantly, households in temporary accommodation still remain lower than pre Covid-19 levels
- The drop in households in temporary accommodation in 2022 can largely be explained by an increase in social housing lets following a period of delays in new lettings and new developments being completed due to Covid-19
- Temporary accommodation figures don't include those placed in our supported housing scheme which opened in September 2021, partly funded by the Rough Sleeping Initiative (RSI) fund

Figure 6: Homelessness pressures since 2019



- Homelessness approaches have increased since 2019 by 111%
- Following two successful years procuring private rented sector properties to prevent and relieve homelessness, it has become more challenging to find suitable and affordable properties. Despite this, the focus on homelessness prevention has meant that temporary accommodation still remains lower than pre Covid-19 levels.
- Since the introduction of Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, significant early intervention has been implemented to prevent homelessness. This explains the lower number in the average new temporary accommodation placements per month

SOCIAL HOUSING

As a non-stock holding local authority, the council does not own or manage any social housing. The social housing in the borough is owned and managed by a number of housing associations.

Very few of these properties become available to rent each year; consequently demand outstrips supply and only families who have an identified housing need are likely to secure accommodation. The council has nomination rights to the majority of vacancies that become available. Nominations are made only to persons that are on the council's housing register.

Being on the council's housing register will not guarantee an offer of social housing. Applicants will be given other options and advice as an alternative to social housing that may help to improve the current housing situation.

Table 14: Demand of social housing vs lets in 2023-24

Total applicants and lets in 2023-24				
Property Size	Applicants as of 1st April 2023	New Demand (No. of Applications accepted in 2023/24)	Lets Throughout 2023/24	% of Lets Compared to Applicants
1 bedroom need	222	150	116	31
2 bedroom need	158	89	80	32
3 bedroom need	222	36	25	10
4 bedroom need	31	4	2	6
Totals	**633**	**279**	**223**	**24**

The above table shows the number of applicants and lets as per property size. The % lets for 3 bedroom and 4 bedroom properties is very low. This is mainly due to the lack of larger properties that are available at social or affordable rent for large families.

As of 1st April 2024, there were 643 applicants on the housing register.

Table 15: Social housing need by number of bedrooms as of 1st April 2024

Bedroom need on Housing Register	No. of applicants
1 bed	237
2 bed	157
3 bed	222
4 bed	27

Table 16: Applications on the housing register on 1st April

Number of applicants on housing register as of						
Property Size	**1st April 2019**	**1st April 2020**	**1st April 2021**	**1st April 2022**	**1st April 2023**	**1st April 2024**
1 bedroom need	150	153	191	189	222	237
2 bedroom need	189	207	185	116	158	157
3 bedroom need	176	191	216	214	222	222
4 bedroom need	16	18	22	23	31	27
Totals	**531**	**569**	**614**	**542**	**633**	**643**

The above table shows the number of applications on housing register each year on 1st April. There has been a significant rise in the number of applications since 2019. There has been a consistent high need for larger properties.

After an increase in 2021, the slight drop in 2022 can largely be explained by an increase in social housing lets following a period of delays in new lettings and new developments being completed due to Covid-19. The demand has not returned to the lower levels experienced in 2019 and 2020.

PROPERTY DISREPAIR

Private landlords must make sure the homes they rent to tenants complies with housing health and safety standards. Any hazards that are identified will be categorised according to how serious a risk they present.

If a landlord fails to take the necessary action, the tenant can ask the council for help. An officer will contact the tenant to discuss their concerns, which may result in an inspection of the property. If the inspection reveals the presence of unsafe conditions, the landlord will be notified of appropriate remedial works for which they are responsible. If the landlord fails to carry out the works the council will take any enforcement action they are able to.

Table 17: Complaints received related to the conditions of a residents' home

Year	No. of complaints received
2019-20	116
2020-21	102
2021-22	118
2022-23	110
2023-24	229

The above table shows the number of complaints received every year. There has been a spike in the complaints received in 2023-24. This could be attributed to the Awaab's Law campaign and other awareness generated via the media at a national and local level.

ROUGH SLEEPING

Rough sleeping is one of the most visible types of homelessness. Rough sleeping includes sleeping outside or in places that aren't designed for people to live in including cars, doorways and abandoned buildings. Rough sleepers are one of the most vulnerable groups in society. Studies have found strong correlations between homelessness and a multiplicity, and increased severity, of both physical and mental health conditions.[16]

The number of people estimated to be sleeping rough in England on a single night in the autumn of 2023 is 3,898 which has risen for the second year in a row, but remains lower than the peak in 2017 [14]

There are many reasons why people may become street homeless. The lack of affordable housing, poverty, unemployment and life events, like the breakdown of relationships and discharge from the Armed Forces can cause homelessness.

NO SECOND NIGHT OUT

No Second Night Out (NSNO) is a national initiative that aims to ensure that those who are rough sleeping for the first time don't spend a second night on the streets and the council implemented this initiative in 2019. The council's aim is to ensure that there is a rapid response to new rough sleepers, and that they are provided with an offer that means they do not have to sleep out for a second night[16]

The five key principles of No Second Night Out are:

1. Identify rough sleepers and help them immediately
2. Encourage a community response by helping the public to report when they see rough sleepers
3. Assess rough sleepers' needs quickly and safely
4. Access emergency accommodation and other services to help support the individual
5. Reconnecting to support, accommodation and family and friends in this country or elsewhere

Since the launch of No Second Night Out (NSNO) in 2019, Hertsmere Borough Council has accommodated 96 individuals. The council also launched a No First Night Out (NFNO) scheme which allows individuals to be placed in a funded supported housing scheme if there is availability and since launch it has accommodated 34 individuals. The council uses StreetLink alongside intelligence reported directly from partners and members of the public to identify rough sleepers.

Table 18: Number of people sleeping rough in Hertsmere on a single night in Autumn each year

Year	No of Rough Sleepers in the borough
2019	7
2020	11
2021	4
2022	2
2023	6

Substantial work has been carried out by the team to reduce rough sleeping within the borough. There was a considerable decrease in the number of rough sleepers in 2021 and 2022. However, the rising cost of living, an increase in individuals with complex needs, and housing need for those leaving asylum accommodations have all contributed to the steady rise in 2023.

REVIEW OF ACTIVITIES TO PREVENT HOMELESSNESS

Housing advice

- The council provides its own homelessness service from its main office in Borehamwood, delivering frontline housing advice and information to people approaching the Council in housing need
- The Homelessness Prevention Officers provide thorough advice to all households who approach as homeless and individual assessments are carried out to determine any additional duty the council may owe to the household
- A lot of emphasis is placed on early intervention to prevent homelessness
- Homelessness prevention funds may be used to offset rent arrears and to bridge the gap between benefits/affordability and rent. This is strictly on a case-by-case basis
- The Homelessness Prevention team includes officers who specialise in a variety of specific service areas: working with young people, private sector housing law, domestic abuse etc. Home visits may be carried out in cases of threatened homelessness from family or friends

Housing register and the council's Allocations Policy

- The Council does not own any housing stock. Social housing in the borough is provided by a number of housing associations
- Anybody can approach the council for housing advice and assistance but due to the limited amount of social housing in Hertsmere the council has set out eligibility criteria in its Allocation Policy, therefore not everybody can join the housing register
- The Housing Options team will assess applications to the Housing Register ensuring applicants' needs are correctly assessed, that they receive appropriate priority banding, and information and advice is provided about how the current housing register process works
- The Council has nomination rights of between 75% and 100% of vacant properties owned by housing associations within the borough
- There are a high number of one-bedroom homes within the affordable housing stock and older persons housing so single people and older people tend to be housed through the Housing Register much quicker than households requiring larger properties

Debt and money advice

- The local Citizens Advice offers an advice and information service to people who live and work in the community
- The CAB receives funding from the Council to provide generalist housing advice and a specialist money advice and debt service
- The council has a pre-tenancy training course to support households before starting a new social or private rented tenancy. This training offers guidance on a range of topics including what to expect as a tenant, landlord responsibilities and how to budget successfully

Private rented offer scheme: Let with Hertsmere

- The Council runs a successful private rented offer scheme called Let with Hertsmere to assist local homeless households who are unable to afford a deposit and who meet certain criteria to access housing in the private rented sector
- The scheme offers a range of incentives to landlords and letting agents:
  - A cash incentive scheme offering a one off cash payment or
  - A rent deposit scheme offering two months' rent placed in a deposit bond alongside support through the tenancy
- The scheme has grown via good reviews and word-of-mouth referrals. However with the rising market rents, the team have found it more difficult to procure suitable and affordable properties and therefore must now consider more affordable areas
- 204 tenancies have been supported via the scheme

Work in schools

The council provides funding to Herts Young Homeless to deliver a schools programme in Hertsmere covering topics relating to preventing homelessness in future, conflict resolution and engaging in healthy lifestyle behaviours. Last year this programme supported 12,000 students in Hertfordshire, over 1800 of which were in Hertsmere.

Social landlords

Since the last Homelessness Review and Strategy, significant progress has been made on working with our housing association partners. The team now liaise regularly with our largest housing association to jointly prevent evictions when there is a risk. Early notification allows the Homelessness Prevention team to work with the household to try to prevent eviction.

Many housing associations have tenancy sustainment teams who provide advice and support to their tenants.

Partnerships

- The Council recognises the important of partnership working to prevent homelessness. There are a number of examples of successful partnerships such as working across the county with other districts and Hertfordshire County Council which allows the council to be part of new initiatives and share good practice
- Strategic meetings focused on homelessness, housing development and risk management and operational meetings focused on tackling hoarding and anti-social behaviour all form part of the council's commitment to partnership working
- The council works well with Hertfordshire County Council's Adults and Children Services including joint funding services and outcomes include the development and implementation of a Joint Housing Protocol with Children Services
- The council provides funding to Survivors Against Domestic Abuse (SADA) and St Albans and Hertsmere Refuge in order that specialist services can provide support to those that need it
- More work could be done to enhance partnership working including restarting the Homelessness Forum and Landlord Forum
- Further work to enhance our 'person centred approach' could be implemented, embedding the Making Every Adult Matter (MEAM) principles more formally into service delivery

No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF)

- Those with a No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) condition usually means they are subject to immigration control and therefore cannot claim public funds such as benefits or housing assistance. Families with a NRPF condition are supported by Hertfordshire County Council as the lead authority for Children Services therefore those that are known to Hertsmere Borough Council are often those with no children.
- Whilst those known to the council with NRPF remain low, these individuals are more likely to be rough sleeping or at risk of rough sleeping. The council provides assistance via outreach and signposts individuals to appropriate services
- The council is able to access NPRF Connect, in partnership with Hertfordshire County Council, which is a national database for councils which allows the department to look up a person's immigration status to ensure the support is tailored accordingly

Refugee and asylum seekers

- Since the last homelessness review, there has been an increase nationally in asylum seekers
- In 2023, 67,337 applications for asylum were made in the UK[17]
- There has also been increased demand under the government's Safe and Legal resettlement routes including the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme, Ukrainian Resettlement Schemes and both the Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy and the Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme
- The council has seen an increased demand for homelessness services from this cohort
- Partnership working with the Home Office, Strategic Migration Partnership and Hertfordshire County Council alongside key voluntary sector partners has been key to preventing and relieving homelessness for those that have approached and are eligible for assistance
- The council makes use of interpreter services for any customer whose first language is not English

CONSIDERING THE NEEDS OF VULNERABLE GROUPS

Rough sleepers

- The number of rough sleepers in Hertsmere remains relatively low, with no rough sleepers at the time of this review. However, there is a relatively constant flow of new rough sleepers in the area
- The council utilises Rough Sleeping Initiative funding to fund a role focused on supporting those who are rough sleeping or at risk of rough sleeping
- Referrals are received through the national StreetLink scheme and from other local organisations. Our Rough Sleeping Coordinator conducts outreach visits and works with individuals to encourage them to move in to short-term accommodation offered whilst longer-term options are explored
- The council operates a No Second Night Out scheme, offering temporary housing to all those who are eligible. Support will be provided to support individuals to be ready for longer-term housing, with the aim that no rough sleeper will return to the street
- The council recognises that sometimes those sleeping rough may not want to engage with services but they will continue to be supported via the outreach service
- A Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP) provision also operates each winter and is available to any rough sleeper who is eligible but does not want to engage with the No Second Night Out scheme
- It is recognised that there is a cohort of individuals at risk of rough sleeping and therefore the council also works with these individuals to try to prevent rough sleeping initially. This may be via referrals into nearby hostels, private rented housing or living with family/friends
- The council's ability to provide this level of support is heavily reliant on Rough Sleeping Initiative funding which is available until March 2025. It is hoped there will be continuation of funding to allow these services to remain in place as the schemes have been highly successful

Vulnerable families

- There are a range of reasons families may become homeless. Having to leave their current home and move into temporary accommodation may be difficult for the family and they may be moving further away from family and friends
- The council works closely Hertfordshire County Council's Children and Adult Care Services alongside their Families First initiative
- The council has nomination rights to a supported housing scheme managed by Sapphire Independent Housing, used as temporary accommodation, where low level support is provided to those in housing need
- Citizens Advice are able to offer advice to families on a range of areas
- Local Foodbanks can provide emergency food aid to those in need

Young people and care leavers

- The Council works in partnership with Hertfordshire County Council to provide assistance to young people and care leavers at risk of homelessness
- The council has committed to a Joint Housing Protocol for 16/17 year olds and care leavers which has been adopted across Hertfordshire
- Funding from the council supports the provision of crashpad spaces across the county for young people which are provided by a range of partners commissioned by Hertfordshire County Council. This means the number of young people the council place into temporary accommodation is low
- However when placement is needed, it can be extremely difficult as many providers will not accept 16/17 year olds. The council has therefore converted a temporary accommodation unit into an emergency crashpad for 16/17 year olds
- A number of supported housing projects operate within the borough including Townsend House, a hostel for young women and young parents run by Sapphire Independent Housing
- In addition, Peabody run a scheme for single people aged 16-25 with low support needs who are homeless or in housing need. This project also accepts young pregnant women and single parents with children who have a local connection to Hertsmere.
- The council also provides funding to Herts Young Homeless to provide sessions in schools focused on the early prevention of homelessness

Survivors of domestic abuse

- The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 sets out a number of new requirements for local housing authorities including extending homelessness priority need to victims who are homeless as a result of domestic abuse and eligible for assistance. This meant the council no longer needs to consider if the person was vulnerable as a result of their abuse to be in priority need
- The council has good links with domestic abuse services including St Albans & Hertsmere Refuge and SADA (Survivors Against Domestic Abuse) who aim to provide a safe, comfortable and conflict free environment for survivors of domestic abuse
- Accommodation options are often more limited for male survivors therefore they may be placed in temporary accommodation and receive floating support instead
- The Herts Domestic Abuse Helpline provides a confidential, free support and referral service for anyone affected by domestic abuse. It is a registered charity and has been operational for 15 years
- The Housing team ensure they are involved in multi-agency partnership working around domestic abuse including attendance at Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARAC) which aims to reduce the risk of serious harm to high-risk victims and their children
- The team also attend quarterly St Albans and Hertsmere Domestic Abuse Forum meetings. This forum brings together statutory and voluntary agencies and organisations that support those affected or concerned by domestic abuse, working across St Albans and Hertsmere

People with mental health needs

- Significant work has been undertaken since the last Review to support those with mental ill health
- The council has two roles funded via RSI funding who hold a caseload of customers to support; providing assistance and signposting to relevant services including when they are struggling with their mental health
- However, it is recognised that access to these services can be challenging due to the high demand and often there are lengthy waiting times for support
- The Housing department has developed good relationships with a range of services including the Community Mental Health Team and Hertfordshire Partnership Foundation Trust alongside voluntary sector partners
- Referrals are regularly made to services including to council led Multi-Disciplinary Meetings
- The council has made referrals to the new Making Every Adult Matter (MEAM) service led by Hertfordshire County Council and has provided funding for this. More work is needed to formally embed the MEAM principles into the day to day operations of the Housing team
- Hospital discharges can often be problematic and good working relationships have been developed with in-patient mental health wards and the NHS and Integrated Care Board (ICB)

Offenders, former offenders and those at risk of offending

- The council works with local Probation teams to support those who may be homeless following a custodial sentence; this includes taking homelessness applications before release
- Local Probation services attended the council's Community Safety Board to ensure cohesion in addressing community safety across the borough
- The housing team attend monthly Multi-Agency Risk Reduction Group (MARRG) meetings where those individuals who are at risk, whether they be a perpetrator, victim or at risk of becoming either are discussed and managed locally

People with substance misuse concerns

- Those approaching with support needs such as drug and alcohol misuse are often supported by the council's Rough Sleeping and Tenancy Support Officer. This includes those at risk of homeless, homeless and in temporary accommodation or homeless and rough sleeping
- There are a range of services to support those with drug and alcohol misuse challenges; Turning Point, Emergency Futures, Change Grow Live (CGL), Oxygen Routes and statutory mental health services
- Those that are eligible may be considered for a supported housing scheme run by the One YMCA that the council has full nomination rights to
- These individuals may be discussed at relevant meetings such as the council's Multi-Disciplinary Team Meetings held with other partners, the Multi Agency Risk Reduction Group (MARRG) or referred to MEAM

Older people

- The number of older people becoming homeless remains relatively low at less than 4% each year since 2019. Normally the council will not consider actively sourcing private rented housing for those over the age of 60 who have approached the council as homeless and instead will encourage them to join the housing register if they are eligible
- There are a range of older persons housing and flexi-care schemes available via the council's housing association partners which are age restricted

Modern slavery and human trafficking

The council has strong links with county wide modern slavery and human trafficking work including the Hertfordshire Modern Slavery Partnership and will make referrals to the National Referral Mechanism when necessary. The Community Safety Partnership lead on this area of work to minimise risk and implement schemes to identify victims.

People with a learning or physical disability

- It can be more challenging to find housing for those with either a learning or physical disability depending on the severity of the disability due to limited suitable housing available
- Whilst the number of homeless households with a physical disability is low, so is the number of adapted properties both from a temporary accommodation and longer-term housing perspective. The Housing department has begun liaising with developers and providing information to the council's Asset Management team to secure new build housing which is either adapted or adaptable
- Those with learning difficulties may struggle to live independently and the council therefore makes referrals to specialist housing providers alongside considering the options available via the housing register and Let with Hertsmere
- Whilst the homelessness acceptances show low levels of priority need due to physical disabilities and even fewer for learning disabilities, the council recognises these figures will in practice be much higher and 'hidden' due to other overriding priority need reasons. For example if a household has a member with a learning disability, but the household has children, the priority need recorded is likely to be the dependent children as opposed to the disability. Therefore more data needs to be captured to try to understand the more realistic numbers
- Hertfordshire County Council's Supported Accommodation Strategy 2017 – 2027 sets out a priority to actively reduce long stay residential care home places with investment focused on supported living type services where individuals have their own tenancies
- The Council engages with Adult Care Services on both a strategic and operational level
- The team recently received training on supporting those with ADHD and autism

Armed Forces personnel

- The Armed Forces Covenant is a promise by the nation to ensure that those who serve or who have served in the Armed Forces and their families are treated fairly and focuses on ensuring the armed forces community are not disadvantaged when accessing services
- The Council is a partner to the Hertfordshire Armed Forces Covenant; provision is made within the council's Allocations Policy to support those who serve or have served in the Armed Forces. Members of the Armed Forces are not required to demonstrate a local connection in order to join the housing register. Those that can demonstrate a local connection with Hertsmere receive additional priority for rehousing

FUTURE LEVELS OF HOMELESSNESS

- It is difficult to accurately predict future levels of homelessness; however demand is expected to continue to rise nationally[12]
- The council expects the increase in homelessness demand to continue with cost of living and other pressures faced by households
- The introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 has ensured that advice and support is delivered to anybody facing homelessness to try to prevent their homelessness
- The following factors are likely to have an impact on the demand for services:
    - Escalating private rent levels
    - Increasing mortgage rates making buy to rent properties unaffordable to landlords and therefore reducing this form of rented housing
    - Households moving out of London into the area
    - A lack of new affordable housing supply
    - An increase in refugees via the government's Safe and Legal routes and asylum seekers in need of housing assistance

CONCLUSIONS

- Demand for homelessness prevention services in Hertsmere is likely to continue to grow
- There will be many challenges for the Housing Team in seeking new solutions to prevent homelessness
- One of the main cause of homelessness is eviction from family and friends, therefore a priority is to continue to develop a service that provides early home visits and mediation from officers who take a holistic approach to the whole household's circumstances and seeks innovative ways to resolve the issues that may lead to homelessness. Solutions should be sustainable and, if homelessness is inevitable, should include working with the household to plan a move into alternative housing rather than have to deal with homelessness at the point of crisis
- Another priority is to further develop the relationship with landlords, both private landlords/letting agencies and housing associations to ensure that any tenant concerns are identified at an early stage. Developing protocols to refer tenants to the council's Homelessness team at a much earlier stage will allow solutions to be identified before tenancies are put at risk
- In order to seek solutions to support people with complex problems, a multi-agency response is required and priority must be given to enhancing partnerships with both statutory, voluntary and community organisations in order to ensure people receive the support they need, not only to secure housing but the ongoing support to sustain it
- The number of households in temporary accommodation has remained relatively steady but demand is growing and increasingly households are placed outside the borough. Effective procurement of temporary accommodation is needed, recognising the need for good value and quality temporary accommodation
- Support is needed for households who have vulnerabilities and proactive solutions are required to allow this to continue effectively

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Homelessness Review has allowed data to be analysed to inform the council's Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy. A number of objectives have been developed in response to the Homelessness Review and are outlined, along with the council's plan to achieve them, in the Strategy.

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