

Worcestershire Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy
2022 – 2025

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Foreword by the Chair of Worcestershire Strategic Housing Partnership

I am very pleased to introduce Worcestershire's Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy. This is Worcestershire's fourth homelessness strategy and as I reflect back over the life of the previous strategy I could not have predicted that we would have had to respond to a global pandemic, an economic crisis and the displacement of so many people through war. So it is with some trepidation that we look to the future to present this, our fourth strategy.

We anticipate that the cost of living crisis will be a huge challenge for those on lower incomes and that loss of accommodation, increases in relationship breakdown and domestic abuse and impact on peoples mental and physical health will be significant.

We saw at the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic that a government injection of funding dramatically reduced rough sleeping, and we have developed more effective collaborations with partners such as health and social care to ensure that those who are threatened with homelessness or actually experience homelessness receive the support they need. We want to build on these new partnerships so that we can respond effectively and efficiently to the challenges ahead.

With the introduction of the Domestic Abuse Act we have created specialisms within our teams to respond effectively to victims and survivors of domestic abuse to ensure they have safe supported accommodation when they are in crisis.

These statutory enhancements to our service do put additional pressures on local authorities and come at a time when the demand for housing across all tenures is outstripping supply and housing costs are increasing. However, we are always looking for innovative solutions to meet needs and increase options available.

The Homelessness Reduction Act has supported us in our aspiration to tackle homelessness in all its forms, from rough sleeping and sofa surfing to those who experience abuse and harm at home or are living in unaffordable or unsatisfactory housing. Anyone can be affected by homelessness and the effects for families and individuals can be devastating and can impact on health and wellbeing, employment, education, and crime.

We want to support people to be able to access good quality accommodation and lead dignified, fulfilling and rewarding lives that have purpose.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of the organisations and individuals who worked with us during the pandemic to help others. I would like to also thank those who have contributed towards the development of this strategy. It sits at strategic partnership level within the umbrella of the Worcestershire Strategic Housing Partnership - recognising that tackling homelessness not only benefits the individual but also benefits the economy, the health of our population, reduces crime and disorder, and reduces costs to the taxpayer.

This strategy will govern our approach for three years. However, given our experiences over the last two years, it is vital that it remains responsive and as such it will be kept under constant review.

Kevin Dicks, Chief Executive of Bromsgrove and Redditch Councils and Chair of the Worcestershire Strategic Housing Partnership

Introduction

The Homelessness Reduction Act provided a catalyst for a change in our approach to homelessness and a framework to formalise and normalise upstream working in partnership with other services. In particular, the Duty to Refer has enabled a step change in early notifications of those threatened with homelessness and whilst there is more that can be done, we now have the structure within which to deliver on this approach. Our work with partners such as health, social care, department of work and pensions (DWP) and criminal justice has improved and become much more collaborative. Our pathways for key client groups have, or are being, strengthened.

We are also working to upskill officers working in homelessness to recognise how each individual or household experience of homelessness is different and will often require a bespoke solution. In particular officers need to understand how adversity in childhood may impact on a person's resilience and provide a trauma informed approach. In doing so we are recognising that more people who approach the service have more complex needs and in response to this we are investing more in support services to help people to get back on track.

We have made significant progress in tackling rough sleeping on the back of the Everyone In initiative and intensive housing support through Housing First and Housing Led initiatives are supporting entrenched clients to sustain accommodation and move away from a street lifestyle.

We continue to see a high demand for social and affordable housing that outstrips supply and we anticipate the cost of living crisis will exacerbate an already challenging private sector market making access to private rented housing more difficult.

We are also anticipating increasing demand from those fleeing wars and are gearing up to look for innovative solutions in response to these households.

This strategy sets out how we will continue to deliver services and respond to the changes that lie ahead.

Executive Summary

This strategy is the result of a collaboration between the local housing authorities, voluntary and community sector and statutory partners.

Why prevention, intervention, and recovery?

Worcestershire's strategy for preventing homelessness and rough sleeping is based around 3 priorities: prevention, intervention, and recovery.

This approach aligns with the Government's Rough Sleeping Strategy, published in 2018 which is also based around the 3 principles of:

1. Prevention: timely support before someone becomes homeless.
2. Intervention: targeted support to get people off the streets.
3. Recovery: the need for accommodation and support.

Across all of the strategy themes it will be a priority to ensure that the safeguarding of all adults including those who sleep rough is explicitly stated and addressed within service aims, learning from the Worcestershire Rough Sleeper Thematic Review and embedding the recommendations throughout strategy and service delivery.

1. Prevention

The effects of homelessness for families and individuals can be devastating and can have significant negative impacts on health and wellbeing, employment, education, and crime. It can also have significant costs to communities, local authorities, and public services.

Preventing homelessness is much more cost effective than dealing with its consequences. A range of studies have been completed including by the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government whose 2012 figures estimated that the average annual cost of homelessness was between £24,000 and £30,000 per person. More importantly, we also know that preventing homelessness and dealing with the root causes delivers far better outcomes for individuals and communities.

That is why we are so committed to preventing homelessness at the earliest possible opportunity and targeting support at those groups who are more vulnerable to becoming homeless. The large proportion of preventative actions within the strategy reflects this commitment.

Through this strategy we will undertake range of preventative actions, including:

- raising awareness around homelessness and rough sleeping to support earlier intervention, particularly through the development and delivery of a communication plan
- explore opportunities to reduce homelessness due to domestic abuse e.g. Sanctuary scheme, powers to remove perpetrators
- Explore further opportunities to co-locate housing staff with other organisations
- Develop, review and refresh protocols including 16 & 17 year olds, prison leavers, care leavers

- Improve intelligence to shape and inform commissioning of services
- Engage regularly with service users to enhance learning from lived experience
- Promote and encourage sign up to the Duty or Commitment to Refer.
- Review issues within the private rented sector following the rent reform legislation and end of the s21 notices to ensure homelessness from the PRS is reduced.
- Work with partners to explore opportunities for further outreach provision from their services e.g. GP drop ins, joint home visits, mental health outreach

2. Intervention

There will always be some people who find themselves homeless or threatened with homeless however good our homelessness prevention response is. We want to ensure that any homelessness is rare, fleeting and non-recurring.

Therefore, we must put in place comprehensive and rapid interventions to help those in crisis, and offer a range of accommodation and support choices to meet specific needs and complexities

We will strengthen our approach to tenancy sustainment across tenures by developing and embedding support services across the county through a community-based approach and ensuring that support is flexible to meet individual support needs.

In particular, we will explore opportunities to fund a specialist mental health role to work specifically with homeless households.

3. Recovery

We want to increase the supply of, and access to, affordable and supported housing, so that people can recover successfully from homelessness. Alongside this we will enable support for those who have multiple and complex needs to try to ensure that homelessness does not reoccur, and longer-term housing solutions are maintained.

Affordable and supported housing supply in Worcestershire is an on-going problem locally, as it is nationally. Demand far outstrips the supply. During the pandemic, government intervened in unprecedented fashion to ensure stability for millions of residents by effectively making it impossible to undertake evictions or repossessions in this country. As a result of this intervention activity levels around homelessness remained relatively stable nationally and locally new, creative ways of working across health services and housing services have developed around, for example, the needs of rough sleepers. However, we are now starting to see an increase in homelessness approaches as these interventions have ended.

This is also compounded by the fact that an overwhelming number of individuals presenting as homeless have multiple and complex needs resulting in exclusion from social rented tenancies and whilst accommodation in the Private Rented Sector (PRS) can be sourced, it has limited levels or no support and is difficult to sustain.

Through this strategy we will

- explore opportunities for a greater range of supported and step-down accommodation, including accommodation for rough sleepers and safe accommodation for survivors of domestic abuse
- review the provision of accommodation and support for young people to ensure no young person will be placed in emergency bed and breakfast with shared facilities, other than in exceptional circumstances
- engage with landlords from the private rented sector to enable access to accommodation across the districts
- work with partners to link households into meaningful activity and services, increase the take up of education and training, and review peer mentoring services
- upscale our response to digital safety

Update from previous strategy

The previous Homelessness and Rough Sleeping strategy 2019 – 2022 was developed during the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 and the publication of the national Rough Sleeper Strategy in 2018. The primary focus was around increasing prevention services and the supply of accommodation and mirrored the national strategy by addressing prevention, intervention and recovery. During the strategy lifetime the Corona virus pandemic struck and the way services were delivered to homeless households and rough sleepers across the county changed profoundly, particularly in response to Everyone In. As a consequence, the strategy was given a refresh in 2021 and the action plan was revised.

This section outlines the principal aims and achievements of the strategy, including the revised actions from 2021.

1	Increased prevention services through developing toolkits and providing advice and assistance to over 4k households	6	Learn from those with lived experience to improve services- 24 service users interviewed as part of the RSI2022-25 and review process in North Worcestershire
2	Encouraged partners to use the Alert system and sign up to and use the Duty or Commitment to Refer through training sessions, local homelessness forums and county events.	7	Enhanced services to Rough Sleepers including a single service offer, motivational interviewing, Psychologically Informed Environment (PIE) services, meaningful activities and Housing First
3	Greater information available to customers through social media posts, refreshed websites, face to face and written materials	8	Explored information sharing through protocols, panels and IT systems – rough sleeper, prevention and domestic abuse panels established
4	Raised awareness of homelessness through schools and GP (social prescribers) to support early intervention	9	Investigated joint funding opportunities with regards to Mental Health services for Homeless households and Rough Sleepers
5	Enhanced partnership working through drop-in sessions, regular joint events and meetings	10	Made better use of statistical data to inform service development in relation to Rough Sleepers

Unfortunately, the pandemic did prevent the delivery of some objectives including hosting annual partnership events and establishing a service user group. An unsuccessful funding bid, due to high levels of competition from other councils, meant mental health services specifically for homeless households have not been developed.

National and Local Context

The Homelessness Review includes a more detailed consideration of the national and local context but there are some specific issues that are highlighted below as they are significant pieces of legislation or due to their impact on homelessness.

Welfare Benefits

The Welfare Reform Act 2012 made changes to the rules concerning a number of welfare benefits including the introduction of Universal Credit which replaced a combined six benefits for working age people who have a low household income – Employment and Support Allowance, Income-based Job Seekers Allowance and Income Support, Child Tax Credit, Working Tax Credit and Housing Benefit.

It also introduced an ‘underoccupancy penalty’ which reduced the amount of benefit paid to claimants in social housing if they are deemed to have more bedrooms than their household size required and limited the total amount of money available to benefit claimants and the total benefits paid to a single person may not now exceed £350pw, the maximum available to families is £500pw including housing costs. This created a number of challenges to existing tenants underoccupying social housing in making up the rent shortfall and for those with larger families to afford their rent. In the Spending Review 2021 the Government announced an adjustment to the taper rate of Universal Credit and the increase in the work allowance to support recovery from the pandemic and to help mitigate some of the impact of ending the Universal Credit uplift.

There were some mitigations including the Household Support Fund and one off Homelessness Prevention Grant to support vulnerable private renters which targeted those unable to work or facing additional financial pressures.

Declining social housing supply and housing affordability

Across the county there is very high demand for social housing with nearly 12,000 households on the housing registers. High employment levels and economic growth bring major opportunities for Worcestershire but also present significant challenges, including high housing costs and a shortage of accommodation which is affordable to local people especially those with low incomes.

There was a sharp reduction during 2021/22 in social housing lettings across the county due to pandemic down to 700 from a high of 1478 in 2018/19¹. There is also a mismatch between the social housing available for letting. For example approximately 50% of vacancies in Wyre Forest are for older people, and yet less than 10% of the households on the housing register are over 65. Part of the issue is the overall decline of social housing numbers as a consequence of the right to buy and right to acquire, for example in 2018/19 113 homes were sold across the county through the Right To Buy or the Right to Acquire.

In many parts of the county the supply of private rented properties at or close to local housing allowance levels is very restricted. In addition. most new social housing

¹ Worcester letting data not included

properties are at “affordable” rather than “social” rent trapping households into benefit dependency.

Incomes and the cost of living

Across the county there is a difference in household income. The average gross salary varies from £28.6k in Wyre Forest to £33.5k in Redditch but is well below the UK average of £38.1k. Affordability of housing is also an issue in parts of the county with only Wyre Forest and Worcester city median house price to median salary ratio lower than the England and Wales average of 7.69. The unemployment rate across the county is lower than the national average ranging from 3.5% in Wychavon to 4.7% in Redditch.

The impact of Covid-19, Brexit and the war in Ukraine has affected the cost of living (particularly food and fuel) and inflation is at it's highest since the 1970s. This will have an impact on household disposable income and is likely to lead to many more people experiencing economic hardship, including some of those who have previously been relatively well off. It will also exacerbate existing poverty and those who have no credit history or savings to fall back on are likely to be particularly affected.

In terms of protected characteristics, evidence from the Cabinet Office identifies that Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) people are more likely than non-BAME people to experience housing issues in relation to quality of housing, cost of renting as a proportion of income and overcrowding. In Worcestershire female employees earn less than their male counterparts in every area.

During the pandemic the lockdowns led to a reduction in income for many households and a consequent increase in rent arrears in both the social housing and private rented sector. Additional funding was given to local authorities in 2022 to support those in rent arrears and those generally experiencing hardship through the Household Support Fund and Vulnerable Renters funding. The use of food banks (distribution of food parcels) nearly doubled between 2019/20 and 2021/22.

Provision for rough sleepers

The “Everyone In” initiative commenced in March 2020 during Covid restrictions to provide accommodation to everyone in need including those not normally entitled to assistance under homelessness legislation. This scheme enabled councils to work with clients who had previously not engaged with housing and support services. We have learnt lessons along the way, and this has resulted in different working practices, being more person focused with a greater understanding of the complexities behind rough sleeping and the cycle of repeat homelessness. In 2020/21 the county made a successful bid for Rough Sleeper Initiative funding. This was extended in 2021/22 and a further bid has been made for 2022-25. This has enabled the councils to enhance localised provision and housing supply for rough sleepers.

Survivors of Domestic Abuse

The Local Housing Authorities and County Council have well established partnership working including a recently established Domestic Abuse Partnership Board which is a successor to the longstanding Domestic Abuse Forum. The councils have

previously jointly commissioned services for survivors and there is partnership working with the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) and other partners around commissioning of “Drive” Independent Domestic Violence Advisors (IDVAs) and training.

Domestic Act 2021 Part IV

This legislation has given local authorities (LAs) further duties in relation to homelessness, undertaking a needs assessment, providing appropriate accommodation (with a new accommodation standard) and the provision of Domestic Abuse support. It also imposes a duty on LAs to have a Local Partnership Board and to work in partnership with Local Housing Authorities (LHA) in areas where there are two tiers of local government.

The legislation states that local authority housing duties include offering ‘Safe Accommodation’ and this includes the offer of support from a local expert support service. ‘Safe Accommodation’ consists of self-contained supported accommodation or traditional refuge accommodation. Therefore ‘Bed and Breakfast’ is not considered to be Safe Accommodation.

The legislation also refers to assessing what other duties are owed to the survivor presenting as homeless, under other homeless legislation. Survivors should always be considered as homeless where there is a significant risk of harm should they remain in their property, and appropriate support should be offered.

The recent Domestic Abuse Act 2021 has enhanced the commissioning work with the County Council and they now also fund specialist Domestic Abuse housing staff within the Housing Advice teams and indirectly support the provision of safe houses.

Prison leavers

In Worcestershire the lack of suitable accommodation undermines the ability of individual involved in the Criminal Justice system to settle and increases the future likelihood of their reoffending. The Worcestershire local authorities are in the process of conducting a review of the Criminal Justice Housing Pathway in partnership with Campbell Tickell.

Partners are committed to the development of a new model utilising existing services, assets, and capacity and to modify approaches as necessary to provide a more joined up pathway.

Our ambition for Worcestershire is that the Criminal Justice Housing and Support Pathway will bring together the full range of partners to provide a bespoke response to individuals that will enable rehabilitation and prevent or tackle homelessness.

Health context

The development of Primary Care Networks (PCN) has led to closer working relationships between GPs and District Councils including through the formation of Collaboratives.

The Health and Wellbeing Board acts as a forum in which key leaders from the local health and care system work together to improve the health and wellbeing of their local population. In Worcestershire the Board also has representation from District

Council members and the Chief Executive of Redditch and Bromsgrove (in his role as Chair of the Worcestershire Strategic Housing Partnership). The Board are currently overseeing the review and development of the Health and Wellbeing Strategy which was out for consultation in early 2022.

The population of Worcestershire is ageing, with 23% over 65 compared to 18.6% in England and Wales and this does put additional pressure on health services.

Average life expectancy in Worcestershire for males is 80.1 years and 83.8 for females. These levels are above England's worst life expectancy areas but not as good as its best areas.

Health and Wellbeing Strategy

The Draft Health and Wellbeing Strategy "Being Well in Worcestershire" has been out for consultation and a final version is anticipated in November 2022. This strategy has a particular focus on good mental health and wellbeing. Under this main priority are three sub-priorities of healthy living at all ages and stages of life; safe, thriving and healthy homes; communities and places and quality local jobs and opportunities. The second of these three sub-priorities is particularly relevant to this Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy, with its focus on tackling health inequalities.

Analysis

The implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act (HRA) (2017) in 2018 led to a peak in applications in 2018/19 with the new duties owed. Please see Appendix One for more information about the statutory framework. However, this is not a trend that has continued and there has been a decrease in most Districts over the 4 year period. Redditch and Bromsgrove saw a small peak during 2019/20. The level of homeless applications in all districts remained lower in 2020/21 than in 2018/19 (except in Redditch).

Duties have been owed to over 95% of those approaching as homeless in 2018/19 increasing to over 98% in the subsequent years. More duties are owed to those already homeless, under the relief category. The total number of approaches under the relief category reached a peak of 54% in 2020/21 which is attributable to the Covid 19 pandemic and the “Everyone In” scheme.

Countywide the top four reasons for homelessness are end of Assured Shorthold Tenancies (AST), family and friends no longer willing to accommodate, other and relationship breakdown (non-violent). This is comparable throughout the county. More work needs to be done to identify the reasons for homelessness for those in the “other” category.

Table One: Reasons for homelessness at prevention and relief stage

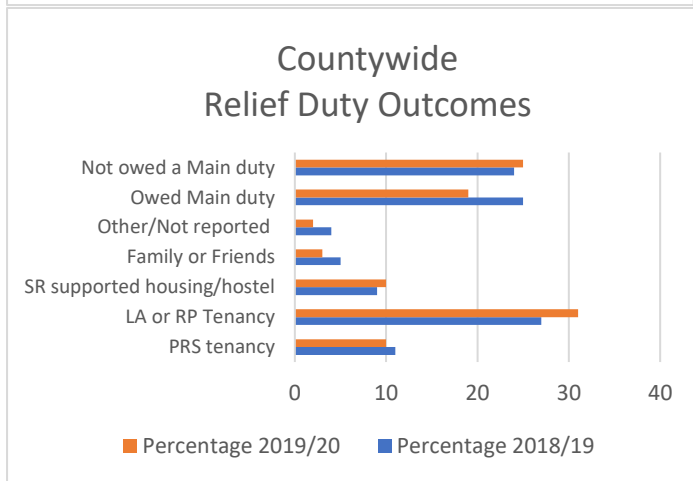
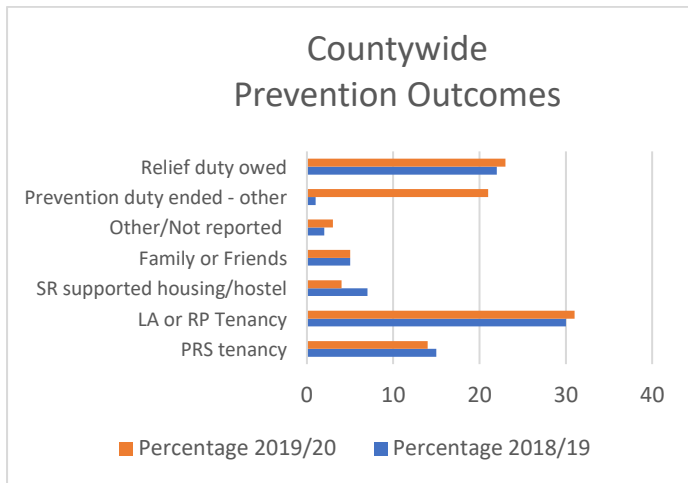
	Prevention %			Relief %		
	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
End of AST	33.6	33.2	23.1	10.2	13.8	6.8
Family/Friends no longer willing to accommodate	26.6	27.1	31.9	21.1	27.8	27.9
Other	15.7	15.7	15.7	16.9	17.1	18.6
Relationship Breakdown (non-violent)	7.2	9	12	16.1	14.5	15.6

The pandemic saw more time spent with family and friends due to lockdown restrictions. Statistics countywide evidence the stress this had on relationships with the increase in homelessness due to family and friends no longer willing to accommodate and non-violent relationship breakdowns. More notably, the number of homeless presentations due to domestic abuse saw an 8-9% increase between 2018/19 and 2020/21, prior to the introduction of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021.

Table Two: Homeless presentations due to Domestic Abuse

	Prevention %	Relief %	Total %
2018/19	4.5	12.7	17.2
2019/20	4.2	11.9	16.1
2020/21	8.2	17	25.2

In 2018-2020 55-60% of those who had a prevention duty owed and 56% owed a relief duty secured accommodation throughout the County.



Households affected by homelessness

This section considers some specific groups within the homeless cohort affected by homelessness. These are the groups that make up the majority of households that approach us and are often the most vulnerable to becoming homeless. The strategy will cover the context and data relating to the various groups and then illustrate what currently happens with an overview of current prevention, intervention and recovery elements of service delivery.

Single People

Context

Single people are often most exposed to changes to welfare benefits and cost of living rises. Affordability issues are likely to be an issue in this cohort. Reflecting this, single homeless people make up a large proportion of applicants on the districts housing registers with the highest age range of between 18 – 34.

Whilst services for single homeless people across the county may differ slightly to reflect the needs and demands specific to each district, the core objectives remain consistent.

Data Collection

In 2020/21 just over 50% of all homeless approaches across the county were from single people. The two most common causes of homelessness in Worcestershire are the loss of private rented accommodation and family or friends being no longer willing to accommodate. The support needs of this group vary but most common support needs across the homeless cohort include mental illness or disability, physical illness or disability and domestic abuse.

Achievements to date

Prevention

The districts are working directly with the private rented sector to prevent tenancies failing and support those in the private sector. This is being achieved by support officers working directly with both the resident and the landlord including through the establishment of Prevention Panels in some local authority areas. These panels meet regularly at a local level and work to find housing and rent arrears solutions as well as coordinated working and information sharing. As part of the role of the panels moving forward, councils will be clear about who is the lead professional for each case.

The Countywide Single Person and Childless Couples Homeless Prevention Support Service is currently provided by Caring for Communities and People (CCP) and is jointly funded by the six LHAs and the County Council. This service's remit is to help councils meet their obligations in providing the Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEPE) provision, as well as providing a support service via drop-in sessions and home visits to individuals who are unlikely to be found in priority need.

Districts have various options to overcome any financial barriers including Rent Bond Schemes, Welfare Assistance applications, Discretionary Housing payments, Help to Stay, tenancy training, financial inclusion and CAB work and food bank referrals.

Early intervention is less easy to achieve when homelessness is predominantly caused by sudden personal crisis, going forward further work is required to engage private sector landlords, to embed approaches such as the 'Help to Stay' scheme and to promote the support and services we can offer.

Intervention

Where homelessness cannot be prevented, we work to act quickly to intervene by developing clear pathways for specific client groups. Where temporary accommodation is required, we have support officers in place who work with clients individually to develop a housing pathway into sustainable accommodation. Support will include help to identify and undertake meaningful activity, reconnections with friends and family or where this isn't an option then to connect to the People Like Us project (Plus) that helps tackle social isolation and loneliness across the county for 18+.

Recovery

The use of Private Sector Leasing Schemes is being developed across the county to ensure a supply of affordable housing which meets current standards and increases the options open to people. Applicants are also supported as part of this work to ensure a smooth transition into a sustainable tenancy.

Complex needs and Rough Sleepers

Context

The Government's Rough Sleeping Strategy was launched in August 2018. The Government is committed to halving rough sleeping by 2022 and announced in December 2019 a commitment to ending rough sleeping by 2024

Rough sleeping can be a dangerous and isolating experience. People who sleep rough are more likely to be victims of crime and violence. The longer a person remains on the streets or actively engages in street life culture the more likely it will have significant implications on their physical and mental health.

Safeguarding issues are particularly relevant to this group and certain actions in relation to safeguarding have been identified by the Thematic Review of Rough Sleepers, undertaken by the Adult Safeguarding Board in 2020. Those pertinent to the six LHAs are included in the action plan.

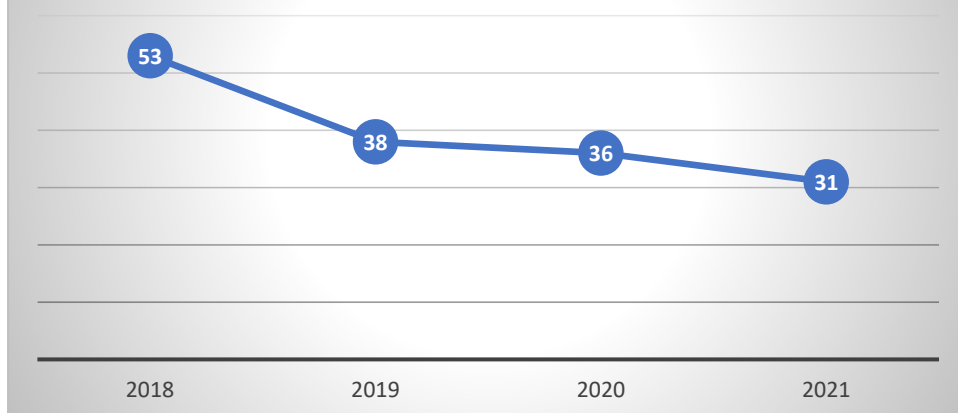
One of the positive outcomes of "Everyone In" was to embed the regular rough sleeper meetings. Having regular rough sleeper/prevention meetings at a local level enables the co-ordination of services and information sharing to develop partnerships with all organisations and individuals committed to ending rough sleeping and homelessness. This includes a consideration of any safeguarding issues that need to be flagged with partners or referred to the Adult Safeguarding Team.

Of the homeless population with complex needs or an offending background, there is limited availability of supported accommodation which can be accessed rapidly resulting in households only option of off the street or long term supported housing being outside of the county. Although Supported Housing providers in Worcestershire work within a trauma informed, person centred approach clients with substance misuse, serious mental health conditions and/or a history of arson may find themselves waiting for a suitable placement due to stringent criteria.

Data Collection

Worcestershire official street count held each year has seen a decrease in rough sleepers since 2018 (please see table below).

Worcestershire Rough Sleeper Street Counts



Rough sleeper data is collated each week improving our local intelligence of the flow, return, stock of households and the reason behind their homelessness.

In terms of “Everyone In”, across the county over 150 people were assisted in response to the first lockdown.

Data we collect is reviewed to identify trends and possible gaps in service delivery including in accommodation options for complex needs clients via the Supportive Housing Needs Assessment being led by Worcestershire County Council.

Achievements to date

Prevention

In each Local Authority a Rough Sleepers meeting has been established and attended by statutory organisations, voluntary sector, and local charities. This meeting shares information and agrees actions to reduce rough sleeping.

The Rough Sleeper Initiative funding has enabled the creation of localised provisions of No First Night Out (NFNO) /No Second Night Out (NSNO) settings offering “Off the Street” accommodation at an earlier opportunity, resulting in households new to the street or at high risk of rough sleeping being accommodated with a structured support package and move on options. It has also funded assertive outreach focusing on street-based responses both directly from the Housing Authorities but also in partnership with a local homeless charity, Maggs Day Centre who provide the Maggs Outreach and Assessment Team (MOAT)s and the commissioned Navigator services.

There are targeted prevention services including officers who focus on early intervention and prevention through regular meetings with social, private sector landlords and other services who encounter people who are at risk of homelessness. Homeless Support/Prevention Officers are working with clients at risk of rough sleeping through a person centred, strengths-based approach to maintain their accommodation. There are also tenancy sustainment services and those focused on the private rented sector, such as “Help to stay” in Wyre Forest and BDHT 360

Support in Bromsgrove which is aimed at private sector landlords who are considering ending tenancies. This helps to reduce homelessness caused by the ending of tenancies by providing tenants support and signposting to be able to stay.

We are working with people with lived experience of homelessness to provide a more personalised, inclusive approach to the overall quality of the services provided and more information on this is included in the Homeless Review.

As part of the development of the Rough Sleeper Action Plans we have identified a specific, long term challenge with female rough sleepers, who have spells in unsuitable and short term accommodation, in some areas and there are no specific specialist services to meet this need.

Intervention

For people already rough sleeping there are services such as the Navigation Support Service who are working with our more complex rough sleepers from rough sleeping into accommodation/housing pathway plan. This is assisted by the MOATs floating support service working with rough sleepers who are disengaged with local services/housing options teams. For those rough sleepers who do engage with councils there are Homeless Support/Prevention officers working with former rough sleepers in accommodation or those vulnerable to rough sleeping onto an accommodation/housing pathway using a person centred, strength-based approach

To support rough sleepers during the colder months we have localised, countywide delivery of the Severe Winter Emergency Provision (SWEP). During Covid this moved from communal provision to self-contained rooms which led to greater levels of usage in some districts.

In parts of the County there are supported Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO) accommodation used as a housing option for households who may require tenancy ready skills/support prior to accessing independent accommodation.

Worcester, Wychavon and more recently Wyre Forest have all been successful in Rough Sleeper Accommodation Programme (RSAP) bids to support people coming off the streets and receiving accommodation and tailored packages of support. In Wyre Forest this will provide a women only specialist service for women at risk of or who are rough sleeping who might also be at risk of exploitation, domestic violence, prostitution etc and who have had unsettled periods of accommodation for a number of years.

Recovery

The Rough Sleeper Initiative and Business Rates Retention Scheme funding has enabled Housing Authorities to implement Housing First (delivered in partnership with St Pauls Hostel) and Housing Led projects throughout Worcestershire. This has taken the most entrenched rough sleeper cohort, some of whom have been on the streets for more than ten years, to maintain social housing tenancies with intensive support.

In addition, there are a range of other accommodation schemes including Private Sector Leasing Schemes increasing options to access affordable, high standard

housing, rent deposit schemes to help access the private rented sector and shared housing provision with individual support packages.

To support former rough sleepers in the longer term some councils have commissioned a Peer Mentor service, using those with lived life experiences working in conjunction with support workers to support rough sleepers.

A Worcestershire Communities of Practice has been established, facilitated by Homeless Link, that is attended by local authority housing options, homeless charities and voluntary sector partners with the focus on sharing good practices.

Finally, personalisation budgets have been set up enabling councils to fund specialist support packages such as access to counselling services and meaningful activities to reduce/break the cycle of homelessness.

Families with children

Context

Worcestershire is an attractive place to live and work, inevitably leading to high rents and house prices, from increasing demand. This means some families are unable to afford a home. The recent pandemic and changes to the benefits system together with the impact of the cost-of-living crisis and the number of people in low paid work has seen a rise in the number of families at risk of homelessness.

We want to prevent homelessness by identifying the key risk factors/triggers in families lives that can lead to a family being at risk of homelessness at the earliest possible stage.

Data Collection

Across Worcestershire there are currently 5518 families on the Housing register.

The data behind family homelessness in Worcestershire suggests that the immediate 'triggers' for family homelessness approaches are primarily relationship breakdown with partner (non-violent breakdown) which accounted for 16% of homeless approaches in 2018 to 15.6% in 2021; 12.7% of approaches were due to Domestic Abuse in 2018 raising to 17% in 2021; and the end of private rented tenancy (assured shorthold tenancy) which was 10.2% in 2018 and down to 6.8% in 2021, due to the eviction embargo during the pandemic.

Achievements to date

Prevention

Throughout the county there are online customer portals to encourage self-referrals at an early stage to obtain housing advice and access the housing register. Housing Authorities have also raised awareness of where to go for help through publishing of materials to promote services and support available and ensuring websites are regularly updated with local and national advice enabling customers to help themselves where possible.

The Duty to Refer (through ALERT) and Commitment to Refer has increased the referrals from a wider range of agencies for customers who are homeless or threatened with homelessness.

There are different multi – agency groups established including prevention panels to provide meaningful advice, support and assistance to particular cases.

The Housing Authorities work with landlords in the private and social housing sector in developing and supporting pre-eviction protocols to ensure eviction is always the last resort and they have assisted with rent arrears payments to ensure evictions can be prevented where possible. This includes providing pre tenancy and tenancy sustainment training to support customers.

Housing teams are co-locating with some outside agencies such as the DWP for a proactive approach.

Families have been assisted to reduce rent and mortgage arrears through various funding streams including the Homeless Prevention Grant "Vulnerable Renters" fund. Across the county we received £365,612 to assist households remain in their current home.

Intervention

At the intervention stage the services aim to assist households into permanent housing as quickly as possible, whilst providing housing support and tenancy sustainment work if required, with targeted delivery in a family's temporary accommodation or homes. This is supported by changing to working practises to enable staff to work more agilely to enable greater access to services.

Homeless families are particularly hit by cost of living rises. Welfare assistance (including access to foodbanks and community kitchens) to meet basic household needs and financial inclusion measures such as budgeting advice, debt management, support and assistance with welfare claims are essential to help maintain temporary and permanent accommodation.

Recovery

We currently work in partnership with other agencies to provide additional support for families and the councils also directly provide floating and outreach services to provide support to families in their own localities. This has been enhanced throughout the Covid pandemic with housing teams having an increased presence in the community to provide comprehensive advice and support to areas where there is recognised deprivation and possible families at risk of evictions.

We recognise that there is an undersupply of accommodation, particularly for larger families and this may cause delays to households moving out of temporary and interim accommodation. Working closely with social and private sector landlords is critical to ensure households move through the rehousing pathway in an effective manner and enable those households to settle back into education and employment.

Survivors of Domestic Abuse

Context

Following the publication of the Domestic Abuse Act (2021) the district authorities implemented a raft of changes and enhancements to services towards creating a more robust and responsive service for those fleeing abusive relationships.

Data Collection

With the Domestic Abuse Act providing a more focussed service for survivors of Domestic Abuse there has been an increase in the recognition of Domestic Abuse in homeless presentations and this has been recorded in the data collected.

In Worcestershire in 2020-21, there were a total of 12,887 domestic abuse incidents (reported crimes and non-crimes) reported to the police. In addition to those who have reported domestic abuse, there is thought to be a large unmet domestic abuse need in Worcestershire. Prevalence data suggests that 43% of incidents go unreported to the police.

Across the County the number of homeless approaches due to Domestic Abuse accounted for 12.7% in 2018/19, 11.9% in 2019/20 and 17% in 2020/21 of all homeless approaches.

According to data collected via a Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) project, which ran from September 2020 to March 2022, of 162² homelessness approaches due to Domestic Abuse, 148 of those were owed a duty. 14 households were owed the prevention duty and 121 were owed a relief duty. As part of the DLUHC project, Worcester Community Trust were funded to develop and train a team of Domestic Abuse Community Champions, who would be volunteers based in community settings, trained to advise and signpost survivors. A total of 59 champions were trained and supported to make onward referrals for 195 service users, who were referred to services that would reduce the risk of re-entering an abusive relationship.

A new role of Research and Intelligence Officer has been developed in order to support the gathering, analysis and dissemination of data for this client group. This role will support more accurate data collection and will help to inform future resourcing of services.

Achievements to date

Prevention

The Domestic Abuse and Housing Co-ordinator role was introduced to start working on establishing services across the County in preparation for the act. The county local authorities have been working with the co-ordinator to improve services available through the homelessness housing process, develop a Domestic Abuse Pathway and provide training and regular meetings in order to upskill staff in understanding and recognising Domestic Abuse and the need for risk assessments and safety planning

² some district data missing

Wyre Forest District Council piloted a joint working with West Mercia Womens Aid in establishing a Domestic Abuse Panel. This is a meeting between a representative from Womens Aid and the Domestic Abuse Housing Officer to create links between housing and support services. It is an opportunity to make sure all involved are doing what is needed to offer support and to share best practice and learning between agencies. These Panels are now considered good practice and are likely to be rolled out across the county local authorities.

When considering preventing Domestic Abuse the stakeholder engagement workshop suggested that more could be done in respect of educating children and young people and young people on healthy relationships.

The engagement workshop also suggested that local authority websites need to be improved to ensure a consistent and up to date list of services and information can be easily accessed by those fleeing an abusive relationship.

Intervention

The Domestic Abuse Act (2021) requires that local authorities provide an offer of support to all victims of Domestic Abuse who are accessing 'Safe Accommodation' provision. In addition to the support service commissioned out to a local specialist domestic abuse service, the county local authorities have recruited specialist Domestic Abuse Housing Officers, to work with and support those fleeing Domestic Abuse. This officer oversees the housing process for victim/survivors creating a named contact who takes ownership of the case so that they don't have to keep re-telling their story and provides continuity in their journey. These officers will discuss the safest and most appropriate options, ensuring that any temporary accommodation is safe for them to occupy and will refer or signpost them for additional support.

Safe Accommodation, as referenced in the Domestic Abuse Act, covers any temporary accommodation that is made available by local authorities to those fleeing an abusive relationship. Local authorities have worked in partnership with the County Council and social landlords to make more accommodation available to this group that meets the definition of being 'safe' under legislation. Local authorities across the County have received grant funding to ensure these new units comply with these requirements..

A sanctuary scheme is a service designed to help keep survivors within their homes, if it is safe for them and they choose to do so. If the relationship has ended and the perpetrator is no longer residing at the permanent residence, then safety measures such as additional locks on doors and windows, security lights, and video doorbells are provided. More advanced measures may also be considered such as safe rooms built into the property. Work is being undertaken by the County Council to ensure that Sanctuary schemes are available and consistent in all areas..

Recovery

The Freedom Programme helps survivors of Domestic Abuse to make sense of and understand what has happened to them and is delivered by West Mercia Women's Aid across Worcestershire to assist in the recovery process.

The newly commissioned Domestic Abuse Support Service (DASS), delivered by West Mercia Womens Aid, will support survivors in a number of different housing settings including refuges and safe houses to ensure they have access to advice and support to aid recovery. This service is commissioned by Worcestershire County Council in partnership with other commissioners including the District Councils and Police and Crime Commissioner.

Many victims/survivors of Domestic Abuse have never had the opportunity or freedom to take up a hobby or take part in an activity they enjoy due to their controlled and isolated environment. By investing in the right support that includes meaningful activities victims/survivors can be given the opportunity to improve their confidence and self esteem and achieve a sense of meaning and purpose in their lives.

Tackling perpetrator behaviour is also key and the Drive Project aims to reduce the number of child and adult victims of domestic abuse by deterring perpetrator behaviour. Liaising closely with local police and support agencies, caseworkers deploy a two-pronged approach of disruption through the criminal justice system and/or support for unresolved personal issues to stop domestic abuse. The Drive Project pilot focuses on priority (high-risk or serial) perpetrators, as this group carries the greatest risk of serious harm and engage poorly with available services.

Young People

Across Worcestershire's Local Authorities in 2020/21 there were 629 young people aged between 16-24 on the housing registers down from 697 in 2018/19. For young people the data indicates that most common causes of homelessness in Worcestershire are family or friends being no longer willing to accommodate, the loss of private rented accommodation and relationship breakdown with partner (non-violent breakdown).

The recent pandemic and changes to the benefits system together with the impact of the cost-of-living crisis and the number of people in low paid work has seen a rise in the number of young people at risk of homelessness.

Prevention-

Across the county we have raised awareness of homelessness and where to go for advice to encourage self-referrals at an early stage through improving customer portals, publishing materials to promote services and support available, keeping websites updated with local and national advice enabling households to help themselves where possible and the use of the Duty To Refer via ALERT for wider agencies to refer potentially homeless or homeless customers to us.

Many of the councils have well-established multi-agency working or prevention panels to develop meaningful support provision as required including the Care Leavers Panels.

The Councils work with social landlords to ensure a pre – eviction protocol is followed and that eviction is always the last resort and where possible provide assistance with rent arrears or additional outreach support. Partnerships with private sector landlords help to ensure an understanding of housing to aid a preventative approach

Some of the authorities and the Care Leavers service provide pre-tenancy sustainment training and in some parts of the county training is offered within schools to raise awareness of homelessness causes and tackle relationship breakdown.

Intervention -

If, despite all prevention interventions, young people become homeless the teams will continue to provide tenancy sustainment training, support and work with other services to ensure the homelessness is fleeting. Changes to the way officers work and the use of technology like video conferencing means the services are more agile and able to provide greater access to people. Support will include help with independent living and financial inclusion measures such as budgeting advice, debt management support and assistance with welfare benefit applications.

As both a prevention and intervention service, mediation is available to reduce relationship breakdowns and restore connections with family and friends where these have broken down.

Across the county currently there are jointly funded³ Young Persons Pathway Worker to ensure young people have support into accommodation and provide a person centred approach.

In the longer term we will work with young people and partners to overcome financial barriers to accessing accommodation through support into working programmes. Accommodation can be provided by both social and private sector landlords and many councils provide rent deposit schemes/ referral to vicars' relief to help young people to move into affordable, suitable accommodation.

Across the county the Councils have worked with Registered Providers (RPs) to provide suitable supported accommodation such as specialist young persons accommodation including Foyer or similar schemes, Nightstop, Crash pad emergency rooms and floating support from projects like Basement. In some cases this is in partnership with the County Council who provide funding for the specialist support services.

Recovery

Many young people will continue to have support needs beyond their homelessness and so part of the longer term recovery will be the ongoing development and embedding of support services across the county, in conjunction with the County Council (with Personal Advisors for example) and Voluntary and Community Sector.

The use of the Duty or the Commitment to Refer offers agencies who identify issues with households to refer into housing services through a clear signposting route. This is supported by having an easy to access, agile workforce in the community that can provide comprehensive advice and support to areas where there is recognised deprivation and possible young people at risk of evictions.

Young people often have the lowest incomes and are very vulnerable to cost of living rises so maintaining access to welfare assistance (including access to foodbanks and community kitchens) to meet basic household needs and financial inclusion measures such as budgeting advice, debt management, support and assistance with welfare claims are essential to help maintain permanent accommodation.

³ Local Housing Authorities and Worcestershire Childrens First

Households in temporary accommodation and permanent housing

Temporary Accommodation

Local Authorities (LAs) in England & Wales have duties to provide temporary accommodation under the following circumstances:

- Interim Duty

Provision of accommodation whilst homelessness enquiries are ongoing when the LA has reason to believe the applicant may be homeless, eligible for assistance and in priority need.

- Main Duty

The main housing duty is a duty to provide temporary accommodation until such time as the duty is ended, either by an offer of settled accommodation or by providing advice and assistance that is sufficient to secure accommodation. The main duty is owed when the LA is satisfied that the applicant is eligible for assistance, homeless, in priority need and not intentionally homeless.

Temporary accommodation (TA) provided under either duty must be suitable in terms of location, standards and cost. The Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities states that while Bed & Breakfasts (B&Bs) may be used in an emergency, councils should avoid the use of B&Bs wherever possible and, in the case of families or pregnant women, should use B&Bs for a maximum of 6 weeks.

The availability of different types of TA across Worcestershire differs between districts. The councils have a range of types of accommodation available for their use; including B&B and self-contained, with some districts having formal arrangements with suppliers in place, some using TA on an ad-hoc basis, and some using a combination of the two arrangements.

The table below shows the number of TA units each Worcestershire LA has available to it, compared to the average number of households in TA at any one time (using the average number in TA at the end of each quarter in 2021/22).

Table three: TA units in Worcestershire

District	Average No. in TA at end of Qtr 21/22	Shared/ B&B	Self-contained	Gap/ Surplus
Bromsgrove	18	Ad hoc B&B	10 designated units	-8 units
Malvern Hills	8	Ad hoc B&B	4 designated units	-4 units
Redditch	49	Ad hoc B&B	25 designated units	-24 units
Worcester City	57	16 designated B&B rooms Plus ad hoc	26 designated units	-7 units

		8 rooms at LA owned shared TA		
Wychavon	17	Ad hoc B&B	16 designated units	-1 units
Wyre Forest	26	3 designated B&B rooms 11 rooms at LA owned shared TA	7 designated units	-5 units

The above table shows that the average TA gap differs significantly across the districts and reflects the difference in demand for TA across the county.

Whilst the majority of the districts only use B&B accommodation on an ad-hoc basis, Worcester City, Redditch Borough Council and Wyre Forest have contracts with B&B providers in place to ensure the availability of this type of accommodation in order to fulfil their statutory duties to homeless households. Although contract arrangements mean that these units can be provided at a lower rate than ad hoc use, this type of accommodation is still significantly more expensive than other types of TA, particularly where arrangements exist to cap the rent at Local Housing Allowance levels. In addition, as the Code of Guidance states, B&B is not suitable for families and should be avoided for other households wherever possible. Studies have shown that moving home many times in early life affects child behaviour and mental health. Specifically:

- Homeless children are more likely to be in poor health than non-homeless children
- Children who have been in temporary accommodation for more than a year are over three times more likely to demonstrate mental health problems such as anxiety and depression than non-homeless children
- Living in temporary accommodation puts children at greater risk of infection and accidents

The Worcestershire councils have therefore committed to reducing the use of B&B and replacing it with alternative accommodation which is less expensive and of better quality. As this forms part of their 'business as usual' work it doesn't feature as a specific countywide action.

Permanent housing

In terms of permanent housing all the councils work with developers and registered providers to deliver market and affordable housing across the county. This work is underpinned by the council's Local Plans which identify a wide range of tenures and types of housing including low cost home ownership and social / affordable rent properties.

Local Plan numbers are informed by a combination of the standard methodology requirement, Housing Market Assessments and Housing Needs Surveys to

determine the required mix of housing. The councils also work with registered providers to ensure best use is made of existing stock including tackling underoccupation and low demand schemes.

Work with private sector landlords and letting agents also enable councils to meet some housing needs in parts of the county although local housing allowance rates do make this challenging. The councils have been innovative in attracting landlords to provide accommodation through landlord forums, the use of rent bonds and deposits, social letting agencies and private sector leasing schemes and this will continue during the lifetime of the strategy.

Governance arrangements

Oversight and delivery

Worcestershire Strategic Housing Partnership (WSHP) is responsible for ensuring that the commitments within the Housing Strategy are realised and the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy is a sub-strategy. The partnership is a multi-agency and cross sector partnership, ensuring delivery of the strategy is supported across relevant organisations.

Sitting under this group will be the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Group, a public and voluntary sector partnership, who have a specific focus on strategy delivery. In addition, the Worcestershire Strategic Housing Officers Group (WSHOG) will be responsible for the operational delivery of the councils elements of the strategy.

The Local Homelessness Forums, made up of local partners will also support the oversight and delivery of the strategy.

Monitoring

WSHOG will report progress against local strategy implementation plans to Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Group who will undertake a review of progress on an annual basis up to and including 2025.

Each council will also be responsible for reporting back on its local action plan on a quarterly basis to its Local Homelessness Forum.

Funding the strategy

Homelessness services are funded through a variety of funding streams including the individual councils general fund budgets as well as additional funding received from the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) called the Homelessness Prevention Fund (HPF)

Homeless Prevention Fund

Homelessness Prevention Fund is ringfenced and should be utilised to::

- Fully embed the Homelessness Reduction Act and contribute to ending rough sleeping by increasing activity to prevent single homelessness.
- Reduce the number of families in temporary accommodation by maximising family homelessness prevention.

- Reduce the use of bed and breakfast accommodation for families and eliminate family B&B placements beyond the statutory six-week limit.

In 2022/23 it also includes an element for new burdens due to the Domestic Abuse Act 2021.

The allocations in 2022/23 are as follows;

Housing Authority	Grant (£)
Bromsgrove District Council	163,348
Malvern Hills District Council	140,582
Redditch Borough Council	322,383
Worcester City Council	474,097
Wychavon District Council	362,524
Wyre Forest District Council	351,898

However, there is currently a consultation into how this funding is allocated across the country with some of the Worcestershire councils potentially losing out, which will put prevention services at risk.

Rough Sleeper Initiative 2022-25

	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Worcestershire	£927,451	£1,079,229	£1,002,282

Domestic Abuse Act 2022/23

Housing Authority	Grant (£)
Bromsgrove District Council	32,859
Malvern Hills District Council	31,912
Redditch Borough Council	32,788
Worcester City Council	32,943
Wychavon District Council	32,015
Wyre Forest District Council	31,078

Rough Sleepers Accommodation Programme 2021/22 - 2023/24

Local Authority	Grant			
	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2023/24
Worcester	Capital - £440,000		Revenue £147,667	
Wychavon & Malvern (18 units)	£28,330	£49,420	£50,420	N/A
Wyre Forest	N/A	£29,023	£30,622	N/A

Action Plan

Through the course of developing the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy we have worked with service users, stakeholders and our housing advice teams to identify gaps in service delivery or provision.

As part of developing the strategy we undertook a review of provision across the county, reviewed statistics from a variety of data sets, interviewed stakeholders and service users (in relation to rough sleeping) and held a stakeholder day in June 2022. This information helped identify gaps and future actions for the strategy. There were a number of suggestions from the stakeholder day that are business as usual and as such don't feature in the action plan but will still be delivered including the revision of protocols already in place, delivering on the Rough Sleeper Initiative funding proposals and co-location of officers with partners such as the DWP.

The strategy will be reviewed on an annual basis and this will include the review of current actions and identification of any new actions required for years two and three.

To summarise the key actions for the strategy, identified from gap analysis, are:

- Increasing the range of accommodation available to a number of client groups and ensure distribution throughout the county including for survivors of domestic abuse through provision of “safe accommodation” and development of a countywide sanctuary scheme, increasing access to the private rented sector, meeting young people’s needs for emergency accommodation beyond Bed and Breakfast etc
- Working with the Research and Intelligence Officer to improve data collection and quality
- Increase the level of homeless prevention through a variety of actions including:
 - Undertake joint working and training with Registered Providers, Mental Health teams, Criminal Justice, Substance Misuse etc
 - Raising awareness of homeless services to stakeholders and the public and the ability to refer cases in through the Duty to Refer or Commitment to Refer
 - Developing prevention panels across the county
- Work with those with lived experience to bring about service improvements where required

See the full action plan in Appendix Two

Appendix One – Legislation

Legal duties

The primary homelessness legislation – Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996 – provides the statutory under-pinning for action to prevent homelessness and provide assistance to people threatened with or actually homeless.

In 2002, the Government amended the homelessness legislation through the Homelessness Act 2002 and the Homelessness (Priority Need for Accommodation) (England) Order 2002 to ensure a more strategic approach to tackling and preventing homelessness and to strengthen the assistance available to people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness by extending the priority need categories.

In 2017 the Housing Act 1996 was amended by the Homeless Reduction Act 2017. This brought in additional duties to all households, namely the prevention and relief duties which apply regardless of priority need or intentionality.

In making decisions local authorities must take into consideration the Public Sector Equality Act 2018 and give consideration to individuals protected characteristics.

Local authorities also need to consider section 11 of the Children's Act 1989 and the duty to promote and safeguard the wellbeing of children when making decisions.

Homeless duties

Housing authorities have a legal duty to provide advice and assistance to anyone that is eligible and homeless or threatened with homelessness. If a housing authority has reason to believe that someone may be homeless or threatened with homelessness, they must investigate what duty they owe to them under the homelessness legislation.

A person will be eligible depending on their immigration status. This is a complex area of law, though generally, UK nationals with a right to reside, those with settled status, pre settled status and exercising their worker rights, or those with limited or indefinite leave to remain with recourse to public funds would be eligible.

To establish if the applicant is homeless or threatened with homelessness, the following needs to be established:

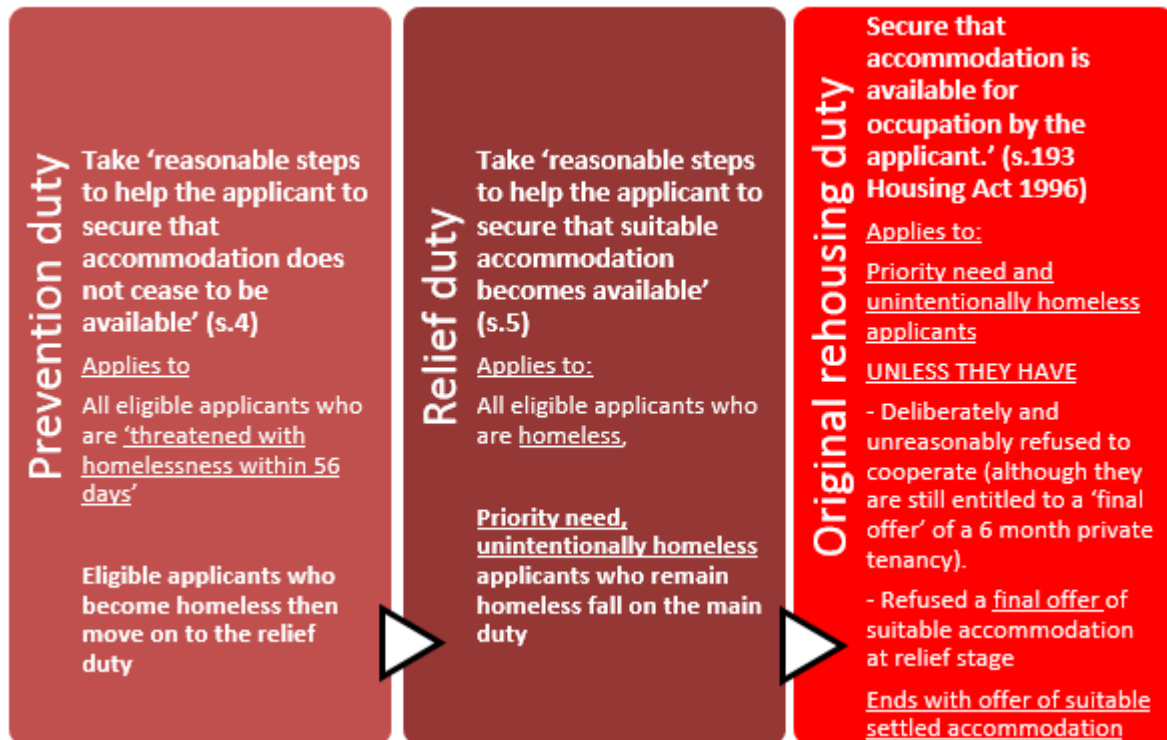
- Do they have the legal right to occupy accommodation that is available to them and their household for the next 56 days?
- Is the accommodation reasonable to occupy?

When assessing whether the accommodation is reasonable to occupy, the following should be considered:

- Is there a probability of violence? Violence has a broad definition here and includes emotional, financial, psychological abuse and controlling/coercive behaviour.
- Is there a probability of threats that are likely to be carried out?

- If the above are met the property is unsuitable, otherwise the local authority will need to consider all other matters in relation to the house to determine if suitable. The local authority will factor in the prevailing housing circumstances in the area when assessing whether a property is reasonable to occupy.

The duties are outlined below:-



If satisfied a household is homeless or threatened with homelessness, they have a duty to:-

- Assess their circumstances and how they became homeless
- What support they need to sustain accommodation
- What accommodation would best suit their needs
- Develop a personalised housing plan setting out reasonable actions for the authority and customer to undertake to address the housing situation

If a household is threatened with homelessness, they will be owed a prevention duty.

If a household is actually homeless they will be owed a relief duty.

These are collaborative duties and the authority should seek agreement from the client in regards to actions set.

These duties can end if:-

- A suitable offer of accommodation that is likely to last for 6 months is accepted
- A suitable offer of accommodation that is likely to last 6 months is refused, if the offer was a 6 month private tenancy or social tenancy the local authority would not need to consider if a main housing duty is owed

- If a prevention duty is owed, and someone becomes homeless, this will end the prevention duty and a relief duty will begin
- If a relief duty is owed and 56 days pass, this can end the relief duty and a main housing decision should be made
- If a household ceases to be eligible for assistance
- If someone deliberately refused to co-operate with their housing plan and the local authority has an approved policy on when duties should be ended in such instances. Worcestershire authorities are not currently ending duties due to deliberate refusals to co-operate with housing plans.

Main duty decisions

If the relief duty ends and the applicant has not been housed, and they have not refused a 6 month private or a social tenancy, the local authority will need to make a main housing duty decision.

A 'main homelessness duty' is owed where the authority is satisfied that the applicant is eligible for assistance, unintentionally homeless and falls within a specified 'priority need' group.

The 'priority need groups' include households with dependent children or a pregnant woman and people who are vulnerable in some way e.g. because of mental illness or physical disability. In 2021 this was expanded to include those fleeing from domestic abuse to have an automatic priority need for housing. In 2002 the priority need categories were extended to include applicants who are aged 16 or 17, care leavers aged 18-20, people who are vulnerable as a result of time spent in care, in HM Forces, in prison or custody, and those who are vulnerable as a result of having to flee their home because of non-domestic violence or the threat of violence. Guidance on factors local authorities should consider when looking at vulnerability can be found in the Code of Guidance for Local Authorities.

If someone does not fall within these categories or is not deemed vulnerable, they will not be owed a main duty due to not being in a priority need.

If someone is in a priority need the local authority will need to consider if they are intentionally homeless. A household is intentionally homeless if they have:-

- Deliberately done...
- ...an act or omission...
- ...in consequence of which...
- ...they cease to occupy accommodation...
- ...that was available and reasonable to occupy...
- And the act of omission was not done in good faith

All of these tests need to be satisfied for a household to be intentionally homeless. Acts or omissions should not be deliberate if the applicant was not capable of managing their affairs due to age, mental health or infirmity or due to a temporary

aberration of the mind, or if under duress or benefit delays beyond the applicants control.

If someone is intentionally homeless there will be a duty to provide accommodation for a reasonable period of time for the household to make their own arrangements.

Homelessness Households not owed the rehousing duty

Homeless people not owed the full rehousing duty are typically single people or childless couples who are not assessed as being in 'priority need' or those deemed to be intentionally homeless. These groups are only entitled to advice and assistance if homeless, not the "main housing duty". Some non-priority homeless people are offered access to Local Authority commissioned housing support services.

The local authority can utilise its discretion to assist certain households in exceptional circumstances.

Street Homelessness

DCLG defines street homelessness as: "People sleeping, about to bed down (sitting on/in or standing next to their bedding) or actually bedded down in the open air (such as on the streets, in tents, doorways, parks, bus shelters or encampments). People in buildings or other places not designed for habitation (such as stairwells, barns, sheds, car parks, cars, derelict boats, stations, or "bashes").

Appendix Two - Action Plan

Year One (Dec 2022 – November 2023)

High level action	Action	Client group	Responsible Organisation	Lead organisation (if county action)	Timescale
PREVENTION					
Reducing homeless approaches	Explore opportunities with Worcestershire County Council to develop a county wide Sanctuary Scheme to enable survivors of Domestic Abuse to remain safe in their own home	Domestic Abuse	WCC	RBC&BDC (Domestic Abuse Co-ordinator)	March 2023
	Work with the Research and Intelligence Officer to improve quality, understanding and utilisation of data including on adverse childhood experiences to assist with shaping homeless prevention services	All client groups	RBC&BDC	RBC & BDC	March 2023
	Targeted domestic abuse training and joint working with registered provider teams to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduce risk of financial abuse for tenants Enhance understanding of tenancy law/policies to remove perpetrators 	Domestic Abuse	RBC&BDC	RBC&BDC (Domestic Abuse Co-ordinator)	March 2023
Partnership working	Ensure health collaboratives have a housing rep or housing issues fed into the collaboratives	All client groups	All councils	WSHOG	March 2023
	Explore further opportunities to co-locate housing staff with other organisations e.g. DWP, Care leavers team	All client groups	All councils	WSHOG	March 2023
	WSHOG to discuss with WCF the issues around the transition from young people to adult services (where learning or physical disability or mental health need) so that a coherent and consistent pathway is in place that avoids homelessness occurring	Young people	WCF	WSHOG	March 2023
	Develop protocol with criminal justice and develop action plan following on from the independent report	Prison leavers	All Councils	Reducing Re-offending Group	March 2025
Customer Involvement	Engage regularly with service users using a variety of methods including face to face interviews and surveys to	All client groups	All Councils	WSHOG	March 2025

	enhance learning from lived experience and consider whether actions from the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping strategy are making a difference to households				
Raising awareness – customers and other organisations	Explore opportunities to work with Here2Help to have a community directory of homeless related services.	All client groups	All Councils & WCC	WSHOG and Nicki Breakwell	March 2023
	Deliver communication plan to raise awareness and have a consistent message around homelessness across the county (see separate plan appendix three)	All client groups	All councils	Worcestershire Strategic Partnership Officer	March 2025
Early Intervention	Explore the opportunity to establish prevention panels for domestic abuse across the county	All client groups	BDC, MHDC, RBC, WC & WDC	N/A	March 2023
	Work with Ukrainian hosts and guests, asylum seekers and refugees in partnership with other organisations to reduce homelessness	All client groups	All councils	WSHOG / WSHP	March 2023
	Promote and encourage sign up to the Duty or Commitment to Refer especially from the Police (DA), Voluntary and Community Sector and registered providers.	All client groups	All councils	WSHOG to agree individual organisations	March 2023
	Work with the Early Help Partnership to ensure family homelessness is prevented at the earliest stage.	Families with children	All councils	Worcester City	March 2023
Commissioning	Work in partnership with the County Council, service providers, the Police and Crime Commissioner and other organisations to commission, deliver and review services to ensure they satisfy objectives	Domestic Abuse	All councils	WFDC	March 2023
Thematic review of rough sleepers (where actions not already)	Local Homeless Forums to consider the development of a set of principles for organisations providing services for the homeless.	Rough Sleepers	Adult Safeguarding Board and councils	WSHOG	March 2023
	Members of the local homeless forums to consider how the voluntary sector and other smaller organisations	Rough Sleepers	Adult Safeguardi	All councils	March 2023

picked up elsewhere in the action plan)	providing homeless services may be able to work collaboratively to deliver and access training		ng Board and councils		
	Consider outcomes of the supported housing joint strategic needs assessment and the Housing First UofW evaluation in identification of further types of accommodation for the rough sleeper client group	Rough Sleepers	Adult Safeguarding Board and councils	WSHOG	June 2023 tbc
	Monitoring of outcomes from the RSI2022-25 and the Rough Sleeper Action Plan to see how effective the interventions are into rough sleeping across the county	Rough Sleepers	Adult Safeguarding Board and councils	WSHOG	March 2025
	Consider local evidence of need which supports (including female rough sleepers) any specific actions.	Rough Sleepers	All councils	Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy oversight group	March 2023
Data and intelligence	Monitor and gather intelligence around debt and other impacts from the cost of living including with voluntary sector working with the homeless and rough sleepers	Rough Sleepers	All councils	Local homeless forums	March 2023
INTERVENTION					
High level action	Action	Client group	Responsibility	Lead organisation (if county action)	Timescale
Tenancy sustainment	Ensure officers link to harm reduction service where client not fully engaged with drug and alcohol services, through joint working and training	All client groups	Cranstoun	WSHOG	March 2023
	Develop and embed support services across the county – community based led approach – to meet needs	All client groups	All councils	WSHOG	March 2023
	Ensure any available support provision is flexible to the clients needs as they progress along the pathway	All client groups	All councils	WSHOG	March 2025
Training	Staff training in Psychological Informed Environment (PIE)	All client groups	All councils	WSHOG through WDC (training budget)	March 2023

	Awareness of the MCA and the CARM process within councils for those who have capacity but have complex needs to include circulating CARM resource pack to housing advice teams.	Complex needs / Mental Health	Adult Safeguarding Board	All councils	March 2023
RECOVERY					
High level action	Action	Client group	Responsibility	Lead organisation (if county action)	Timescale
Tenancy sustainment	Explore opportunities to link homeless households into meaningful activity and services to reduce social isolation and loneliness such as Plus (Onside Advocacy).	Rough Sleepers	All councils	Rough Sleeper Co-ordinators	March 2025
	Increase take-up of education, training and employment support available across the county	All client groups	All councils	Building Better Opportunities / WSHOG	March 2023
	Review the existing peer mentoring services and consider whether this should be widened out across Districts / Clients	Rough Sleepers	All councils	WDC, MHDC, BDC & RBC	March 2023
Early Intervention	Work with those in safe accommodation to ensure digital safety including around local settings, use of social media etc	Domestic Abuse	All councils	Domestic Abuse Co-ordinator / Domestic Abuse Housing Officers	March 2023
SUPPLY OF ACCOMMODATION					
	Explore opportunities for a greater range of supported and step-down accommodation available, before settled accommodation, for those that need an interim step, following the supported housing needs assessment	All clients	All councils	ASC / PH / WSHOG	March 202
	Explore the housing demand for rough sleepers to identify whether any further supported accommodation is required and where that should be located e.g. Housing First, Direct access Hostel	Rough Sleepers	All councils	Research and Intelligence Officer	March 2023
	Develop / retain 35 units of safe accommodation across the County for victims/survivors of domestic abuse	Domestic Abuse	All councils	WFDC	March 2023

Year Two (Dec 2023 – November 2024)

High level action	Action	Client group	Responsible Organisation	Lead organisation (if county action)	Timescale
PREVENTION					
Reducing homeless approaches	Explore the funding opportunities available to employ a countywide Young People’s Co-ordinator (YPC)	Young People	All councils	WSHOG	March 2024
	Review issues within the private rented sector (PRS) following the rent reform legislation and end of the s21 notices to ensure homelessness from the PRS is reduced.	All client groups	All councils	WSHOG	March 2024
Partnership working	Work with partners to explore opportunities for further outreach provision from their services e.g. GP drop ins, joint home visits, mental health outreach	All client groups	All councils	Health and Housing Partnership Officer	March 2024
	Work with partners to explore joint training and job shadowing to improve understanding of care act, homelessness and mental health assessments to support the prevention of homelessness	All client groups	All councils	Health and Housing Partnership Officer	March 2024
Customer Involvement	Explore opportunities to develop a youth homelessness snapshot survey with YPC	Young People	All councils	Young People Co-ordinator	March 2024
Raising awareness – customers and other organisations	Deliver communication plan to raise awareness and have a consistent message around homelessness across the county (see separate plan appendix three)	All client groups	All councils	Worcestershire Strategic Partnership Officer	March 2025
Early Intervention	Work with school/education settings to explore homelessness / healthy relationships targeting schools in areas where homelessness is more prevalent	Young People	All councils	Youn People Co-ordinator	March 2024
INTERVENTION					
High level action	Action	Client group	Responsible Organisation	Lead organisation	Timescale

			Organisation	(if county action)	
Reducing rough sleeping	Review outcomes from Rough Sleeper Initiative 2022-25 funding / Rough Sleeper Accommodation Programme ⁴ to reduce rough sleeping	Rough Sleepers	All councils	Rough Sleeper Coordinators	March 2024
Tenancy sustainment	Ensure any available support provision is flexible to the clients needs as they progress along the pathway	All client groups	All councils	WSHOG	March 2025
RECOVERY					
High level action	Action	Client group	Responsibility	Lead organisation (if county action)	Timescale
Raising awareness	Work with schools and education settings to ensure digital safety and healthy relationships is delivered	Young People	All councils	YPC	March 2024
Tenancy sustainment	Explore opportunities to link homeless households into meaningful activity and services to reduce social isolation and loneliness such as Plus (Onside Advocacy).	All client groups	All councils	WSHOG	March 2025
SUPPLY OF ACCOMMODATION					
Increasing accommodation	Explore opportunities for a greater range of supported and step-down accommodation available, before settled accommodation, for those that need an interim step	All client groups	All councils	WSHOG / ASC	March 2024
	Explore opportunities presented by re-purposing older peoples accommodation surplus to requirements	All client groups	All councils	WSHOG	March 2024
	Review the provision of accommodation and support for young people to ensure no young person will be placed in emergency bed and breakfast with shared facilities unless no other accommodation available (to avoid rough sleeping) including working with RPs on new build and accessing existing stock and other specialist housing providers	Young People	All councils	YPC	March 2024
	Support the recommissioning of YP accommodation and support services to ensure it meets need	Young People	All councils	YPC	March 2024

⁴ In Wychavon, Worcester and Wyre Forest only

Year Three (Dec 2024 – November 2025)

High level action	Action	Client group	Responsible Organisation	Lead organisation (if county action)	Timescale
PREVENTION					
Reducing homeless approaches	Explore opportunities for localised counselling services specifically for homeless households	Mental Health	All councils	Health and Housing Partnership Officer	March 2025
Partnership working	Explore Greater Manchester Combined Authority around co-ordinated bids across statutory and voluntary sector partners to address gaps	All client groups	All councils	Homelessness Link / WSHOG	March 2025
	Explore opportunities to engage PRS landlords through prevention panels to increase prevention in the PRS.	All client groups	All councils	WSHOG	March 2025
Raising awareness – customers and other organisations	Deliver communication plan to raise awareness and have a consistent message around homelessness across the county (see separate plan appendix three)	All client groups	All councils	Worcestershire Strategic Partnership Officer	March 2025
INTERVENTION					
High level action	Action	Client group	Responsibility	Lead organisation (if county action)	Timescale
Tenancy sustainment	Explore opportunities with the MH Trust around a specialist MH funded post to work with homeless households	Mental health	All councils	Health and Housing Partnership Officer	
RECOVERY					
High level action	Action	Client group	Responsibility	Lead organisation	Timescale

				(if county action)	
Tenancy sustainment	Explore opportunities to link homeless households into meaningful activity and services to reduce social isolation and loneliness such as Plus (Onside Advocacy).	All client groups	All councils	WSHOG	March 2025
SUPPLY OF ACCOMMODATION					
PRS accommodation	Engage with landlords from the private rented sector to enable access to accommodation across the districts post rent reform act	All client groups	All councils	WSHOG	March 2025

Appendix Three – Communication Plan

Homelessness is a complex issue. People find themselves without a home for many reasons. There has been a steady increase in the number of people seeking help and there are many factors contributing to this including public sector austerity, welfare reform, cost of living rises and an undersupply of suitable, affordable accommodation. We provide a number of services across the county to try to prevent homelessness from occurring and to provide assistance to those that become homeless. In 2020/21 the county had approaches from over 2214 households, that we owed a duty to. There are also a much smaller number of people who sleep rough every year and across the county there are tailored services to address these needs including No First and No Second Night Out accommodation, support via the HOPES commissioned service, Navigators and in-house support teams and bespoke accommodation schemes for move-on including Rough Sleeper Accommodation Programme (RSAP) funded projects. The Voluntary and Community Sector also support people facing homelessness with food, clothing and advice etc. However, not all those on the streets are Rough Sleeping, some will also be begging or street drinking for example and this message should be highlighted as well.

This communications plan has been developed by the District Councils to raise awareness around homelessness (an action in the Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy 2019-2022) and to deliver on the recommendations of the Worcestershire Safeguarding Adults Thematic Rough Sleeping Review.

Objectives of the plan:

- To ensure that the public, organisations and people who are potentially homeless are aware of the help that is available
- To communicate how important it is for people to act early if they are having difficulties that may lead to homelessness
- To highlight the important work of the councils and their commissioned partners to raise awareness and reduce the misinformation circulated on social media
- Have some clear, jargon free key messages that highlight activity or actions for the councils, stakeholders and the public

Action	Outcome	Communication Channels	Target Audience	Responsible	Due date and frequency
To re-promote the Duty to Refer / Commitment to Refer message.	To increase the number of referrals to Homeless Teams through Duty to Refer from a wider range of agencies.	Existing joint meetings and publicity materials with public organisations.	Public organisations who may meet people who are potentially homeless.	District Councils	Dec-22

For organisations and agencies who have an interest in preventing homelessness to continue to meet on a regular basis to share information, develop best practices and current policy developments.	To have a cohesive and coordinated approach and response to homelessness.	Regular local homeless forums	Organisations and agencies who are involved in homelessness.	District Councils and voluntary/statutory agencies	Quarterly or Bi-annually depending on local arrangements
To continue to review information on housing and homelessness on the district council websites to make sure it is up to date and accessible including through obtaining views on the information from People With Lived Experience (PWLE) To include case studies or videos to make messages more impactful.	For the public, organisations and people who are homeless or may become homeless to have easily accessible online information.	District Councils' Websites	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> People who are homeless or may potentially become homeless General Public 	District Councils	Sep-22 and a six monthly review
To promote the services available to rough sleepers including Streetlink, Cold/Hot Weather Emergency Provision, new services plus the existing services both statutory and voluntary.	For the public to have an increased awareness of the services available for people who are homeless. All organisations to promote a jargon free, cohesive message.	Regular media campaigns to include local newspapers, Facebook, Twitter and Instagram channels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> People who are homeless or may potentially become homeless General Public 	District Councils, WSHOG and Homeless organisations	Quarterly as a minimum

Channels to be used (subject to local arrangements)

- Local Homeless Forums
- Websites
- Social media (depending on local policies)
- Members and staff briefings
- Newsletters

Resources (subject to local arrangements)

- Website and media teams
- Relevant Housing Managers (Operational / Strategic)
- Worcestershire Strategic Housing Partnership Officer
- Worcestershire Strategic Housing Officers Group (for annual review)