

Walsall Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2023 – 2028

Effective from 01.04.23

CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
1. Introduction	3
2. Our Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy	4
2.1 Overview	4
2.2 National context	4
2.3 Local homelessness context	5
3. Delivering this Homelessness Strategy	9
3.1 General principles	9
3.2 Corporate commitment	9
3.3 Homelessness Steering Group	10
3.4 Homelessness Forum	10
4. Homelessness Strategy Action Plan	11
4.1 Preventing homelessness	11
4.2 Meeting the needs of young people	13
4.3 Securing accommodation for people who are homeless	15
4.4 Supporting people who are, or have been homeless	17
4.5 Ending rough sleeping	18

1. Introduction

The Homelessness Act 2002 (HA2002) requires local authorities to take strategic responsibility for tackling and preventing homelessness in their area. The approach taken to formulating this Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy complies with obligations found in the HA2002 and part of this has included the completion of a comprehensive Homelessness Review to evaluate the current levels of homelessness, service provision and support in Walsall. The Review has enabled the formulation of a refreshed strategy that is currently fit for the next five years and should be read in conjunction with this document.

This Strategy provides a single plan for Walsall based agencies to concentrate their activities for tackling and preventing homelessness. In formulating this Strategy, the Council is very grateful for the input and assistance it has received from service users and agencies alike that have taken part in the review. In particular, this includes young people who have experienced homelessness, people who had experienced rough sleeping, people who had experienced domestic abuse, and newcomers who all took part in the focus groups and interviews. In addition, colleagues from Adult Social Care, Children's Services, Health, and those who work in the third sector such as local housing associations have all provided valuable support and input to make this a strategy that is robust and responsive in tackling homelessness in the borough.

The Strategy must be reviewed and refreshed every five years and is intended to be in place for a maximum of five years from 2023-2028. However, a new Strategy and Action Plan will be reviewed and published sooner if there are substantial changes to homelessness legislation or revisions to statutory guidance. In addition, the Action Plan may be reviewed and amended to reflect the need for new interventions or to reflect revised practice at any time with the authorisation of both the Cabinet Member and Director of Service.

As well as the review, when formulating this Strategy the objectives of the Council's Housing Allocation Scheme and Tenancy Strategy have been cross-referenced. The Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities was also considered. Both the Strategy and the Homelessness Review are available to download from the council's website and copies can also be viewed at the council offices during usual opening hours and are available free of charge.

2. Our Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy

2.1 Overview

The causes of homelessness are often connected to a wider set of more complex circumstances and socio-economic factors. Homelessness can affect physical and mental health wellbeing, educational achievement, the ability to gain and sustain employment, together with increased pressure on personal and family relationships. These effects, especially on children, can be life long and can cause repeated homelessness of a generational nature.

This Strategy sets out how we aim to prevent homelessness and to ensure that support and accommodation will be available for people who are either at risk of losing their home or have lost their home. We fully recognise that no single organisation can prevent homelessness alone and both the Homelessness Steering Group and Forum acknowledge that we must be proactive in working together to enable the greatest impact in both the prevention of homelessness and in securing homes for those who become homeless. As such the Strategy promotes working across organisations and policy boundaries to ensure successful delivery. We have adopted five objectives that will drive our strategy: namely,

- 1. Preventing homelessness**
- 2. Meeting the needs of young people**
- 3. Securing accommodation for people who are homeless**
- 4. Supporting people who are, or have been, homeless**
- 5. Ending rough sleeping**

For the avoidance of doubt, the Council regards anyone age 16 to 25 as a Young Person. Our five priorities are underpinned by our Action Plan which sets out a network of actions that will be completed during the time frame of this strategy.

2.2 National context

There is a national legislative framework setting out the rights of people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness and the responsibilities of local authorities, other public bodies and housing associations. Broadly speaking, a person is threatened with homelessness if they are likely to become homeless within 56 days. An applicant who has been served with a valid notice under section 21 of the Housing Act 1988 to end their assured shorthold tenancy is also threatened with homelessness, if the notice has expired or will expire within 56 days and is served in respect of the only accommodation that is available for them to occupy. An applicant is to be considered homeless if they do not have accommodation that they have a legal right to occupy, which is accessible and physically available to them (and their household) and which it would be reasonable for them to continue to live in (Section 11 & 12 *Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities*).

The enactment of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 in April 2018 brought about significant change by improving the rights of people who are at risk of homelessness

with additional responsibilities for local housing authorities. During the term of the previous strategy these responsibilities have become firmly embedded within the Walsall homelessness service. More recently, the 2021 Domestic Abuse Act and accompanying statutory code came into force on 01 October 2021. The Act places duties on each relevant local authority in England to appoint a multi-agency Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Board to perform certain specified functions including assessing and making arrangements for accommodation-based domestic abuse support for all victims and their children. The act also extends priority need for homeless assistance to persons who are homeless because of being a victim of domestic abuse (Section A4.4 of the statutory code).

Nationally, the levels and patterns of homelessness in England present a mixed picture over the past decade. Overall, the levels of presentations to local authorities have increased – homeless assessments have more than doubled comparing 2012/13 to 2020/21 (116,000 and 282,000 respectively) although the latter figure is post Homelessness Reduction Act. Based on annual rough sleeper counts/estimates the numbers of people experiencing street homelessness has declined from a high in 2017 (4,750) reducing to 1,500 in 2021. In September last year the Government published its *Ending Rough Sleeping for Good* strategy¹ and offers a series of funding and support interventions that will underpin this strategy in tackling rough sleeping. The last decade has also however seen a steady rise in households entering temporary accommodation rising from 30k in 2011 to 95k in 2021². In addition, persons of minority ethnic origin are disproportionately more likely to become homeless, as are young people aged 16 to 25 years of age.

2.3 Local homelessness context

As referred to in section 2.1 to enable the formulation of this refreshed Strategy a Homeless Review has been completed that covers the levels of homelessness in the borough. Between April 2019 and March 2022, the Council assessed and accepted a statutory duty to assist 2,738 households. In the latter two years 827 and 824 were supported by way of an accepted duty which for each year accounted for around 45% of those who approached the local authority where homelessness or threat of were a causal factor behind their approach. The vast majority found not to be owed a duty received advice.

The main causes of homelessness in Walsall as recorded by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Homelessness Statistics are broadly similar as a percentage share to both the regional and national picture, with '*Family or friends no longer willing or able to accommodate*' and the *ending of a private rented tenancy* combining to take half the share at 29% and 20% respectively. Assessments relating to domestic abuse have reduced slightly between 2019/20 and 2021/22 but are still above regional and national comparisons. The Council has a strong track record in preventing homelessness with around 75% owed the Prevention Duty securing accommodation. However, there is a heavy reliance on securing alternative

¹ Department for Levelling Up Housing and Communities, September 2022

² Crisis Homelessness Monitor (England) 2022.

accommodation for these households and **a key priority for this strategy will be that by 2025 to enable 50% of successful prevention outcomes through keeping people in their original home.**

Applicants aged 18 to 34 years represent nearly 60% of households owed a duty. In line with national trends the most common age group (of lead applicants) in Walsall owed a duty are persons aged 25 to 34, however Walsall has an over representation of persons aged 18 to 24 sitting at 26% compared to a regional and national average of 20% and 19%. 40% of households owed a duty contain dependent children. Particularly in the context of the new objective of *Meeting the Needs of Young People* **one of the key ambitions of this strategy is to reduce the disproportionate number of young people presenting as homeless in the borough.**

Last year, White British households made up 65% of presentations, Asian/Asian British 14%, Black African/Caribbean/Black British 9% and Mixed/Multiple Ethnic Groups 6%. This compares to like 2021 Census figures of 71%, 19%, 5% and 3% respectively implying a significant overrepresentation in Black African/Caribbean/Black British households and Mixed/Multiple Ethnic Groups. **A key ambition of this strategy is to reduce the disproportionate number of households from ethnic minority backgrounds presenting as homeless in the borough.**

Comparing 2016 and 2017 when rough sleeper numbers peaked at 26 and 20 respectively, the Council has made significant and demonstrable impacts in tackling rough sleeping in the borough, although the latest 2022 annual rough sleeper count of 8 offers a degree of caution against counts of 4 for both 2020 and 2021. **It remains an ambition of this strategy to ensure no one needs to sleep rough in Walsall by 2024.**

The number of households identified with support needs has increased over the last three years rising to 53% in the last financial year. Around two-thirds of the support needs identified last year were centred on the needs of mental health, support for young people and persons at risk or experiencing domestic abuse. Instances of repeat homelessness were recorded on 19 occasions last year (2021/22) although this only accounts for persons who were previously owed a duty.

External factors continue to contribute to homelessness, including affordability and the ability to sustain a tenancy. This includes taking into account both the direct costs (e.g. rent) but also the wider costs incurred of running the home and thereby preventing the threat of homelessness brought about for example by being unable to afford to heat and run a home. To this end the strategy will always support interventions and planning policies aimed at increasing the number of energy efficient homes in the borough.

In Walsall, the core statutory homelessness service is delivered by the Council's Housing and Welfare Team. Following a successful bid for Rough Sleeper Initiative funding the team is also supported by a dedicated rough sleeper team that includes an outreach service. In addition, the borough also benefits from the newly formed Walsall Connected hubs, which serve as new entry points for people to be able to

present as homeless. The Council also has 90 units of temporary accommodation located at four sites, and this is supplemented by further services commissioned through our partners and includes:

- 76 units of dispersed temporary accommodation for young people provided by Walsall Housing Group
- A Domestic Abuse refuge (8 units) and a portfolio of 19 dispersed units provided by GreenSquareAccord (GSA). Housing support is also provided by GSA to the remaining rough sleepers that were housed under the Housing First Programme
- Black Country YMCA provide 15 supported lodgings, and a day stop and night stop service for young people

Temporary Accommodation

Local housing authorities in England have a duty to secure accommodation for unintentionally homeless households in priority need under Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996. Households can be placed in temporary accommodation (TA) pending the completion of inquiries into an application, or after an application is accepted until suitable secure accommodation becomes available. **A key priority of this Strategy is to have a modern fit for purpose temporary accommodation offer which provides the most positive outcomes for people requiring this service.** A full options appraisal (including a dispersed model) will be completed by the close of 2023 to establish the best model going forward. This will be informed by the lessons learnt from our pilot of procuring a small number of dispersed TA properties, and the work completed with Housing Associations to meet TA needs during the covid pandemic. It will also consider the impact of the current cost of living crisis on the type and quantum of TA required. Since 2020 the Council's Housing Strategy has included a target that at any given time a maximum of 0.9 households per 1,000 will be accommodated in Temporary Accommodation and to date this has been achieved.

Asylum Seeker dispersal and Refugee Resettlement programmes

The West Midlands Region like all regions of the UK forms part of the Government's asylum seeker dispersal scheme. Prior to their claim being determined the majority of households supported under this programme do not have access to public funds and therefore in law do not qualify for assistance from the Council other than in certain circumstances where the household includes a dependent child or a vulnerable adult and in these circumstances a referral may be made to Social Care. Currently the number of people entering the UK asylum seeker dispersal scheme is increasing and looking ahead it seems likely that the borough will receive an increasing number of presentations from former Asylum Seekers who have been given leave to remain and entitled to access public funds. These households will be assisted initially by the Housing and Welfare Team and there is a clear likelihood that increasing pressures

will be placed on services via this situation. Many of these households will have specific support needs and the role and engagement of the local voluntary sector will be key.

The Government have also put in place several Resettlement schemes which currently include the Afghan Relocation and Assistance Programme and Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme, together with the UK Resettlement Scheme and Homes for Ukraine. As of 31 January 2023, 88 Ukrainian individuals had been housed under the *Homes for Ukraine* scheme and at the time of finalising this assessment 72 households were still housed through this scheme with only 6 (as at 18 November 2022) subsequently presenting as homeless to the Council following a breakdown of relationship with the host household. However, as the outcome of the war in the Ukraine remains uncertain the Council may be called to assist increasing numbers of households housed under this scheme, with the potential of further homeless applications where the relationship between host and guest has ended. The Council has commissioned the Refugee and Migrant Centre to provide support to households across these resettlement schemes, including sustaining host guest relationships, and offering assistance to those households choosing to seek alternative housing options.

3. Delivering this Homelessness Strategy

3.1 General principles

The delivery of this strategy requires multi-agency cross working including between housing services, adult social care services, children services and public health, all located within the local authority. These sections of the Council provide statutory functions and commit financial assistance which will support to deliver the strategy. Added to this, whilst the strategic authority for the West Midlands Metropolitan Authority has no devolved responsibility for homelessness policy (as this remains a matter for national and local government), the Elected Mayor of the West Midlands has established a taskforce to co-ordinate efforts across the region to tackle homelessness to which Walsall Council will continue to take an active role.

Housing associations are under a duty to assist local authorities with their homelessness functions, and it is essential that the strong partnership built up locally between the Council and housing associations is maintained. Housing associations can also significantly contribute to reducing homelessness by the way they manage their own stock, including services to help sustain tenancies, and reducing their own evictions. Walsall Housing Group for example in their Corporate Plan state that by March 2024 “Our ambition is not to evict anyone into homelessness”. In addition, throughout the duration of this strategy, the local authority will seek to build stronger relationships between departments and agencies, and to foster a multi-agency commitment to deliver the strategy. The Council will be especially keen to ensure involvement from the voluntary sector, along with co-operation with a wide range of public authorities and the private sector. The Council will also confer with people who have lived experience of homelessness, to get their views about what works and what does not, any barriers to service provision and any suggestions for improvements.

The objectives of this strategy will be delivered via the Strategy Action Plan detailed in Section 4 that in large parts has been put together from the findings of the Homelessness Review. The Action Plan shows clearly:

- the specifics of each action to be taken (What)
- the activities needed (How)
- the resources that will be needed to complete each action (Who),
- the deadline for when each action is expected to be completed (When)

3.2 Corporate commitment

Progress towards tackling homelessness and achieving the objectives of this strategy will be reported to the Council's Customer Engagement Directorate Management Team and will be discussed at meetings of the Corporate Management Team. Approval for specific actions will be reported to Cabinet if required. The Portfolio Holder for Customer will act to champion the issue of homelessness across all council business. The chairperson of the Homelessness Steering Group and the Homelessness Forum will provide a report when requested on the levels of homelessness, activities on preventing homelessness, securing accommodation, providing support and lastly the resources available for tackling homelessness.

Authority to make amendments to this Strategy, if and when required, are given to the Director of Customer Engagement in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Customer

3.3 Homelessness Steering Group

The Homelessness Steering Group will oversee the delivery of the Homelessness Strategy Action Plan. The Group meets every three months to review the levels of homelessness, to consider the activities for preventing homelessness, securing accommodation, providing support, and to coordinate the resources for tackling homelessness. The Group is responsible for annually updating the Plan, to ensure it remains relevant and fit for purpose. The Group will be chaired by a senior representative either from the Council or from a partner organisation. Membership will consist of senior officers responsible for Adult Social Care, Children's Services, Public Health, Housing plus representatives from the four largest housing associations being Walsall Housing Group, GreenSquareAccord, Watmos and Longhurst Group (Beechdale).

3.4 Homelessness Forum

In addition to the Homelessness Steering Group, the Homelessness Forum will also provide an overview of progress made to the delivery of the Action Plan. The Forum meets every year to comment on the levels of homelessness, to promote activities being carried out to prevent homelessness, secure accommodation and provide support, identify ways to work together, and to explain how resources are being used to tackle homelessness. The Forum will also be a vehicle for inviting interested parties to participate in strategy delivery. Membership of the Forum will include all agencies represented at the Steering Group, plus any other public authority, voluntary organisation and any other interested persons (including those with lived experience).

4.0 Homelessness Strategy Action Plan

1. PREVENTING HOMELESSNESS			
What	How	Who	When
Continue to improve joint working relationships with other public bodies and Council functions	Continue to review and promote the Duty to Refer arrangements, particularly in relation to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People leaving prison and youth detention centres • People about to be discharged from hospital • People referred via Teams in Health • People referred via Teams in Adult social Care • People referred via Teams in Employment and Skills 	Local authority Children's Services Adult Social Care Probation service DA Steering Grp	April 2024
	Explore and improve joint working arrangements with health partners, e.g. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public Health • Walsall NHS Health Care Trust • Walsall Together • Primary Care Networks 	Local Authority Health agencies	September 2023
	Support the Domestic Abuse Board in the implementation of the new duties contained in the Domestic Abuse Act 2021	Local Authority Housing Associations	Ongoing
Build better relationships with private rented sector landlords to prevent homelessness prior to the point of crisis	Explore opportunities with landlords to identify at an early stage those at risk of losing their home and understand what can be done to prevent the end of assured shorthold tenancies.	Local Authority Private Rented Sector Landlords	December 2023
	Carry out an options appraisal on the benefits of introducing a social lettings agency	Local Authority Housing Associations PRS Landlords	March 2026
Continue to enhance housing related information	Integrate homeless services within the continued development of	Local Authority	June 2023

including access to the information	the Walsall Connected hubs	Voluntary Sector partners	
	Review homelessness processes and procedures and their interconnection with information technology	Local Authority	March 2024
	Ensure we monitor and take actions in compliance with the Armed Forces Covenant	Local Authority	On-going
Ensure the housing service has a clear understanding of the extent of repeat homelessness	Produce Strategy mid-term Homelessness Needs Review	Local Authority	September 2026
	Analyse the characteristics of all people seeking homeless advice and assistance to identify any levels or patterns of repeat presentations	Local Authority	March 2024

2. MEETING THE NEEDS OF YOUNG PEOPLE			
What	How	Who	When
Deliver upstream housing information targeted at young people.	Undertake research to identify the specific causes of homelessness attributed to young person's experiencing homelessness aged 16 and 17 and 18 to 25.	Local Authority	March 2024
	Explore opportunities to introduce housing options education in local schools and colleges	Local Authority Education Local Colleges	March 2025
Continue to develop prevention services targeted at young people	Analyse the usage, effect and impact of the Councils mediation facility specific to young people aged 18 to 25	Local Authority	March 2024
	Continue to implement the DLUHC and DfE Joint Guidance on preventing homelessness for 16/17-year-olds	Local Authority Education Local Colleges	Ongoing
Enhance affordable housing options and access for young people	Coordinate review of age restricted stock across the housing association sector	Local Authority Housing Associations	
	Develop young person's live & work unit following the St Basil's model <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Options Appraisal • Development (if feasible) 	Local Authority Housing Associations Developer Partner	March 2024 March 2028
	Plan successful transitions for young people leaving custody	Local Authority Probation Service	Ongoing
	Re-commission housing and support options for homeless young persons or young persons at risk of homelessness	Local authority	October 2024 and October 2026
Ensure care leavers and fostered children have access to accommodation that meets their needs	Review Care leavers protocol	Local Authority Children's Services	

	Review Housing Protocol for 16- and 17-year-olds	Local Authority Children's Services	
	Review priority for fostering in the Housing Allocations Policy	Local Authority Children's Services	December 2023

3. SECURING ACCOMMODATION FOR PEOPLE WHO ARE HOMELESS

What	How	Who	When
Increase the housing offer for people who are homeless	Develop PRS landlord incentives package	Local Authority	March 2023
	Implement incentives to encourage private landlords to house people who are homeless		Ongoing
	Review PRS landlord Incentives package		March 2025 and March 2027
	Review Policy to Discharge of Homelessness Duty in the PRS	Local Authority	December 2023 and December 2025
	Support where possible the provision of new affordable housing accommodation for larger households or stimulate the supply of such existing properties	Local Authority Housing Associations	ongoing
	Complete and Review pilot exploring incentives to encourage under-occupation households to downsize their home with a view to mainstreaming incentives	Local Authority Housing Associations	December 2023g
	Mainstream under occupation initiative (dependent on results of pilot scheme)		April 2024 onwards
	Implement the Supported Housing Improvement Programme initiative to improve the exempt accommodation offer in Walsall	Local Authority	January 2023 to March 2025
	Deliver Accommodation for Ex-Offenders programme	Local Authority Probation Service PRS Landlords	April 2023 to March 2025
	Review and update Discretionary Housing Payment Policy	Local Authority	March 2024 March 2027

Enhance temporary accommodation provision tailored to meet need	Commission and manage Temporary Accommodation Options Appraisal	Local Authority	June 2023
	Continue to develop policy of sourcing dispersed temporary accommodation	Local Authority Housing Associations	Ongoing
	Develop & introduce a temporary accommodation and procurement strategy	Local Authority	March 2024
	Continue to bring long term empty homes back into use through advice, mediation, and Compulsory Purchase Order where necessary	Local Authority	Ongoing
Ensure Housing Nominations Agreement and Housing Allocations Policy are updated and fit for purpose	In collaboration with local housing associations carry out a review of the Nominations Agreement for social housing in Walsall	Local Authority Housing Associations	December 2023 December 2026
	In collaboration with local housing associations carry out a review of the Housing Allocations Policy for social housing in Walsall	Local Authority Housing Associations	December 2023 December 2026

4. SUPPORTING PEOPLE WHO ARE, OR HAVE BEEN HOMELESS			
What	How	Who	When
Ensure wherever possible people are supported to remain in their home	Review and maximise tenancy support schemes to prevent homelessness	Local Authority Housing Associations	Ongoing
	Review the current use and impact of Personal Housing Plans	Local Authority Housing Associations	March 2024
	Carry out research into the causes and experiences of homelessness for people of a black or other minority ethnic origin, to inform future service provision	Local Authority	March 2025
	Review Crisis Support Policy	Local Authority	March 2024 March 2027
Make best use of national and local funding for tackling homelessness	Maximise funding opportunities including working closely with WMCA partners	Local Authority	Ongoing
	Complete a Homelessness and Health Needs Assessment with Public Health Services	Local Authority Health agencies	June 2024
Continue to improve housing Independent Domestic Violence Advisor offer for victims of Domestic Abuse	Review current Independent Domestic Violence Advisor offer with customer feedback	Local Authority	June 2023
Deliver Walsall's Domestic Abuse safe accommodation offer	Review and recommission, or extend, Domestic Abuse safe accommodation service	Local Authority	December 2024
	Evaluate and review current Sanctuary Policy and associated target hardening works for victims of Domestic Abuse	Local Authority	April 2024 April 2027
Deliver resettlement support services for refugee communities	Review and evaluate service provision to support homelessness prevention	Local Authority	April 2024

5. ENDING ROUGH SLEEPING

What	How	Who	When
Maintain the impact legacy of Housing First	Continue HF legacy support service to 2025	Local Authority Housing Associations	March 2025
	Options appraisal on future service provision for Housing First legacy customers	Local Authority Housing Associations	December 2024
Deliver rough sleeper services	Maintain street outreach service to prevent any rough sleeping increase	Local Authority	Ongoing
	Continue to develop service level agreements with local Housing Associations to provide secure properties for rough sleepers	Local Authority Housing Associations	Ongoing
	Continue to build relationships with local hoteliers to provide self-contained night shelter accommodation	Local Authority Local hotels	Ongoing
	Improve and enhance access for rough sleepers to addiction treatment services	Local Authority Public Health Provider partners	Ongoing
	Promote Walsall's <i>Change into Action</i> , expand to local businesses and produce spend plan	Local Authority	Ongoing
Embrace and utilise the opportunities outlined in the Government's <i>Ending Rough Sleeping for Good Strategy</i>	Implement the outputs outlined in the strategy centred on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prevention • Intervention • Recovery • Transparent & Joined up System 	Local Authority	Ongoing
	Maximise access to funding outlined in Ending Rough Sleeper strategy	Local Authority	Ongoing