

**STOCKTON-ON-TEES BOROUGH
COUNCIL**

**HOMELESSNESS
REDUCTION AND
ROUGH SLEEPING
STRATEGY
2020- 2025**

CONTENTS PAGE

	Page reference
INTRODUCTION	2
THE NATIONAL POLICY CONTEXT	4
OUR LOCAL ISSUES	6
OUR APPROACH TO SUPPORTING VULNERABLE PEOPLE AND HOW WE PREVENT AND ADDRESS HOMELESSNESS AND ROUGH SLEEPING	9
OUR 4 STRATEGIC PRIORITIES	16
MONITORING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF OUR STRATEGY	17

INTRODUCTION

Homelessness Reduction and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020- 2025

Following the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, Stockton-On-Tees Borough Council produced its first Homelessness Reduction Strategy in 2018. We have now taken the opportunity together with our partners to reflect on how we have responded to the new duties and to look ahead to ensure that our 4 core objectives (as detailed in this Strategy), also reflect the importance Government is placing on preventing and addressing rough sleeping.

The Council has adopted a range of interventionist tools in its Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy to ensure that wherever possible, crisis incidents are kept to a minimum, and homelessness and rough sleeping is prevented.

Our Strategy provides a framework for how we will engage early with our customers, partners and wider stakeholders (local communities, council members, registered providers, developers, government agencies, private landlords and voluntary and community groups) to intervene and prevent homelessness and offer appropriate services to support people that do become homeless, as we understand that homelessness can be a very damaging experience for individuals, families and to our local communities.

Council Vision

This Strategy has been prepared giving regard to the Council Plan 2020-2023.

The Council Plan sets out the Councils vision and hopes for the Borough looking forward to 2023 and explains the priorities the Council will be working on in the coming year to bring the vision to life.

Our Vision for the Borough

We want the borough of Stockton-on-Tees to be:

- A place where people are healthy, safe and protect from harm
 - This means that the borough will be a place where:
 - people live in cohesive and safe communities
 - people are supported and protected from harm
 - people live healthy lives
- A place that is clean, vibrant and safe:
 - This means we will enjoy:
 - great places to live and visit
 - clean and green spaces
 - rich cultural experiences
- A place with a thriving economy where everyone has opportunities to succeed
 - This means that the borough will have:
 - a growing economy
 - improved education and skills development
 - job creation and increased employment

We will play our part in bring about this vision for the Borough by being a Council that is ambition, effect and proud to serve. This means that we will make sure to provide:

- financial sustainability and value for money
- dedicated and resourceful employees
- strong leadership and governance



THE NATIONAL POLICY CONTEXT

The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017

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

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

The definition of homelessness

The definition of homeless remains unchanged from that outline in Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996. In summary, someone is considered to be homeless if they do not have a legal right to occupy accommodation, including, but not restricted to the following:

- Having no accommodation at all;
- Having accommodation that is not reasonable to live in, even in the short-term (e.g. because of violence or health reasons);
- Having a legal right to accommodation that they cannot access (e.g. due to fire, flood etc.);
- Living in accommodation they do not have a legal right to occupy (e.g. staying with friends temporarily).

Duty to refer

The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 introduced a duty on public sector bodies (including prisons, probation services, hospitals and the Department of Work and Pensions for example) to refer service users who they think may be homeless or threatened with homelessness to a housing authority.

Applications and inquiries

All applications for housing assistance will be assessed to determine if we have reason to believe that an applicant may be homeless or threatened with homelessness, the Council must and will make inquiries to see whether we owe them any duty under Part 7 of the 1996 Act. This assessment process is important in enabling housing authorities to identify the assistance that an applicant may need, either to prevent them from becoming homeless, or to help them to find another home. In each case, the Council will first decide whether the applicant is eligible for assistance and threatened with or actually homeless.

Assessments and personalised housing plans

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

Prevention duty

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

Relief duty

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

National Rough Sleeping Strategy 2018

The Government published its Rough Sleeping Strategy (and supporting Delivery Plan) in 2018, both set out the Government's plan to halve rough sleeping by 2022 and end it by 2027. It includes a range of commitments, intended both to help those who are rough sleeping or currently at risk of doing so, and to lay the foundations for a system focused on prevention, early intervention and a rapid rehousing approach to recovery. A requirement of this Strategy is that all local authorities update their Homelessness Prevention Strategies and re-badge them as "homelessness and rough sleeping strategies" and that local authority's report progress in delivering these strategies and publish annual action plans.

Rough sleeping has increased in Stockton (from 3 rough sleepers in our 2018 count, to 8 individuals in our recent 2019 count) and therefore this Strategy (as per our previous one) highlights that preventing rough sleeping and appropriately supporting those that suffer this experience remains a strategic objective for the Council.

Domestic Abuse Act 2018

The Domestic Abuse Act 2018 has strengthened the commitment to ensure the most vulnerable members of our community are protected, safe and able to enjoy a quality of life free of threat. There are significant links between the prevalence of domestic abuse and homelessness in our Borough.

OUR LOCAL ISSUES

An overview of Stockton-on-Tees

Stockton-on-Tees is a Borough of wide contrasts made up of a mixture of busy town centres, urban residential areas and picturesque villages. The Borough covers approximately 20,000 Hectares (equal to 200 square kilometres or 49.4 thousand football pitches), living in 84,490 dwellings (2016).

According to the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD 2019), the Borough is ranked 73rd most deprived out of the 317 local authorities in England. Tees Valley has a population of 666,237; of which 194,803 (29.2%) live in Stockton on-Tees, making it the largest Local Authority area in Tees Valley by population size. The Borough's population is expected to increase to 211,005 by 2039 an increase of 10.1% since the 2011 Census. There is significant population growth expected in two particular age groups 65+ years (54% by 2039) and 90+ years (150% by 2034). By 2033 the working age population (16-64 years) is expected to have decreased by 1,977 to 120,872.

Homelessness in our Borough

Homelessness is often caused by a complex interplay between a person's individual circumstances and adverse factors often outside the control of the individual or family and can include for example unemployment, poverty, the state of the housing market and changes to government policy.

Headline facts and figures

- **Table 1** (overleaf) details the main reasons for homelessness presentations in the borough. As highlighted **family no longer able/willing to accommodate, end a private rented tenancy, relationship with partner ended (non-violent breakdown) and domestic abuse are the key reasons for homelessness in our borough.**
- We have **successfully increased the number of positive Housing outcomes for customers approaching the service by 30%** (comparing Q2 18/19 to Q2 19/20).

Service pressures and demands

- **Table 2** overleaf compares outcomes of prevention and relief over the period 2017/18, 2018/19 to 2019/20 and provides an indication of demands on the existing service.
- **Table 3** In Stockton on Tees almost two thirds of households placed in temporary emergency accommodation have self-identified as having a mental health issue and over half of those who approached the service identify as having a drug or alcohol dependency issue. Overleaf indicates the support needs of relief cases over the period of 2 years from 1st April 2018 to 31th March 2020 with a clear pressure and increased incidence of customers exhibiting mental health and substance misuse.

Table 1: Reasons for Homelessness presentations

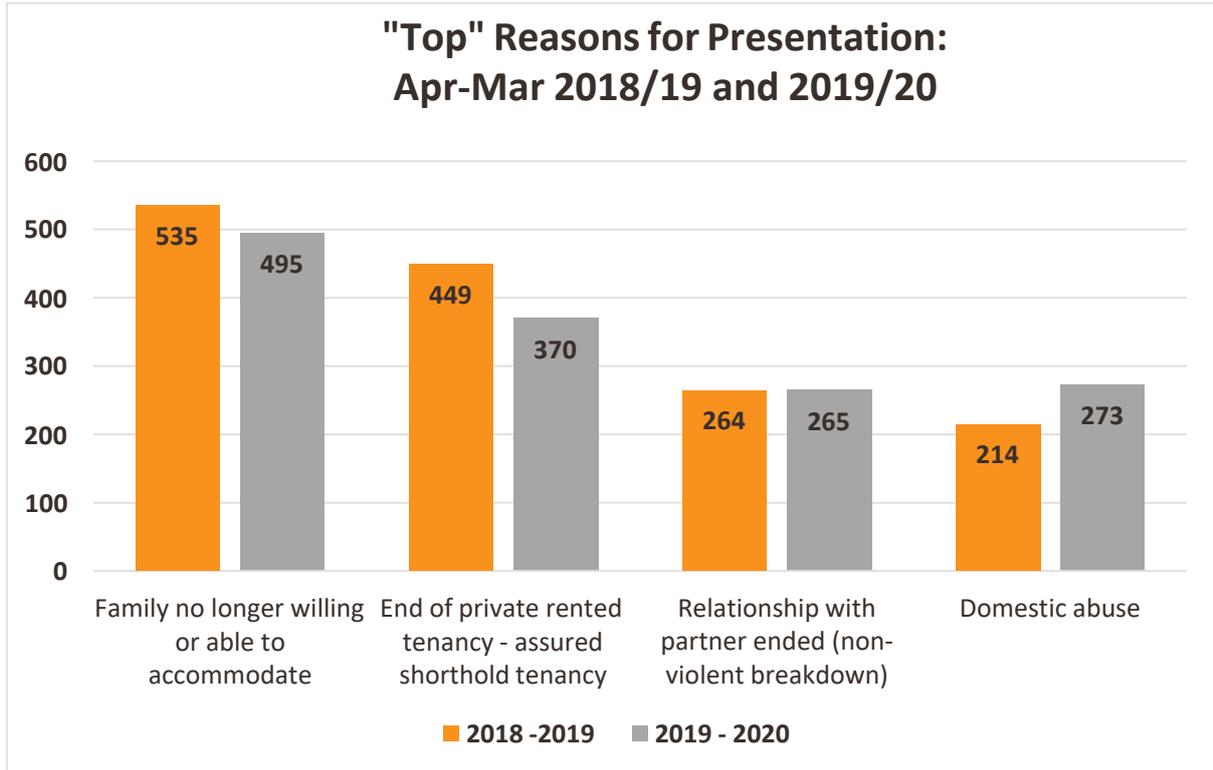
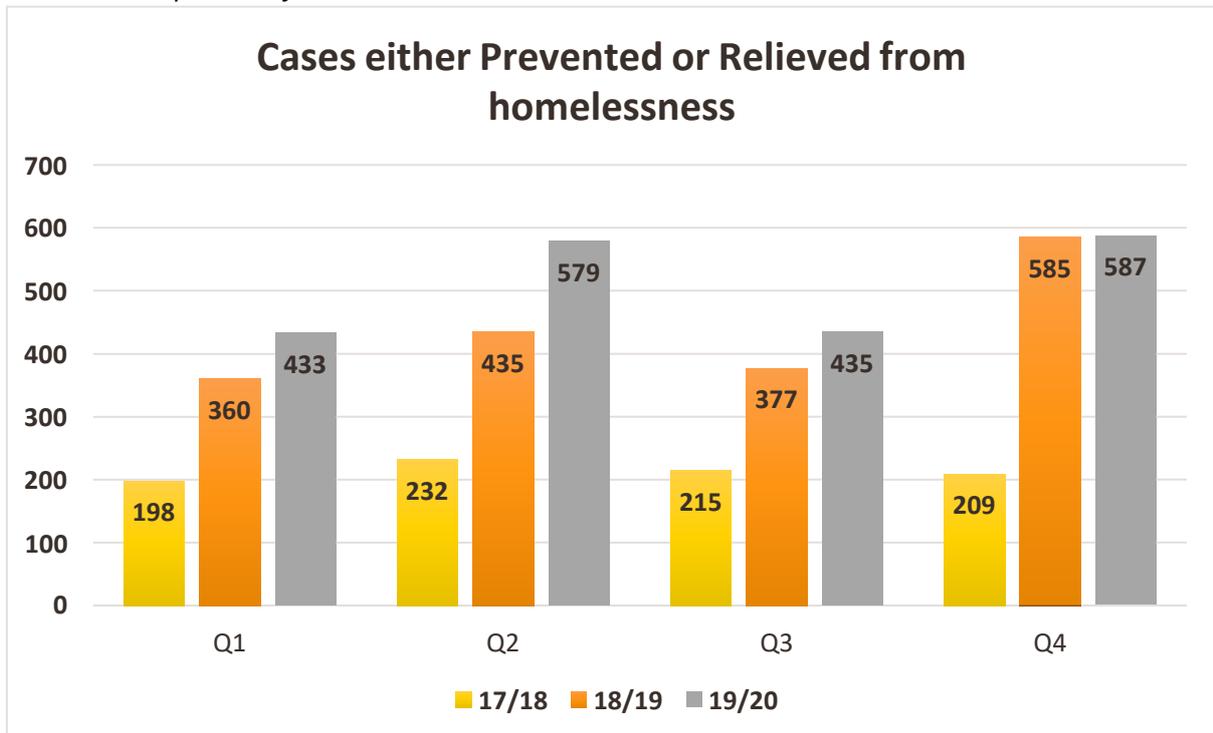
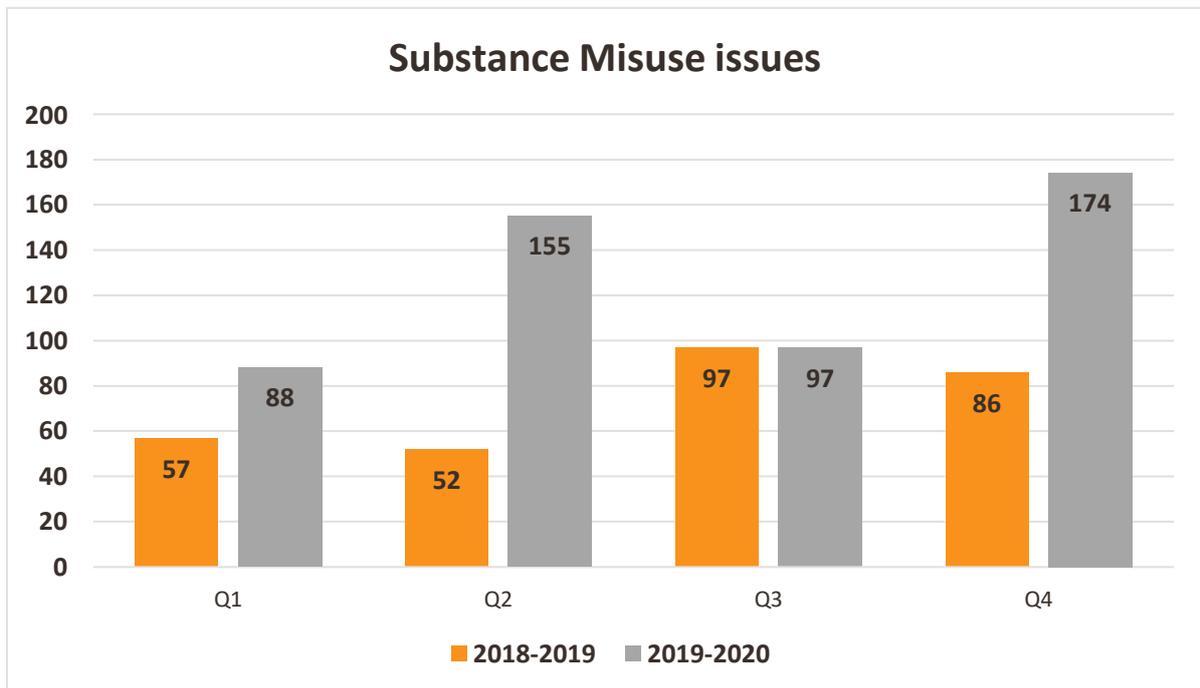
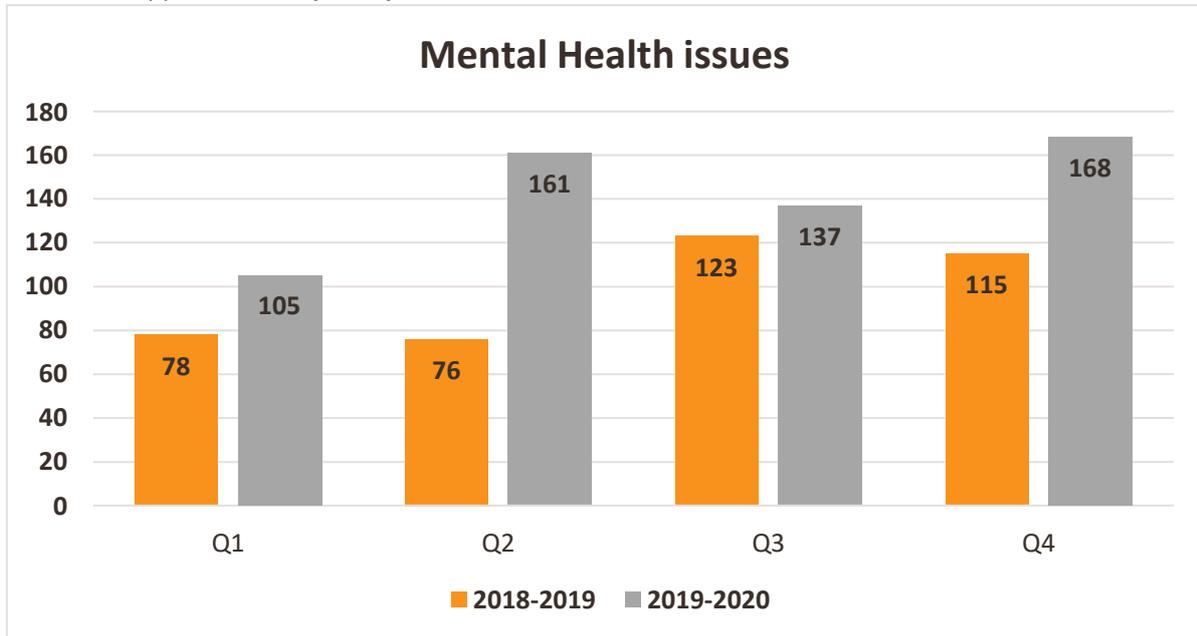


Table 2: Comparison of Outcomes



Data collected for 2017/18 is not directly comparable with the two future years due to the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act from 2017.

Table 3: Support Needs of Relief Cases



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

Our Service Delivery Model

The Prevention Team

The prevention team work with households who are **Eligible**, and **Homeless**, or, **at risk of homelessness** in the **next 56 days** the Homelessness Preventions Officer (HPO) will **intervene early** and undertake a full assessment of the household circumstances and support needs, to agree a **Personal Housing Plan** to prevent homelessness occurring.

If the Applicant and their family (if applicable) are currently homeless, the Prevention team will work with the household under the **Relief Duty** of the **Homelessness Reduction Act** to ensure the household secures permanent suitable housing within the **next 56 days**. For households in **Priority Need** (for example, a family with dependent children), there is a duty to provide interim emergency accommodation if they have no accommodation available to them.

In circumstances when the Council have **statutory duties** to households, **Prevention, Relief or Final Duties** the full range of toolkits available to our service are used. This includes financial assistance when this is a barrier to securing accommodation, provision of accommodation options and advice, and / or referral to dedicated support services.

The Housing Solutions Team

The Housing Solutions Service identifies suitable temporary accommodation for those Households with no accommodation available to them. The team work closely with all the **Commissioned** and **Non-commissioned providers** in Stockton to access and secure accommodation, working with households at a **pace manageable and appropriate** for them, to **move on at the most suitable time**, to more sustainable accommodation. All temporary placements are monitored against a mutually **agreed support plan** for each household. The team provide and deliver services to Rough Sleepers to help them move off the street and into suitable accommodation supported via the floating support service.

Additional local investment in services

The Council working in partnership with local authority partners across the North East region have secured additional Government funding (Rough Sleeping Initiative, Rapid Rehousing Fund and monies from the Cold Weather Fund) to support a range of initiatives focusing on Rough Sleeping.

This additional funding has enabled Stockton to adopt a range of early intervention tools and pilot a number of new service initiatives (some in partnership with other local authorities):

- **A Rough Sleeper Outreach Support Officer** – working with some of our most vulnerable and chaotic customers who need intensive help and support to remain in their accommodation.
- **A Substance Misuse Outreach Officer** – a dedicated Officer to identify and engage proactively with anyone who presents with a substance misuse support need or vulnerable to substance misuse. Stockton have a contract with the drug and alcohol service provider to offer outreach services for rough sleepers in both Stockton and a neighboring borough.
- **A Prison Outreach Officer** – a dedicated Officer to work closely with the Prison service and Courts to ensure that those individuals released from custody have a planned pathway to secure accommodation and support (if required).
- **A Personalisation Fund** – flexible funding utilised economically to sustain or provide access to suitable accommodation which otherwise would be unavailable without intervention.
- **A Rough Sleeper Outreach Navigator** - who attends all the street link reports on Rough Sleepers, engaging proactively with the customer, encouraging them to work with agencies to address their needs. Stockton’s Street link reports have significantly increased in the last year.

The above posts have been targeted to support the Council to provide robust pathways to ensure we can reduce the number of Rough Sleepers in the Borough and meet the requirements of No Second Night Out.

Provision of temporary / supported accommodation (managed by the previously mentioned Housing Solutions Team)

Commissioned and temporary accommodation

A number of commissioned and temporary accommodation contracts are due for review and renewal in 2021. The review will assess the continued appropriateness of existing commissioned services, how they are performing, and how closely they are meeting current, projected, and future emerging demand for services. The existing service provides a range of accommodation, support and signposting, to address the linkages between homelessness and increased presentation of customers exhibiting multiple support needs, providing a vital alternative to traditional temporary accommodation (specifically B&B and short term unregulated, hostel accommodation). The aim of these placements is to provide more than a 'roof', these supported temporary accommodation placements enable individuals and / or families who may have barriers to housing, to follow agreed "pathways" to secure sustainable independent accommodation.

All homeless households accommodated in a commissioned and temporary accommodation unit are assessed to identify their support needs and are provided with an indicative support plan. Those with identified needs (which may include mental or physical health, learning disabilities, substance misuse for example) are provided with an agreed number of weekly support hours. When a homelessness household is ready to move on, the Gateway Service will instigate a move on plan with the aim of securing a transition to settled permanent (more suitable) accommodation.

Non-commissioned temporary accommodation

Stockton have a number of Non-Commissioned Housing Providers that offer homeless single people accommodation. These providers work with those homeless single people who often have significant barriers to securing accommodation. We work closely in partnership with these providers, referring customers into these properties while maintaining agreed pathways. This provides a supportive environment for customers to ensure they develop appropriate skills to successfully transition to more independent living.

In the period of 01/03/2019 – 01/04/2020 we have referred 326 customers into the Non-commissioned Housing, with 153 being successful at securing and sustaining accommodation.

Bed and Breakfast accommodation

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

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

The Council is committed to using this form of accommodation as a 'last resort' and has made significant progress over recent years to reduce the use of this form of temporary accommodation, the Government target being families with dependent children not to be placed in temporary bed and breakfast type accommodation for a period longer than 6 weeks. Stockton perform at a significantly better timeframe than this at an average of 9 days (2019-20).

If a placement is necessary, it will be for the shortest possible time (until we can secure alternative accommodation). All B&B placements are monitored daily. If after exploring all other accommodation options a family is placed into B&B, robust mechanisms are in place to monitor the number of children placed in this form of accommodation with regular updates provided to our Local Safeguarding Children's Board.

Delivering Specialist accommodation in partnership

The Council successfully secured, through an existing partnership with a partner Registered Provider, Northstar Housing Group, £234k of capital funding and £31k of revenue funding from Homes England to provide additional housing supply in the form of 6 two bedroomed properties. This new supply facilitated effective and appropriate move-on accommodation to generate new vacancies in local authority temporary supported accommodation.

Emergency out of hour's service

To ensure that we are able to meet our statutory duty the Council provides an out of hours' service to customers at risk of homelessness who require emergency accommodation.

Out of area temporary accommodation placements

On occasions the Council may have no alternative but to make a placement "out of Borough". Placements such as these will always be kept to a minimum with the aim of moving the household back into the Borough as soon as possible, unless it is not safe for the household to return. Where "out of Borough" placements are identified as the most appropriate and suitable solution for an individual or family, the Council engage early with their respective counterpart Authority to ensure the placement is managed in a coordinated and planned way.

Domestic Abuse

The Council has adopted a Domestic Abuse Strategy for 2017-2022 sets out how a multi-agency approach is being taken to prevent people from becoming victims and perpetrators of domestic abuse, and to provide support and protection, including the provision of crisis refuge accommodation services, for those who need it.

The Homelessness and Housing Solutions Service works closely with specialist partner agencies to provide advice and access to accommodation to those who require specialist services.

Our Homelessness Prevention Officers will offer relevant information to allow the applicant to make decisions about the best course of action for them and their family; this could be a referral to refuge or hostel accommodation, or a referral for outreach or floating support from a provider such as Harbour. Harbour provide a range of services including accommodation options, counselling and outreach services.

The Council successfully secured £55k (2019-2020) and £60k (2020-2021) from MHCLG through a partnership bid led by Standing Together a national organisation whose aim is to develop and improve services for people who do or are vulnerable to experiencing domestic abuse. In Stockton this has provided a **Whole Housing Project Officer** to modernise and ensure local domestic abuse services are aligned, work effectively and efficiently, and can respond proactively to the requirements of local people at risk.

Working collaboratively with key stakeholder partners to develop good practice models and ensure that wherever possible the Council and its partners intervene and support customers and their families in the most appropriate and effective way to ensure their safety and welfare.

Another specific aspect to the [Whole Housing Project](#) is developing a robust business plan to sustain the “Safe at Home” scheme. ‘Safe at Home’ provides an invaluable service to customers vulnerable or at risk of domestic abuse by providing additional security in their homes enabling them to remain safely in their family home wherever this is deemed appropriate and a choice of the customer. In April 2020 this service transferred to the Housing Solutions and Homelessness Team from the Community Safety team to ensure its sustainability and to develop a more bespoke offer.

Young people and care leavers

Young people who are also care leavers and young people under 18 years old are supported by the Council's Resources Team and the Leaving Care Team to make the transition from care to independent living. The **Looked After Children and Care Leavers Strategy 2018-21** sets out the Council's approach to ensuring every child and young person has a safe, happy, healthy, secure and loving childhood, nurturing their aspirations and enabling them to meet their full potential.

There is an agreed protocol between the Council's Homelessness and Housing Solutions and Children's Services Teams to ensure young people are appropriately supported. The support provided ensures appropriate guidance and advice is in place through dedicated Personal Adviser support, all children and young people have an up to date and comprehensive Pathway Plan, there are a range of accommodation options, including Staying Put and Supported Lodgings and support for access into employment, education and training. The Council has commissioned supported accommodation for care leavers and young homeless people that provides support to enable young people to move towards independent living.

Former members of the armed forces

The **Tees Valley Common Allocation Policy** has recently been reviewed. The updated policy (due to go live in Autumn 2020) will include a number of minor revisions to ensure that a priority award is granted to those who are serving, or who have served, with the armed forces and their families to ensure that appropriate preference is given to those seeking accommodation.

Additional preference will be awarded to members of the HM Armed Forces community (serving, or have formerly served, in the regular or reserve forces; a bereaved spouse/civil partner or a divorced spouse/civil partner) who are identified as having an urgent need for housing within 5 years of discharge.

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

Trafficking and modern-day slavery is a national issue. To ensure we are able to respond in a timely and effective manner, the Council does have protocol arrangements (and pathways) in place. This pathway includes a range of Council service areas including Housing and other statutory bodies such as the police, the Home Office and with local voluntary and community organisations.

Hospital discharge

Partnership working is key to effective and timely hospital discharge for all patients to ensure delays are avoided and that there are suitable services and move on accommodation available for those who need it. In undertaking a review of our service delivery model, we have identified hospital discharge as an area for further development. Housing are engaged in further developmental work working proactively with colleagues in Social Services, the Health Service and Strategic commissioners to identify any barriers to appropriate and planned discharges from medical care back into the community.

Working in partnership

In order to both prevent and support those who are homeless we work collaboratively with a number of internal and external partner agencies. This includes responding and introducing robust and effective working practices and procedures in accordance with Government guidance with respect to COVID19, to protect vulnerable customers and service providers.

One local example of effective partnership is:

Registered Providers and the Tees Valley Lettings platform

The five local authorities in the Tees Valley have a shared Common Allocation Policy and are members of the Tees Valley Lettings Partnership along with North Star, Home Group and Beyond Housing. Landlords who are members of this scheme advertise and let their available properties via this route. To maximise all affordable (and social) lettings, the Council has agreed Nomination Arrangements with a number of additional landlords who have properties within the borough, all 'nomination properties' are let in accordance with the Tees Valley Common Allocation Policy.

During 2019, the Tees Valley Lettings Partnership undertook a review of its Common Allocation Policy, this review has ensured that appropriate 'priority' for housing is awarded to those who have been assessed as statutorily homeless and in priority need and those who are owed a homelessness prevention or relied duty.

Private Sector Landlords

The Council's voluntary Landlord Accreditation Scheme recognises the positive and significant contribution of the private rented sector in meeting local housing need. Accredited Private Landlords are required to provide professionally managed services, high quality rental accommodation, and respond quickly to disrepair matters. Accredited landlords can advertise their properties free of charge on the Tees Valley Lettings platform.

Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) and other Government agencies

The Council was complimented by the Regional MHCLG Lead for Homelessness on the format and self-help information available on the website, alongside sharing of Good Practice.

Stockton were one of 13 Local Authority's nationally invited to participate in a review commissioned by MHCLG associated with the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. The Council will feature in the MHCLG report evaluating the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.

The Council actively welcomes scrutiny, support and funding from MHCLG to deliver better outcomes for customers seeking help and assistance from the Homelessness and Housing Solutions team. Active dialogue has also supported and assisted in a coordinated regional response to COVID19.

The voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector

There are a number of VCSE organisations within our Borough who actively support and assist those who are homeless or threatened with homelessness. We value the vital services they provide and work closely with partner VCSE organisations to ensure a bespoke and holistic service to clients who are often the most vulnerable in our local community. The Council has a Homelessness Forum whose aim is to promote positive dialogue between sectors and constructively challenge and inform future strategic aims and objectives in response to the [Homelessness Reduction Act 2017](#).

Internal partnerships

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

Our 4 Strategic Priorities

1. Prevent and Relieve Homelessness

2. Prevent Rough Sleeping

3. Efficient use of temporary* and supported accommodation

4. Work with relevant partners and stakeholders to secure positive homeless outcomes



Objectives



Objectives



Objectives



- 1.1. Provide advice and support to maximise access or maintain appropriate suitable housing
- 1.2. Monitor and evaluate the success of the new Homelessness Delivery Model
- 1.3. Successful transition for the most vulnerable and chaotic individuals to settled accommodation
- 1.4. Implement customer experience “track and trace” to inform service improvement
- 1.5. Explore how the utilisation of technology could improve services

- 2.1. Explore the provision of a “No First Night Out” policy
- 2.2. Actively bid and secure additional funding to support services for rough sleepers
- 2.3. Work collaboratively with VCSE partners to reduce the incidence and likelihood of rough sleeping
- 2.4. Explore and pilot a HUB facility at the Moses project.
- 2.5. Seek to implement a hospital discharge protocol with local hospitals

- 3.1. Implement a revised temporary accommodation model following the conclusion of the STHRS tender process
- 3.2. Implement an in-housing “floating support “ service to deliver effective outcomes
- 3.3. Introduce facilities management procedures to keep people safe during COVID19

- 4.1. Develop effective pathways for customers leaving mental health care and custody
- 4.2. Evaluate all MHCLG fixed term funded projects
- 4.3. Provision of training to stakeholder partners to raise awareness of the Homelessness and Housing Solutions Team

**Temporary Accommodation in this instance is defined as Bed and Breakfast, Emergency Accommodation for Families and Short-term Supported Accommodation*

MONITORING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF OUR STRATEGY

Each of the 4 strategic priorities will be monitored through a SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time Bound) Action Plan. In summary the supporting action plan will be:

- a. Detail all the actions that will be taken in order to deliver the strategic objectives;
- b. Detail timescales for completion;
- c. Lead officers.
- d. Detail resource implications; and
- e. Reference our anticipated outcomes and successful measures.

Our Action Plan will be reviewed on a quarterly basis and our progress against our stated objectives will be published annually.

Reviewing this Strategy

Our Homelessness Reduction and Rough Sleeping Strategy will be reviewed periodically in accordance with the lifespan of the Strategy and the Action Plan which underpins this will be reviewed on an annual basis or in response to any significant policy or legislative change. The views of stakeholders and partners will be sought as part of this review.

Contact details

Should you have any questions or queries in relation to the Councils Homelessness Reduction and Rough Sleeping Strategy please contact:

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