

# At home in Tewkesbury Borough

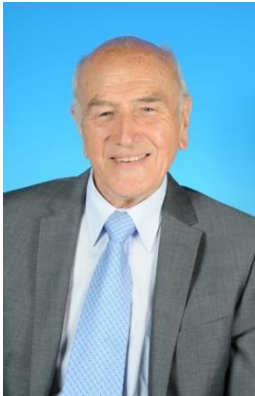
A housing strategy for our borough

Appendix 2: Homelessness and Homelessness Prevention Strategy 2017-2021



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## Foreword



I am pleased to introduce Tewkesbury Borough Council's 'Homelessness and Homelessness Prevention Strategy 2017-2021'. As Lead Member for Health and Wellbeing, I know how important it is for borough residents to have access to excellent advice and assistance when facing housing difficulties – or even the loss of their homes.

Under the Housing Act 2002, the Council is required to publish a strategy setting out how it will address homelessness in its administrative area. We have developed our Homelessness Strategy in conjunction with our overall Housing Strategy to produce a clear direction for a comprehensive customer-focused housing service which will meet the needs of all our borough's residents. This will make it easier for our customers and partner organisations to understand how we intend to address housing issues and deal with homelessness, and when we hope to do it.

Tewkesbury Borough Council is committed to providing early help to those experiencing difficulty with housing. We will ensure that homelessness-prevention options are available to borough residents, to sustain their accommodation and make repossession a last resort. We are also committed to providing excellent and cost-effective homelessness services to all our residents.

Our borough's population is widely dispersed, with relatively low levels of homelessness, and we recognise the need to maximise the availability of solutions for those who experience housing difficulties in our area, by joint commissioning of services with neighbouring authorities and other statutory agencies. This will become particularly important as financial pressures on local authority services continue to drive the necessity of cost-effective solutions for people in need.

We appreciate that housing solutions in isolation for vulnerable people are often unsustainable without support from other agencies, and we will therefore work closely with partners to deliver comprehensive packages of assistance to provide sustainable solutions. These principles are fundamental to meeting the challenges associated with changes to benefit entitlement.

I am confident that Tewkesbury Borough Council's comprehensive Housing and Homelessness Strategy will deliver high quality support and housing advice to Borough residents when they need it, using both existing and newly innovative approaches. Our strategy will also enable the Council to operate effectively, and to work with a range of partner organisations to provide customers with the assistance they need, with a choice of good-quality, affordable and private-market housing in an area where they want to live and work, now and into the future.



Councillor Ron Allen  
Lead Member for Health and Wellbeing  
Tewkesbury Borough Council

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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Homelessness – an overview

The common perception of homelessness tends to be individuals rough sleeping, but homelessness is a complex issue which affects both individuals and families who lose or face losing their homes as a result of numerous causes.

Homelessness can happen to anyone, is detrimental to every aspect of the lives of those affected and can have a negative impact on others living in the community. It also creates additional costs to public services.

The impact of homelessness and housing disruption on the well-being and life chances of affected children are well recognised as extremely detrimental. The prevention of homelessness and rapid resolution of homeless crisis therefore should be prioritised wherever possible when assisting those facing housing difficulties.

Nationally<sup>1</sup> the most common causes of homelessness for accepted applications have been identified as:

- The end of an Assured Shorthold Tenancy (private sector tenancies) equating to 31% of all homeless cases, and
- Parents or friends no longer willing to accommodate equating to 27% of all homeless cases.

Locally<sup>2</sup> within Tewkesbury Borough the primary causes of homelessness for accepted applications in 2015/16 were:

- Loss of Assured Shorthold tenancy (private sector tenancies) - 20%
- Relationship Breakdown involving domestic abuse - 19%
- Parents or family no longer willing to accommodate - 17%

Underlying vulnerabilities often contribute to the immediate causes of homelessness outlined above. These vulnerabilities include poor education, poor physical and mental health, involvement in crime, unemployment and poor life skills. The government<sup>3</sup> have set out overarching priorities to meet these:

- tackling troubled childhoods and adolescence
- improving health
- reducing involvement in crime
- improving skills, employment and the availability of financial advice

The importance of partnership working is imperative to tackling homelessness, particularly the underlying vulnerabilities and priorities. Tackling the underlying causes and the

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<sup>1</sup> Government (DCLG) Live tables on homelessness <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-homelessness>

<sup>2</sup> Housing Strategy 2017-2021 Appendix 1b, page 7

<sup>3</sup> Making Every Contact Count [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/7597/2200459.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/7597/2200459.pdf)

prevention of homelessness is better for those affected and more cost effective than seeking to assist households through statutory homelessness provisions or bringing them inside from rough sleeping.

Ongoing welfare reform changes<sup>4</sup> has, and will continue to, present challenges for those on lower incomes within Tewkesbury Borough. Those most affected are single people aged 18-21 who are out of work, those single on low incomes aged under 35, and larger families on low incomes with 3 or more children.

Assisting those affected to sustain their tenancies will require ongoing bespoke and effective joint working with our partners in the Tewkesbury Borough Financial Inclusion Partnership. Our working relationships with local partners and our neighbouring local authorities are fundamental in delivering successful outcomes for residents facing housing crisis as we are a rural borough with limited resources, and sustainable solutions involve tackling underlying causes of homelessness.

Tewkesbury Borough benefits from the co-location of services at the Public Services Centre on the edge of Tewkesbury Town with:

- Jobcentre Plus
- Tewkesbury Borough Police Station
- Gloucestershire County Council's Children's Services
- Gloucestershire Care Services incorporating Adult Social Services and Health services
- Citizens Advice Bureau
- Severn Vale Housing Society
- The Fire and Rescue Service
- Gloucestershire Rural Community Council, and
- Tewkesbury Borough Council services – including housing services, revenues and benefits, environmental health and planning.

The Public Services Centre enables the housing services team to collaborate closely with our partner agencies and clients to initiative early and sustainable solutions. Our collaboration includes joint training, commissioning, shared intelligence on services and issues challenging residents within our borough.

Tewkesbury Borough Council receives a homelessness prevention grant from the Government (DCLG) which is currently £48,000 per annum. This funding is to be focussed on homelessness prevention within the Tewkesbury Borough local authority area. These monies are spent on:

- Multi agency initiatives to prevent homelessness
- Small grants to partners undertaking prevention activities
- Financial assistance to individual households through deposits, tenancy rescue packages, rent in advance and so on.

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<sup>4</sup> Housing Strategy 2017-2021 Appendix 1b, page 18

We are committed to ensuring homelessness prevention and support services are available to all residents to sustain accommodation and make repossession the last resort.

## **1.2 Statutory requirements, evidence base and consultation**

Local authorities are required to produce a homelessness review and strategy under the Homelessness Act 2002 taking into account:

- Levels of homelessness within the borough
- Services provided to prevent homelessness and to provide accommodation and suitable support and
- The level of resources available to the authority including social services, voluntary organisations and the public agencies to provide these services.

Local authorities are required to keep the Strategy under review, to consult on it, and update it at intervals and to publish a new strategy within 5 years. Tewkesbury Borough Council's previous homeless strategy formed part of the overall housing strategy for 2012-2016, was subject to annual reviews, and informed our current strategic focus.

This Homelessness and Homelessness Prevention Strategy 2017-2021 has been developed as part of the overall Housing Strategy 2017-2021 with full review of services and performance, in conjunction with our Member housing working group, and involved public consultation. The two strategies deliver a comprehensive ongoing review, vision and focus for our housing and homeless activities for the next 5 years. The full national and local data that is used to inform the development of the Housing Strategy and this Homelessness and Homelessness Prevention Strategy and the overall legislative background can be found in the Housing Strategy 2017-2021 appendices 1a, 1b, 1c and 1d.

The demands on the homelessness service in Tewkesbury Borough and the council's housing services performance data can be found in Appendix 1b.

The consultation document and response document can be found on the housing strategy webpages on the council's website<sup>5</sup>.

## **1.3 Strategy Review**

This Strategy will be monitored and reviewed as part of the overarching Housing Strategy 2017-2021.

The action plan will be updated regularly to ensure that we are able to maintain a current and pro-active stance towards new challenges in preventing homelessness in our borough.

Forthcoming changes associated with new legislation, changes in funding streams and further welfare reform will be closely monitored and addressed via the action plan throughout the lifetime of the Strategy. This will ensure we are able to strategically identify and meet new challenges.

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<sup>5</sup> Tewkesbury Borough Council housing strategy webpages [www.tewkesbury.gov.uk/housing-strategy](http://www.tewkesbury.gov.uk/housing-strategy)

## 2 The Prevention of Homelessness

As detailed in the overarching Housing Strategy 2017-2021, Tewkesbury Borough is a rural district which with high levels of employment and relatively low numbers of households in housing difficulty. Our area also includes areas of social deprivation, however, and those in housing difficulty on low incomes struggle to find solutions as there is a high demand on social housing, high property value and expensive private rents<sup>6</sup>. The dispersed population across the borough also adds additional difficulties for homeless households to source accommodation in a locality near to existing support networks i.e. family, schools, GP's and so on.

Over the last five years there has been a rise in homelessness nationally which has also been evidenced in homeless approaches within Tewkesbury Borough. The impact of ongoing welfare reform on those on a low income is also likely to increase homeless demand in our area from those on lower incomes. This will be particularly from very young single people 18-21, single people aged under 35, and those in families with 3 or more children. A recent study by Policy in Practice (2016) commissioned by the Financial Inclusion Partnership within Tewkesbury Borough using multi public agency data evidences the projected impact of welfare reform within the borough, and an overview of welfare reform in our borough is examined in the Housing Strategy and evidenced in our local evidence, see Housing Strategy 2017-2021 Appendix 2b.

The prevention of homelessness is receiving increasing recognition as fundamental in services to those facing housing crisis within government and the formalisation of homeless prevention duties are currently under debate in the Homelessness Reduction Bill<sup>7</sup>. In 2015/16 Tewkesbury Borough Council reviewed homeless prevention activity and introduced the present proactive approach to homelessness prevention on a 'spend to save' basis. Our approach includes financial housing options to those threatened with homelessness in financial crisis. This approach significantly reduced both emergency accommodation placements and homeless acceptances during the last financial year<sup>8</sup>.

Duties associated with the draft Homelessness Reduction Bill involve early homeless prevention intervention to all households facing housing crisis, irrespective of whether there would be a statutory obligation to them as 'vulnerable' if they became roofless. We currently provide early intervention to all those in housing difficulty in our area, offering bespoke written advice and financial housing options to those who need financial help to resolve their difficulties. This enables all residents threatened with homelessness to avoid homeless crisis by staying in their existing home if reasonable, suitable and sustainable. This work is likely to be increasingly important for households in social housing facing housing difficulties as a result of welfare reform, as many will currently be in the most affordable suitable accommodation and more suitable alternatives will not be available.

If staying in their current home is not sustainable over the long term, we will offer advice and assistance to enable residents to move to a more suitable home, in an area of their choice,

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<sup>6</sup> Housing Strategy 2017-2021 Appendix 1b page 29

<sup>7</sup> Homelessness Reduction Bill 2016-17 <http://services.parliament.uk/bills/2016-17/homelessnessreduction.html>

<sup>8</sup> Housing Strategy 2017-2021 Appendix 1b pages 9 and 10



close to support networks before they reach homeless crisis; without the need for the disruption or the cost of emergency accommodation.

We are also committed to developing multi agency solutions for our applicants with our partner agencies and we work closely with Families First, Gloucestershire County Council Adult Social Care team, the Anti-Social Behaviour group, Greensquare, the Citizen's Advice Bureau, the council's benefits team and the Job Centre Plus to draw together comprehensive outcomes.

The government has set out a vision for social justice that is based on two fundamental principles:

1. Prevention and early intervention throughout a person's life, encouraging carefully designed interventions to stop people falling off track and into difficult circumstances.
2. A 'second chance society' ensuring that no one is 'written off' and that anybody who needs another chance gets access to the support and tools they need to transform their lives.<sup>9</sup>

Early intervention facilitates better choice and control for applicants, more sustainable outcomes, less disruptive solutions than statutory homelessness responses. This is particularly important within rural dispersed boroughs such as ours where there is a high demand for social housing, and large distances between and towns and villages, and statutory offers of accommodation may not be near to households' support.

The DCLG has offered guidance to local authorities on the criteria for a Gold Standard<sup>10</sup> to deliver cost effective excellence in homeless prevention and homelessness services. Tewkesbury Borough Council has engaged with the Gold Standard best practice with a view to meeting the best practice model in our area during the lifetime of this strategy

As well as the advice and financial assistance available to all, including those who have caused their own homelessness, we work with partners to establish pathways for those who need specialist support. We are committed to delivering against the ten challenges set out in 'Making Every Contact Count'<sup>11</sup> to benefit our clients and will continue to work with partners to develop our prevention and homeless pathways to benefit those in housing difficulty within our borough.

Tewkesbury Borough Council's housing services assisted 1,360 people with housing advice or homelessness interviews in the borough in the 2015-16 financial year.

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<sup>9</sup> Social Justice: transforming lives, Department for Work and Pensions, March 2012  
[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/49515/social-justice-transforming-lives.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/49515/social-justice-transforming-lives.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> For more information on the Gold Standard and the requirements of Tewkesbury Borough Council you can visit <http://home.practitionersupport.org/>

<sup>11</sup> Making every contact count: A joint approach to preventing homelessness, DCLG, 2012  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/making-every-contact-count-a-joint-approach-to-preventing-homelessness>

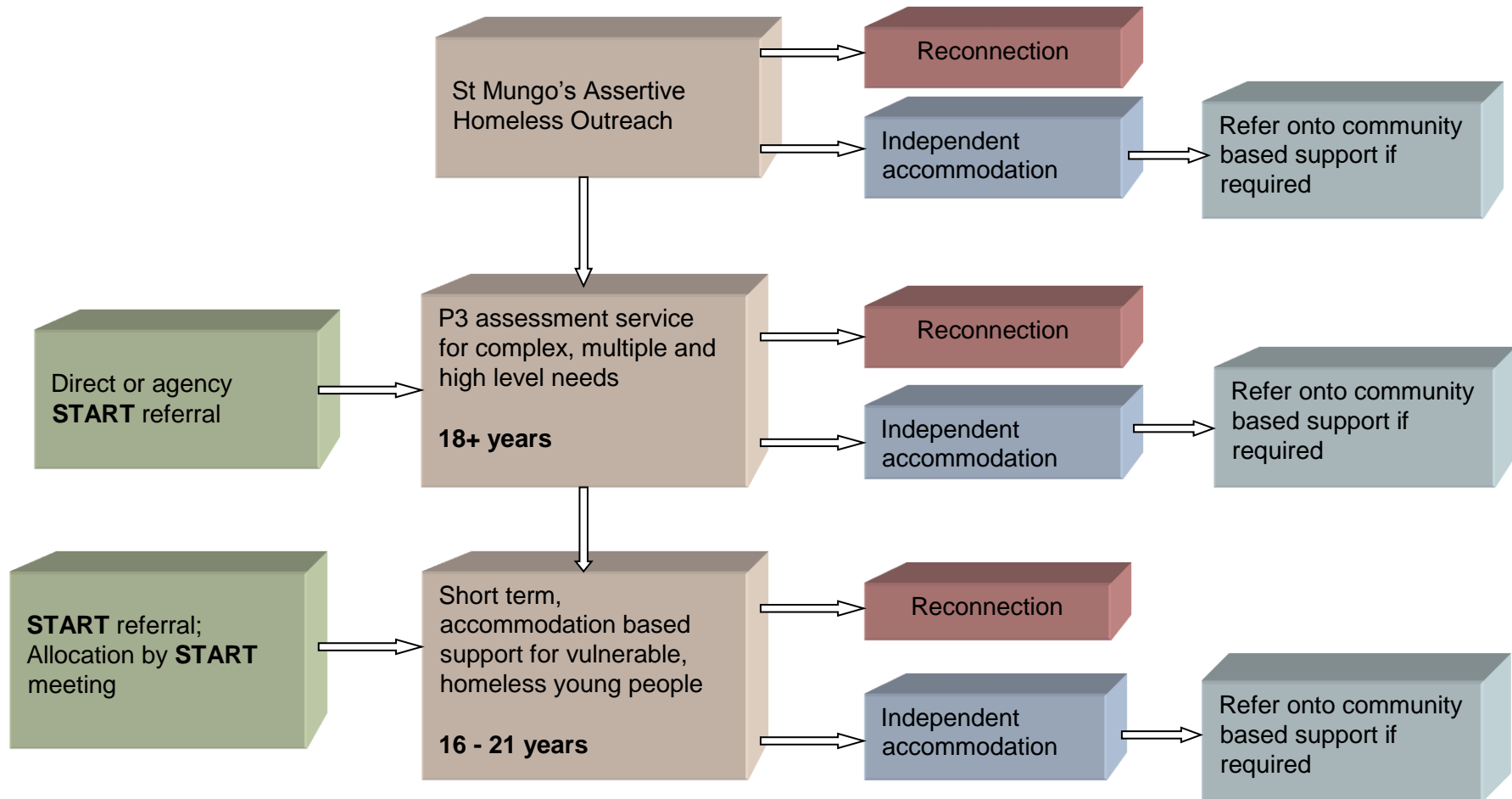
## **2.1 Homelessness Prevention Pathways**

Our support strands and prevention pathways are key to meeting these needs. Pathways for all groups are outlined in this section.

Chart 1 overleaf shows the Homelessness Prevention Pathways process map. START is the process which manages the assessment & access to accommodation based support for those people whose support needs are known and who don't need to go through the assessment service first.

### 2.1.1 Homelessness Prevention Pathways Process

Chart 1: Homelessness Prevention Pathways Process



### **2.1.2 Community Based Support**

One of the principal causes of homelessness is residents losing their tenancies. Households in housing difficulty may be able to sustain their existing tenancies with assistance from Tewkesbury Borough Council, for example to resolve housing benefit difficulties, and continue to benefit from ongoing housing related support.

Similarly, many other households who have become homeless will maintain tenancies in alternative accommodation with the assistance available from community based support.

We have worked closely with Gloucestershire County Council Supporting People commissioners to frame the community based support in our area, and with the support providers Greensquare to support individual cases in maintaining their tenancies and prevent homelessness. This support is critical in engaging with individuals or families when things start to go wrong and looking for solutions to prevent decline and any loss of their home. Greensquare hold regular surgeries in our Public Services Centre and work closely with us to resolve individual challenging cases.

### **2.1.3 Sanctuary/target hardening scheme**

Domestic abuse remains one of the main causes of homelessness within our borough and we are committed to supporting those who experience domestic abuse and enable them to remain in their current accommodation if they are safe to remain. The six District Councils in Gloucestershire and the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) pilot sanctuary scheme to offer target hardening and sanctuary room measures to residents wanting to remain in their homes and at risk of domestic violence has been very successful and been extended.

During 2015/16, 13 households from Tewkesbury Borough accessed assistance through this scheme and all continue to remain in their homes. All residents in our area received target hardening measures (lock changes and minor adaptations). No households required sanctuary measures and all those who benefited within our borough were female households.

Those who experience domestic abuse within our borough are also able to receive support through a specialist community based support via Gloucestershire Domestic Abuse Support Services (GDASS).

### **2.1.4 Young People**

Parental eviction is also a major cause of homelessness within our borough. Research by Shelter suggests that the causes of homelessness in young people are associated with adverse housing, economic and family trends, that young people are disproportionately affected by homelessness, and often don't know where to go for help. Local Authorities have duties towards homeless young people and care leavers, under Homelessness legislation and the Children's Act 1989 and Children (Leaving Care) Act 2002. This means young people may be eligible for assistance from the local housing authority or social

services. Any duty owed to homeless 16 and 17 year olds under the Children's Act 1989 takes precedence over the duties under homelessness legislation. As the local housing authority, however, we are still under a statutory duty to assess and assist all 16 and 17 year olds, in addition to any referral we might make to social services.

We work closely with our colleagues in the Gloucestershire Youth Support Team to prevent homelessness in young people and deliver the best outcomes for this vulnerable group and have a 'Southwark' protocol in place that sets out our shared arrangements. We also provide Equitable Tenancies in partnership with G3 for the young people's accommodation available within our borough, in order that Assured Shorthold Tenancies can be offered to those under 18 in supported accommodation in our borough.

### **2.1.5 Those leaving care**

We also work with the Gloucestershire Youth Support Team to support Care Leavers as they approach 18 to establish a planned move on from care into the most appropriate accommodation to provide sustainable solutions so that they do not become homeless at the end of their period in care. This may include supported accommodation, or independent living in the social sector or private rented sector.

### **2.1.6 Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) Youth Support worker**

Tewkesbury Borough Council benefits from an ASB Youth Support worker within Housing Services to prevent the homelessness of young people through family evictions and reduce nuisance. Our youth support worker engages with young people aged 11-19, families first, social care, schools, and the police to ensure that young people with challenging behaviour are able to stay with their families (if appropriate), and increase their life chances as adults.

### **2.1.7 Supported Accommodation – younger people and 18+**

(18+ accommodation based support and the Young Person's Accommodation based support)

Many households become homeless or threatened with homelessness and need support to develop the skills to maintain their tenancies. Supported housing helps people with a range of needs to find it difficult to maintain tenancies and ranges from rooms to flats, some with 24 hour support, others with support brought in when needed (floating support).

The homelessness prevention pathway as shown on page X is linked to changes identified with the Supporting People Strategy 2011<sup>12</sup>, the revised budget, and the 'pathway' of accommodation-based support. Providers offer first stage accommodation and assessment centres where individuals can begin to engage with support staff and start the process of identifying and addressing any needs. At this stage they plan their route back to independence, with support options available to fulfil their plans. Second stage accommodation-based support provides an effective county network, able to meet need,

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<sup>12</sup> Supporting People Strategy 2011, Gloucestershire County Council

1.1 <http://glostext.gloucestershire.gov.uk/documents/s3324/Supporting%20People%20Strategy%20Executive%20Summary.pdf>

whilst also offering the flexibility for individuals to move temporarily to receive support and reconnect back with their home area afterwards.

Most of the accommodation-based support projects within the county are located outside of Tewkesbury Borough and residents needing assistance are able to secure the county-wide supported housing projects. The council's housing services has worked closely with the local authorities in Gloucestershire, Supporting People, and our partners providing accommodation-based support to ensure that there is fair and equitable access to and move on from supported accommodation provision. We are committed to working with residents when they are ready to move back to Tewkesbury Borough through the countywide reconnection policy and offer financial assistance through rent in advance and deposits for those accessing the private sector.

Within the borough we have a young person's supported housing project in Tewkesbury Town. This provision has been recently improved by G3/Rooftop; the housing association have replaced their outdated provision at Tolley House with a redevelopment of accommodation on Tewkesbury High Street to provide high quality self-contained accommodation for young vulnerable adults on a single site alongside the existing services at Jubilee House in the town centre.

Several dispersed units of accommodation have also become available in the borough through Aspire as part of the Fair Chance<sup>13</sup> programme which supports young people to find independence through training and employment.

Projected ongoing welfare reform may result in a reduction in housing benefit levels for those in supported housing in the future. We will monitor how ongoing reductions will impact and work closely with partners to mitigate wherever possible the effects of possible future cuts on the services to our vulnerable homeless households.

### **2.1.8 Ex-military personnel**

Tewkesbury Borough has a military base within it at Innsworth and is part of the Community Covenant between the local authority services in Gloucestershire and The Armed Forces Community in Gloucestershire (2012). Joint protocols and preventative advice and assistance for those leaving the armed forces have been successful in meeting the needs when they approach and prevent homelessness.

We also work closely with support services available for ex-military personnel such as the Royal British Legion, Alabare supported accommodation, and SAFFA to assist more vulnerable ex-military personnel.

### **2.1.9 Drug and Alcohol Support**

We recognise people may turn to drugs or alcohol and that this frequently leads to homelessness. We have therefore worked with the County Council to commission a

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<sup>13</sup> The Young Engagement Fund and the Fair Chance Fund  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/30-million-boost-to-improve-the-lives-of-britains-most-vulnerable-young-people>

specialist service currently delivered by Change Grow Live to support individuals and their families to reduce their consumption of substances to safer levels or to abstain. The service specification was designed with the involvement of former and current service users, and understanding the most important features of receiving support to fulfil a person's recovery plans.

Recovery workers offer sessions at a series of hubs or supported housing locations to provide support in a way that works for the individual, linked to support from GPs and specialist nurses.

Successful reduction in substance misuse is expected to lead to improved health improvements, and in some cases reduced levels of crime or antisocial behaviour. The service will be monitored to ensure the best possible outcomes and minimise those losing their accommodation as a result.

#### **2.1.10 Mental Health Accommodation**

Accommodation is available in the county to provide short term, intensive housing related support focussing on adults with serious mental illness. Tewkesbury Borough Council works closely with the providers of this accommodation to ensure that our residents can access and exit accommodation back into Tewkesbury Borough when ready to move on.

#### **2.1.11 Older people and people with disabilities**

Within Tewkesbury Borough we work closely with Adult Social Care, Occupational Therapists, and our Environmental Health team to deliver solutions for older people/those previously living independently who are no longer able to live within their homes as a result of their disability. Working together with the resident, and our partners in occupational therapy, and social care, we deliver solutions which include: disabled facilities grants, rehousing into more appropriate accommodation including sheltered or extra care properties to prevent homelessness in this vulnerable group.

We also work closely with the community based support in the area to ensure that residents have the most appropriate support for their needs to maintain their lives in their current homes.

Our overall Housing Strategy addresses the projected increase of older smaller households within the borough over the next 30 years.

#### **2.1.12 Ex-Offenders**

An Accommodation and Brokerage/Personalisation service is active within the County which links closely with Probation and the Police as well as the other accommodation based support schemes.

### **2.1.13 Social Rented Properties – Choice Based Lettings**

We continue to work closely with our housing association partners within the area to meet housing need including to those who are threatened with homelessness. We promote choice based lettings to those facing homelessness and assist residents to make applications. All those threatened with homelessness and those who are non-statutory homeless receive additional priority banding 'silver' to assist them in their efforts to find alternative accommodation.



## **3 Areas of challenge in preventing homelessness**

### **3.1 Welfare Reform, the affordability of tenancies, exemptions and assistance**

As outlined in the main housing strategy and through the jointly commissioned local Tewkesbury Borough analysis by Policy in Practice, welfare reform changes are and will continue to affect the affordability of tenancies for many residents on a low income. Existing reforms affecting those under occupying properties in the social rented sector are continuing to cause many households arrears in their current properties.

#### **3.1.1 Single person households**

Our housing register demonstrates that 50% of those who have applied for social housing have a one bedroom need, and that there is a shortage of smaller properties becoming available. The high demand and low levels of stock indicate a limited ability of the local authority to meet the need of those affected by welfare reforms with a one bedroom need through the existing social housing stock.

Welfare reform following the Localism Act 2011, however, increased the demand for one bedroom accommodation rose following the under occupation reduction in housing benefits for those under occupying social housing. The demand has also increased because the amount of housing benefit to which those under 35 and on a low income were entitled was restricted in private sector rented properties to the 30<sup>th</sup> percentile of median rents for a room in a shared house. Those under 35 were no longer able to afford self-contained private rented accommodation in our area and there is limited shared private rented accommodation.

Forthcoming reforms in 2019 will also affect smaller households as they impact on single people aged under 35 on a low income in social housing. These reforms will introduce the shared accommodation rate for housing payments to the social sector. These changes are likely to result in significant shortfalls in rent for many younger single tenants within the social rented sector on low incomes as social housing rents are higher than the shared accommodation rate for housing benefit.

There is some uncertainty about the impact of these changes on supported accommodation and we will need to monitor how the reform is introduced for this group. Certain exemptions, however, were put in place which categories of ex-offenders (where there may be risks to others in shared accommodation), and also some provision for individuals who have formerly resided in specialist accommodation.

Care leavers will be one of the most vulnerable younger groups likely to be affected as whilst they are exempt from the single room rate until their 22<sup>nd</sup> birthday, they will be subject to the shared accommodation rate in social housing if on a low income until they reach 35 years of age.

Forthcoming reforms will impact further on very young single adults aged 18-21 who are not in training or work who will not be eligible for housing payments towards their rent. This is likely to result in both financial hardship and homelessness.

### **3.1.2 Family households**

Welfare reform will also impact on larger households with the reduction of the benefit cap to £20,000 with effect from November 2016. Research undertaken by Policy in Practice indicates these reforms will affect families on a low income with 3 or more children within the borough – but that those most affected are likely to be lone parents in social housing.

### **3.1.3 Welfare reform work already undertaken with partners**

We are committed to preventing homelessness within our borough in those households affected by welfare reform and by informing them of the changes to their income, enable them to either remain in their homes if sustainable, work with them to make their homes sustainable if possible, provide a period of affordable adjustment using transitional discretionary housing payment funds where residents are affected to enable them to make changes, or help them move to affordable accommodation without reaching homeless crisis. We are able to expedite interim solutions through our close working relationship with colleagues in Revenues and Benefits for affected households.

We will also engage closely with residents and our partners in the Tewkesbury Borough Financial Inclusion partnership to mitigate the effects of these reforms on those affected. This work will include identifying exemptions to ensure the most vulnerable receive the assistance to which they are entitled, and multi agency work which includes access to discretionary housing payments and transitional funds to enable residents to meet their rental obligations whilst seeking employment, or move to alternative affordable accommodation if appropriate.

These activities will be fundamental as many of the affected households will be in suitable social housing and cheaper alternatives will not be available. If residents lose their homes as a result of welfare reform, it will be difficult for Tewkesbury Borough Council to find suitable solutions. This joint partnership work with residents will also contribute to our overall Housing Strategy 2017-2021 Priority 4 Objective 4.3.

We will continue to monitor ongoing changes to benefit entitlements affecting our residents throughout the life time of this strategy with a view to preventing homelessness in those affected.

### **3.1.4 Increasing the numbers of smaller properties**

We will encourage Housing associations and voluntary sector partners to focus on supply of affordable suitable smaller accommodation, including good quality shared provision. We will review existing supported accommodation to ensure there is sufficient capacity for those young people needing to gain the necessary skills before being able to live independently.

### **3.1.5 Working with the Private Housing Sector**

13% of the housing stock within the borough is in the private sector rented accommodation, and the private housing sector is an important part of the council's strategic approach to meeting the diverse range of housing needs within the borough as demands on the social housing within the area increases.

Within Tewkesbury Borough rents tend to be higher than in the urban areas of Gloucestershire and those on low incomes often struggle to find landlords willing to rent to tenants on benefits.

Our evidence<sup>14</sup> suggests that the median LHA rates for private rented accommodation in smaller accommodation types are affordable in parts of the borough at the rates of the local housing allowance for those over 35 years. In 2015/16 we extended our financial housing options for those threatened with homelessness, to all residents irrespective of priority need or whether they became homeless intentionally to enable those who were threatened with homelessness to find alternative accommodation within the private rented sector. Our existing schemes such as rental deposits and rent in advance have proven to be successful in preventing homeless crisis to many households.

Further work needs to be undertaken to build a list of landlords willing to work with low income tenants. This work may include: further incentives for landlords taking on clients threatened with homelessness, advice for landlords to build relationships and trust with local landlords in our area. Building relationships within the private rented sector will be a priority throughout the life time of this strategy particularly with a view to providing smaller and shared accommodation.

Tewkesbury Borough Council operates a Landlord Accreditation Scheme which aims to increase the supply of good quality private rented accommodation available for those looking for accommodation. The scheme is called Fit to Rent and has been developed countywide by a consortium of Gloucestershire Councils in cooperation with local landlords.

We are also exploring working in partnership with Housing associations who operate Private Sector Leasing Schemes designed to house vulnerable people in the private sector. These schemes are likely to be of interest to small portfolio/single property owners who would prefer to take a risk free income from properties and do not want to actively manage tenancies. We will develop and promote such schemes within the borough to maximise the available homes for those threatened with homelessness.

### **3.1.6 Home owners**

Tewkesbury Borough has benefited from the Government's Mortgage Rescue Scheme (MRS) in the past although this has been phased out.

The number of presentations from home owners facing a crisis situation with their finances is very low within the Borough. We are not complacent, however, and will continue to offer and develop housing options to homeowners facing repossession, and offer specialist

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<sup>14</sup> Housing Strategy 2017-2021 Appendix 1b pages 29, 31 and 32

housing advice and assistance in partnership with the Citizen's Advice Bureau. This will be particularly important for vulnerable or disabled homeowners in mortgage difficulty where their property is adapted and suitable for their needs.

#### Challenges

- Intervention at the earliest possible stage for households in crisis and ensuring they access our services
- Achieving the GOLD Standard in homeless prevention to give a cost effective and excellent service to those facing housing difficulties
- Working with residents and partners to mitigate the effects of Welfare Reform on tenancy affordability
- Improving choice for residents facing homelessness by improving access to the private rented sector
- Addressing the needs of home owners following the removal of the Mortgage Rescue Scheme.

## **4 Homelessness Assistance and Emergency Accommodation**

If vulnerable households are roofless or become roofless during homeless enquiries, local authorities have a duty to provide accommodation, often in an emergency, while homeless enquiries are ongoing. Tewkesbury Borough Council offers a 24 hour emergency accommodation service to vulnerable households through our housing service during office hours as well as out of hours through the jointly commissioned service with Orbis who make placements on behalf of the council overnight.

The review of our housing and homelessness statistics indicate that the local demand for emergency and temporary accommodation is likely to continue, and may increase due to the impact of ongoing welfare reform.

Emergency and temporary accommodation is an important resource used to house urgent homelessness cases quickly and locally. Many local authorities, including Tewkesbury Borough Council, rely heavily on privately owned bed and breakfast (B&B) accommodation. It is widely recognised, however, that bed and breakfast accommodation can be of variable quality, expensive, and damaging to family life as households often don't have the opportunity to kitchen facilities and have access to only one room.

We are committed to limit the use of bed and breakfast accommodation for all groups. This is especially important for our applicants as there is limited private bed and breakfast style accommodation available within our Borough. We are reducing the use of bed and breakfast in many client groups through use of prevention initiatives and other more suitable temporary accommodation provision, but need to source alternative accommodation for those we cannot prevent.

### **4.1 Family households**

The council has access to five three bedroom houses managed by our partners Stonham across the borough which are used to house homeless family households on an interim basis and have been invaluable to largely avoid the use of bed and breakfast for this group in our area. In times of high demand, however, homeless family households may be placed into bed and breakfast, and we will seek further alternative accommodation provision for this group.

### **4.2 Young people**

We work closely with our partner agencies to avoid using bed and breakfast for young single people. This is because young people are inexperienced and particularly vulnerable in emergency accommodation. Tewkesbury Borough Council part funds Gloucestershire Nightstop who coordinate host families offering short term accommodation solutions for young people under 26. The scheme ensures that young homeless people have a safe environment with an evening meal whilst reconciliation work is ongoing or alternative accommodation is sourced.

Our supported housing providers for young people in the county also offer 'crashpads' as emergency accommodation for very young people in our area. However many, including the one in

Tewkesbury Town, are no longer in use and there are only 2 units remaining in Gloucestershire. The revenue funding (the support staffing element) for these units has been removed and with no further investment it is unlikely that the units will be brought back into use for this purpose. We also work closely with the Gloucestershire youth support team to ensure that very young people can access all appropriate solutions and support. This is possibly going to be through fostering solutions.

### **4.3 Those experiencing domestic abuse**

Our review of homelessness indicates that violent relationship breakdown continues to be one of the main causes of homelessness locally. This is in part due to our co-location with the urban areas in the county, and approaches to Tewkesbury Borough from applicants fleeing perpetrators in these areas. We have worked hard to develop solutions and alternatives to emergency accommodation for those who are experiencing violence in their home.

Following the recent closure of refuges in the county, a joint bid from the six District Councils in Gloucestershire to the DCLG was successful in securing funding for 'Places of Safety' to provide safe self-contained emergency accommodation for those fleeing Domestic Abuse in April 2015. 12 properties will be made available across the county for this purpose in partnership with Gloucestershire Domestic Abuse Support Services (GDASS) and local housing associations. Four properties are currently available across Gloucestershire, and in Tewkesbury Borough our partner Severn Vale Housing Society is currently identifying two properties which will be available within our area. These will be used as emergency homeless accommodation for all household types, including men, and households with older boys, with bespoke support from GDASS. We will continue to work with this group and our partners to ensure that a high quality alternative to bed and breakfast continues to be available for those who become homeless as a result of violence.

We also work closely with GDASS to ensure that community based support is available to those who need it within the borough. This facilitates efficient triage and assessment of risk associated with domestic abuse, and links to IDVAS, MARAC, MAPPA, social care, and the police to facilitate protective action for victims.

### **4.4 Single households**

We continue to regularly use bed and breakfast for single households, particularly single men with complex issues, and have difficulty sourcing alternative emergency accommodation within the borough for this group. Most bed and breakfast accommodation sourced by Tewkesbury Borough Council tends to be within the urban areas of Gloucestershire. This results in homeless clients having to move out of district. Furthermore, the demand and cost of emergency accommodation across the county has risen, placing extra pressure on the service, and further disruption for homeless households.

Further work needs to be undertaken within the borough to source appropriate emergency accommodation for single homeless people locally. This is important to enable them to maintain their support networks and prevent isolation.

As well as being less suitable for our applicants than local solutions, the cost of private bed and breakfast continues to be problematic for the service. Whilst we have been successful in reducing the number of placements and the length of stay in bed and breakfast during 2015/16, the average cost of emergency bed and breakfast has remained similar to previous years<sup>15</sup>.

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<sup>15</sup> Housing Strategy 2017-2021 Appendix 1b, Chart 9 page 13

Locally we need to source suitable alternative emergency accommodation which also minimises housing benefit subsidy losses and costs to the council's housing services budgets through unsuccessful claims.

#### **4.5 Duration of emergency accommodation**

The length of stay within emergency accommodation is also problematic for households who are difficult to move on because of previous rental arrears or behavioural issues. Failure to find more secure accommodation can further isolate homeless households and delays the household's ability to establish longer term support within their locality to resolve underlying issues which have contributed to their homelessness. Furthermore, available emergency accommodation also becomes silted by harder to place households, forcing placements of other households into emergency accommodation further afield.

Consequently, it is important that we work with our partners to secure solutions for our homeless households who have failed to maintain tenancies in the past and support our clients to make the changes to their lifestyles and manageable arrears agreements to prove they are able to cope independently in the future. These solutions could include short term tenancies either in private leasing arrangements or social housing with community based support in which our residents could demonstrate their ability to maintain an arrears agreement and tenancy fitness.

Such temporary accommodation solutions are likely to be both beneficial for applicants and Tewkesbury Borough Council. This is because temporary accommodation will thin the borough will enable them to maintain normal lifestyles not possible in bed and breakfast, and to maintain support networks within the borough. Temporary accommodation is also likely to be less expensive for Tewkesbury Borough Council as the borough council will receive higher subsidies on rents than the capped amount within bed and breakfast.

Discussions are ongoing with housing providers in the area to develop a cost effective alternative to bed and breakfast within Tewkesbury Borough and also longer term tenancies for more challenging households. At the time of writing this strategy, we are awaiting further information regarding the temporary accommodation management fee grant allocation to the borough for April 2017 onwards in order to inform our ongoing negotiations with providers.

We are also active partners in the county-wide homelessness partnerships with the local authorities in Gloucestershire and county council and work with them to find solutions to homeless issues affecting all our authorities including the use of private sector emergency and temporary accommodation.

#### **4.6 Rough Sleeping and 'No Second Night Out'**

The most recent snapshot rough sleepers count in 2016 indicated there were no people sleeping rough in Tewkesbury Borough. Whilst the prevalence of rough sleeping within the borough is low, there are instances of rough sleeping throughout the year<sup>16</sup> and we are committed to ensuring that rough sleepers in our area have the assistance they need to find and maintain accommodation.

Tewkesbury Borough Council part fund an Assertive Outreach Service currently provided through St Mungo's Broadway for rough sleepers in partnership with the other authorities in

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<sup>16</sup> Housing Strategy 2017-2021 Appendix 1b pages 15-17

Gloucestershire, the County, the PCC and the PCT. This provides a local service which meets the Government's 'No Second Night Out' approach<sup>17</sup>.

Any person identified by services or the public through Streetlink as sleeping rough is visited by St Mungo's Broadway to link them into local services, support, housing services, and accommodation in the county. We will continue to monitor rough sleeping levels regularly and work with the supported accommodation commissioners to ensure that suitable accommodation can be accessed quickly by those in need.

#### **4.7 Severe Weather Protocol**

In order to provide a humanitarian response in times of severe weather Tewkesbury Borough participates in a protocol with all other districts within the County. The protocol ensures that in periods of severe cold or other extreme weather conditions, no rough sleeper has to remain on the streets. Where necessary we will secure emergency placements in partnership with St Mungo's Broadway. We will continue to review the protocol and consider the involvement of voluntary sector organisations in responding in such circumstances.

There continue to be difficulties finding solutions for single chaotic households with multiple needs (i.e. substance misuse, learning difficulties/mental health problems, with chaotic or high risk offending behaviours) across the county. These residents often fail to maintain accommodation because of challenging behaviour and risk to others, and are vulnerable to street homelessness. Whilst numbers of chaotic households in each district is relatively low, it is difficult to coordinate resources to find timely and appropriate solutions. We will continue to work with our neighbouring local authorities through the county wide strategic homeless group, supporting people, and other statutory agencies to find multi agency opportunities for this group.

#### **Challenges**

- Lack of local alternatives to Bed & Breakfast (B&B)
- Limited number of accommodation spaces available for households
- Expense of emergency accommodation/ short term accommodation
- Supporting specific groups to access suitable emergency accommodation
- Supporting households with poor tenancy history to find a sustainable solution
- Lack of temporary accommodation within the borough
- Solutions for single households with dual diagnosis/multiple needs

<sup>17</sup> Vision to end rough sleeping, DCLG, 2011 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/vision-to-end-rough-sleeping--2>



## 5 Full Homelessness Duty

If, following homelessness enquiries, we establish that households are eligible, homeless, and vulnerable, who have not caused their own homelessness, and have a connection to Tewkesbury, the local authority has a full homeless duty to find them suitable accommodation<sup>18</sup>.

Temporary suitable accommodation offered by the Borough Council can be in the private rented sector, in supported accommodation through the county network, or within temporary social housing.

Until recently, the homeless duty to provide suitable accommodation could not be ended unless a permanent offer of a tenancy in social housing or if a household left suitable temporary accommodation. This inevitably resulted in homeless households having higher preference for social housing than other applicants with a high degree of housing need which was often considered unfair.

Following the changes introduced by The Homelessness (Suitability of Accommodation) (England) Order 2012<sup>19</sup> and the Localism Act 2011<sup>20</sup> local authorities now have the power to end the main homelessness duty with a 12 month private rented sector offer. This new power has an additional safeguard for the household through a 're-application duty' if the household becomes homeless again within two years. Tewkesbury Borough Council has not been using this power to discharge homeless duties to date because additional resources are required to meet the criteria of the legislation. This will be considered during the lifetime of this Strategy.

To assist accepted homeless households find permanent accommodation, our accepted applicants are awarded additional priority through the higher Gold banding on Homeseecker Plus, the council's Choice Based Lettings system, to access permanent social housing within our area.

### 5.1 Challenges associated with Homeless Duties and welfare reform

The overall impact of the current and forthcoming welfare reforms on financially vulnerable households within Tewkesbury Borough has been detailed in the main Housing Strategy and evidenced in the evidence base. Welfare reform, however, has introduced a number of uncertainties and difficulties for local authorities both assisting those threatened with homelessness, and also those to whom a homeless duty is owed.

Some of the forthcoming reforms remain under consideration, but the current programme of welfare reform will pose difficulties for all local authorities including Tewkesbury Borough Council in meeting their statutory duties to house vulnerable homeless households on low incomes who are single and under 35 years or those in large family households (as outlined earlier). This is because the local authority cannot end its homeless duty to accommodate unless homeless households are offered suitable and affordable accommodation – either within social housing, or an offer of a private sector tenancy of no less than 12 months. It is likely that both these groups will be unable to afford either type of accommodation unless they find employment which either raises their income, or exempts them from the benefit cap.

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<sup>18</sup> Housing Act 1996 part VII (as amended) and Homelessness Act 2002  
<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/homelessness-data-notes-and-definitions>

<sup>19</sup> The Homelessness (Suitability of Accommodation) (England) Order 2012  
[www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2012/2601/contents/made](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2012/2601/contents/made)

<sup>20</sup> Localism Act 2011 <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2011/20/contents>

Tewkesbury Borough Council is an active partner in the Financial Inclusion Partnership that includes the DWP, housing associations, the CAB, and other local agencies. We will continue to monitor the effects of welfare reform and work in partnership with affected households to:

- Identify exemptions from the benefit restrictions.
- Support those affected with interim support from Discretionary Housing Payments if possible.
- Introduce robust referrals for those affected to receive money advice.
- Introduce strong working relationships with the job centre to enable those affected to find employment locally.

## **5.2 Forthcoming changes in homelessness legislation**

At the time of writing, the Homelessness Reduction Bill is progressing through parliament. This legislation will place statutory responsibilities on local housing authorities to prevent homelessness in all client groups irrespective of whether there is a statutory homeless duty to accommodate.

Whilst we currently assist all client groups, changes in our statutory duties will need to be monitored closely to ensure that we offer our residents the best service possible.

### Challenges

- Continued use of the social housing sector for discharging homelessness duty
- Sourcing sustainable housing solutions for care leavers and young people under 35.
- Discharging Homeless duties to those affected by welfare reform
- Implement changes associated with the forthcoming Homelessness Reduction Bill

## 6 Strategy Objectives

The challenges identified in the previous sections of this document have created our 5 objectives for homelessness and prevention and improve our services to homeless residents.

Following consultation homelessness and homelessness prevention was agreed to be a key priority for Tewkesbury Borough Council. We believe we are in a good position to address these challenges the housing services faces over the next 5 years. Homelessness and homelessness prevention is in the overarching Housing Strategy 2017-2021 as Priority 2.

The objectives will be monitored through the wider Housing Strategy action plan; please see the main Housing Strategy 2017-2021 document for the homelessness action plan, page 28.



## 7 Glossary of terms

This glossary aims to consolidate all homelessness terms that are associated with this strategy document. It is also to compliment the over-arching the Housing Strategy 2017-2021 and the evidence base appendix 1b.

Affordable Homes Programme	A funding programme from the DCLG that aims to increase the supply of affordable homes in England
Affordable Housing / affordable homes	As defined by the NPPF, 2012 Annex 2 <a href="https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/6077/2116950.pdf">https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/6077/2116950.pdf</a>
Affordable rents	Rented housing provided by a housing association subject to a rent of up to 80% of local market rents (inclusive of any Service Charge where applicable)
Assertive Outreach Service	A specialist service commissioned by local housing authorities to support rough sleepers. In Gloucestershire this is St Mungo's Broadway
Assured Shorthold Tenancy (AST)	The most common form of tenancy is an AST. Most new tenancies are automatically this type. A tenancy can be an AST if all of the following apply if you're a private landlord or housing association, the tenancy started on or after 15 January 1989, the property is your tenants' main accommodation, you don't live in the property. A guide to tenancy types can be found here <a href="https://www.gov.uk/tenancy-agreements-a-guide-for-landlords/tenancy-types">https://www.gov.uk/tenancy-agreements-a-guide-for-landlords/tenancy-types</a>
Bed & Breakfast accommodation (B&B)	A small lodging establishment that offers overnight accommodation only with breakfast often included.
Bedroom Tax	The commonly used term for the Under-Occupation Charge (see below)
Benefit Cap	The limit on the total amount of benefit that most people aged 16 to 64 can receive. More information can be found here <a href="https://www.gov.uk/benefit-cap/overview">https://www.gov.uk/benefit-cap/overview</a>
Choice Based Lettings (CBL)	A scheme that gives housing applicants the choice and ability to 'bid' (express an interest) in council and housing association properties that it advertised via the local housing authority.
Council Tax Reduction	Households on a low income may be entitled to assistance in paying their Council Tax. Council Tax Reduction replaced Council Tax Benefit in April 2013.
Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG)	This government department defines itself as " <i>The Department for Communities and Local Government's job is to create great places to live and work, and to give more power to local people to shape what happens in their area.</i> " <a href="https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-communities-and-local-government">https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-communities-and-local-government</a>
Emergency Accommodation	The local housing authority has a legal to duty to provide emergency accommodation to help a homeless person. This is when a person is homeless or threatened with homelessness, eligible for assistance and in priority need.

Homelessness / Homeless	Shelter defines homelessness where a person is living in unsuitable housing, don't have rights to stay where they are or are sleeping rough. <a href="http://england.shelter.org.uk/get_advice/homelessness/homelessness_-_an_introduction/what_is_homelessness">http://england.shelter.org.uk/get_advice/homelessness/homelessness - an introduction/what is homelessness</a>
Homelessness Acceptances	Households accepted by the local housing authority as being statutory Homelessness.
Homelessness Approaches	The number of households that approaches the local housing authority as Homeless.
Homelessness Prevention	The number of households that approach the local housing authority as Homeless, accepted as Homeless and have had their Homelessness prevented through measures such as mediation with family/relatives to remaining living at home, being moved in supported accommodation or support lodgings, financial assistance such as rent deposit schemes to move into a secure home, installing security measures within the home for people experiencing domestic abuse.
Homeseeker Plus	The Gloucestershire and West Oxfordshire Choice Based Lettings scheme to allocate social housing
Housing association	Also known as Housing associations (RP) or Registered Social Landlords (RSL) a housing association offers homes for rent and sale at below market values in accordance with meeting the definition in Section 1(1a) of the Housing Associations Act 1985 or Section 80 of the Housing and Regeneration Act 2008, or is a body approved or accredited by the Homes and Communities Agency or equivalent successor body whose terms of approval or accreditation have been evidenced to the satisfaction of the Council.
Housing Benefit	Financial support from the local authority to assist low income households to pay their rent
Local Housing Allowance	Used to work out Housing Benefit for tenants who are in private rented housing
National Planning Policy Framework	"The National Planning Policy Framework sets out the Government's planning policies for England and how these are expected to be applied" <a href="https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/6077/2116950.pdf">https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/6077/2116950.pdf</a>
Private rented housing / private rents	Tenants who rent from a private individual or company that is not a housing association.
Roofless	Used to describe a person who is rough sleeping or does not have a 'roof' in terms of bricks and mortar i.e. people living in a vehicle could be defined as "roofless".
Rough Sleeping/ Rough Sleeper	Defined by the DCLG as " <i>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").</i> "
Social housing	Used to describe housing rented by housing associations and council housing.
Social rents	Rents that are set by the housing association in accordance with the formula set by the Homes and

	Communities Agency (or its successor body)
Streetlink	"A website that enables the public to alert local authorities in England and Wales about people sleeping rough in their area" <a href="http://www.streetlink.org.uk/node/1659">http://www.streetlink.org.uk/node/1659</a>
Temporary Accommodation	Accommodation provided by councils to Homeless applicants
Under-Occupation Charge	Brought in as part of the Welfare Reform Act 2012 that affects council or housing association tenants of working age with a spare room. Housing benefit is cut to the amount matching the household size. This brings social housing tenants in line with private rented housing tenants.
Universal Credit (UC)	"A new type of benefit designed to support people who are on a low income or out of work. It will replace six existing benefits and is currently being rolled out across the UK. The new system is based on a single monthly payment, transferred directly into a bank account." <a href="https://www.moneyadviceservice.org.uk/en/articles/universal-credit-an-introduction">https://www.moneyadviceservice.org.uk/en/articles/universal-credit-an-introduction</a>
Welfare Reform	Changes to benefits that started in 2013, brought in by the Welfare Reform Act 2012.