

West Northants Council

Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2024 – 2027

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Foreword

Homelessness in the 21st century is a tragic reflection of the fragility of society and the failures of the systems underpinning that society. It is our job as public servants to make those systems as robust, adaptable, and compassionate as possible in order to avoid the waste of potential, the erosion of dignity and the loss of life that homelessness and rough sleeping can give rise to. With that in mind we approach this task with the commitment and determination that it merits. We want to ensure people have access to good, safe housing which provides the foundation for accessing health and social care when they need it, the best education, securing employment and living their best life.

This strategy has been developed at a time of significant pressures and the cumulative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, cost of living crisis, the national housing crisis and the current global situation. Unfortunately, this means many households continue to feel the pressures relating to increases in costs of living and the demand for affordable housing and housing-related support services continue to increase. We are committed to change this and believe by working with a variety of partners including health, the police, Registered Provider partners and the voluntary, community and faith sector we can achieve better outcomes for people affected by homelessness in West Northants.

This is our first Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy as West Northamptonshire Council (WNC). We have included the views of colleagues, partners and customers on how collectively we can reduce homelessness and rough sleeping in West Northants. We believe that the themes and actions it sets out are long-term and flexible enough to address likely changes to legislation, guidance and social and economic shifts over its duration. This strategy outlines our commitment to tackle an issue which is complex and challenging. The delivery of this strategy will assist people who are some of the most vulnerable in our community.

Our new three-year strategy places strong emphasis on early intervention and ensuring we increase prevention of homelessness, reduce rough sleeping, reduce the number of households in temporary accommodation and provide more suitable and affordable accommodation for our diverse communities.

The strategy is framed around four themes:

- Improving collaboration & partnership working
- Early intervention and prevention of homelessness
- More suitable and affordable housing
- Reducing rough sleeping

We are determined to make homelessness in West Northants rare, brief and unrepeatable. With increasing demand, there is additional pressure on council services and the resources of our partners. However, by working together and making homelessness everyone's responsibility we will continue working towards ending homelessness in all its forms.

Councillor Adam Brown - Deputy Leader of the Council & Cabinet Member for Housing, Culture & Leisure

Our Vision and Values

The Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2024-2027 has been co-produced with a range of services across the council, external statutory partners, our arms-length management organisation (ALMO) who manage our council housing stock and key Registered Provider Partners and voluntary, community and faith sector organisations. All partners supported this strategy setting out the vision to work towards ending homelessness across West Northants.

We will achieve this through:

- Taking a **multi-agency collaborative partnership** approach to effectively tackle homelessness and making homelessness everyone's responsibility
- A **personalised approach** to ensure that people receive the right advice and support at the right time to help them to find, or remain in, a safe and stable home
- Improving residents' experience of engaging with services and ensuring that **every contact counts**

Homeless Link worked with staff from local accommodation providers, support services and people with lived experience of homelessness to find out what values mattered to them and to the way they are treated. The following values were identified:

- **Honesty and trustworthiness**
- **Respect**
- **Empathy, kindness and compassion**
- Staff working with people experiencing homelessness highly value **purpose in their work**.



Graphic: Created via workshop facilitated by Homeless Link, July 2023

How we developed our strategy

We adopted a co-production approach to develop our Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy and it was informed by:

- the findings of our strategic review of homelessness in West Northants
- discussions with various teams within the council including our ALMO and Northamptonshire Childrens Trust
- various external statutory and non-statutory partners
- two independent pieces of research commissioned by the council

Health Needs Assessment of people who sleep rough

During 2023, the Council's Housing and Public Health teams commissioned an independent assessment of the health, social care, housing and support needs of people at risk of or with experience of sleeping rough, within West Northamptonshire. A project group of over 20 key partner organisations, including those involved in supported accommodation and health service provision provided data and staff interviews. The research also included the views of those with lived experience of homelessness and using local services. The research reviewed: the current customer journey, including existing accommodation and support; identified gaps in service provision; and made recommendations for future scale and type of service provision. This included new operating models and approaches to inform a new commissioning framework for supported accommodation and services for this cohort.

Homelessness and Housing Solutions Health check

During 2023 we commissioned an internal 'service health check' of our Housing Solutions provision, which included mystery shopping of the access points to our service, staff interviews and case file reviews. This work has informed our plans for an aggregated West Northamptonshire Housing Solutions Service aggregation, our Homelessness Transformation Project and a programme of bespoke staff training.

Events and engagement:

- **Single Homeless Forum and Homelessness Prevention Network:** Our two established partnership networks fed into the review and strategy development and provided data.
- **Prevention of rough sleeping engagement event:** In conjunction with Homeless Link, we held a half day event focused on prevention of rough sleeping, in July 2023. This was informed by a survey on values of those with lived experience of homelessness and of service providers, undertaken by Homeless Link in advance of the session.
- **General needs homelessness and prevention event (Jan 2024)**
- **Wider Determinants of Health Workshop:** In conjunction with Public Health, the health needs assessment was presented to a wide range of internal and external stakeholders at this workshop in August 2023 and further workshops have taken place in early 2024.

National Context

This strategy and the evidence base that informs the themes and objectives have been developed at a time when our country is experiencing significant pressures and challenges, with the landscape of homelessness evolving quickly, shaped by cumulative impacts. Significant challenges at a national level include:

- Cost of living increases – this has culminated in high levels of inflation, increased living costs that have severely impacted household finances. This is a contributing factor in the increasing risk of homelessness and created additional pressures for households who were already struggling.
- Benefit and welfare reforms – these reforms have had significant implications for housing and homelessness.
 - Universal credit – a single payment generally made direct to the applicant, which cover some or part of any housing costs. Benefit rates have not risen in line with market rental values, which may lead to rent arrears and can contribute towards the on-going costs of living crisis. For some households in temporary accommodation, the Local Housing Allowance rates have been frozen at 2011 levels therefore exacerbating issues around affordability (although an uplift in LHA rates is due from April 2024)
 - Single Accommodation room rate – for people under 35, a single shared room rate applies. This restricts people to a very low rate to cover housing costs as well as putting homelessness services under pressure to find affordable shared properties for people to move on to
 - Under-occupancy – this reduced housing benefit entitlement to social housing tenants considered to be under-occupying their home.
- Health inequalities - the pandemic accentuated health inequalities arising from lack of warm, safe homes with adequate space; access to healthy outdoor space; safe workplaces and schools. Nationally, we now better understand the negative impacts on those who lack one or more of the 'key determinants of health'.
- Resettlement Schemes - the emergency resettlement of Afghan nationals; the refugee crisis following the invasion of Ukraine.
- Unaffordable local housing market – lack of affordable housing and expensive private rented sector.

The latest headline measures for homelessness and rough sleeping in 2022-23 for England are as follows:

- **Homelessness Assessments** – the number of households assessed due to being threatened with homelessness or already being homeless was just under 300,000 (up 6.8% from 2021/22 and 3% above the pre-covid level in 2019/20)
- **Temporary Accommodation** - the number of households in temporary accommodation increased by 10%
- **Rough Sleeping** – the single-night count of people sleeping rough in November 2022 was 3,069 – an increase of 26% from the previous year

Other notable changes in 2022-23 compared to the previous year include:

- decrease in successful outcomes to prevent & relieve homelessness
- increases in number of households owed a homelessness duty due to the end of an assured shorthold tenancy. In particular, large increases were seen in the end of assured shorthold tenancies due to landlords wishing to sell or re-let properties.
- increase in households owed a prevention or relief duty where the main applicant was aged 65-74
- increase in number of households owed a prevention or relief duty where the main applicant was in full-time (up 10.8%) or part-time work (up 6.5%)

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Local Context

West Northamptonshire Council’s Corporate Plan 2021-2025 sets out priorities to achieve the vision for making West Northants a great place to live, work, visit and thrive. These are:

- Green and Clean
- Improved Life Chances – including adults supported to live independently; care provided for those that need it; reduced hospital stays and delays; joined up and local services with health; and safe and secure accommodation for all
- Connected Communities
- Thriving Villages & Towns – including increase affordable housing & council homes; raise standards of privately rented homes
- Economic Development
- Robust Resource Management

The **West Northamptonshire Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2023-2028** focuses on helping residents to “**Live Your Best Life**”. This is a joint strategy working with a variety of partners including health, voluntary and community sector organisations, police and fire colleagues. The strategy focuses on tackling health inequalities throughout West Northamptonshire by looking at “wider determinants”, which are external elements that can affect a person’s health and wellbeing. Over the next 5 years, the aim is to achieve the 10 ambitions outlined in the strategy through work at a very local level via West Northamptonshire’s nine Local Area Partnerships (LAPS). The 10 ambitions and some of the key outcomes relevant to homelessness are outlined below:

Ambition	Key Outcomes
The best start in life	
Access to the best available education and learning	
Opportunity to be fit, well and independent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adults are healthy and active and enjoy good mental health.
Employment that keeps you and your family out of poverty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More adults are employed and receive a ‘living wage’. • Adults and families take up benefits they are entitled to
Good Housing in places which are clean and green	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good access to affordable, safe, quality, accommodation and security of tenure
Safe in your homes and when out and about	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People are safe in their homes, on public transport and in public places. • Children and young people are safe and protected from harm.
Connected to friends and family	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People feel well connected to family, friends and their community. • Improving outcomes for those who are socially excluded.
The chance of a fresh start when things go wrong	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Homeless people and ex-offenders are helped back into society. • People have good access to support for addictive behaviour and take it up

Access to health and social care when you need it	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Timely access to all health and social care services when it is required, life course from conception to end of life. • People are supported to live at places of their residence and only spend time in hospital to meet medical needs. • Services to prevent illness (all health screening and vaccinations) are easy to access with quality service provision.
Accepted and valued for who you are	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People feel they are a valued part of their community and are not isolated or lonely. • People are treated with dignity and respect.

West Northamptonshire Council’s Anti-Poverty Strategy sets out how we will work with partners to support people struggling financially, what we will do to stop people falling into poverty and how we will work to influence the Government and other national organisations to get the best deal for the people of West Northants. The strategy includes an objective to ‘Meet housing need with good quality social housing and enable the private rented sector to be an effective housing contributor’, with commitments to:

- Develop a new West Northants Housing Strategy.
- Support the development of new homes and ensure rent levels support local housing needs
- Develop a new West Northants Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy.
- Help to prevent and reduce homelessness by seeking alternative housing options and increasing the number of good quality private sector homes available to rent.

The **West Northants Housing Strategy (2022-2025)** is a high-level document, which forms one of the cornerstones for delivering our Corporate Plan. It sets out the main housing related issues across West Northants and how we will deliver the housing priorities based around the following themes:

1. Deliver Homes people need and can afford
2. Improve the quality, standard and safety of homes and housing services
3. Support residents to live healthy, safe and independent and active lives
4. Support thriving and sustainable communities

Underpinning the strategy is the importance of partnership working and without this we will not be able to tackle the big challenges that lie ahead.

This is West Northamptonshire Council’s (WNC) first Homelessness and Rough Sleeping strategy, to cover the next three years. Prior to the formation of WNC as a unitary authority, in April 2021, the legacy authorities of Northampton Borough Council, South Northants Council and Daventry District Council each had their own homelessness and rough sleeping strategies, with related action plans. All three had similar priorities for homelessness prevention, though with different locality-based challenges and levels of need for services.

Key achievements

Since our legacy authorities' strategies were produced, we have achieved positive results through partnership working and funding initiatives, despite global, national and local challenges. These include:

- Accommodating safely people experiencing or at risk of rough sleeping, through the Everyone In programme, during the Covid-19 pandemic. Embedding effective new working practices following our learning during this period, improving outcomes for those affected.
- In conjunction with Public Health, ensured access to the Covid-19 vaccination and screening for blood borne viruses, for those accommodated in winter shelter and supported provision. This addressed some health inequalities for those most vulnerably housed.
- Securing funding from the government's Rough Sleeping Initiative Round 5 (RSI 5) for 2022-25, to support people at risk of rough sleeping.
- Establishing, with Public Health, the multi-agency, peripatetic, Northampton Homeless Treatment Team (NHTT), in conjunction with [CGL](#), [Bridge](#) and the [Hope Centre](#) for people with drug and alcohol dependency who sleep rough or are at risk.
- Purchased and set up 35 properties, with tenancy support under [NSAP/RSAP 1](#) and 2 funding, including three with additional support for women who have experience of sexual and financial exploitation.
- Led a partnership approach to establish the Accommodation for Ex-Offenders (AfeO) project, which provides private rented accommodation for up to two years following release from prison. Accommodated 40 people by end of March 2023. Secured funding for 60 further ex-offenders during 2023-25.
- Co-designed and delivered with Adult Social Care, Multiple Exclusion Homelessness (MEH) training following the [Jonathan 19 Safeguarding Adults Review](#)
- Commissioned Midland Heart to deliver housing related and supported accommodation at [Oasis House](#), as part of our single homeless pathway
- Developed and adopted the [Housing Strategy 2022-25](#)
- Adopted a new WNC Housing Allocations scheme
- Provided wrap around resettlement support for over 800 arrivals under Homes for Ukraine and over 500 individuals under programmes for Afghan nationals.
- Obtained Local Authority Housing Funding (LAHF), to support settled accommodation for Afghan and Ukrainian individuals and families.

Main findings of our homelessness review

Homelessness approaches: Almost 5,000 homelessness approaches (4951) were made to the Housing Options Service in 2022/23. An increase of 14% (599 approaches) on the previous year.

Main duty acceptances: we made 483 main duty homelessness acceptances in 2022/23, increasing from 321 in 2021/22.

Reasons for loss of last settled home

In common with the national trend in reasons for loss of last settled home for households approaching as homeless, our main reasons are:

- Being asked to leave by family and friends
- End of an assured short-hold tenancy
- Domestic abuse.

West Northants has a higher than national average rate of people approaching as homeless after 'End of supported housing'.

Repeat approaches: Almost half of customers who approached during 2022/23 had made one or more previous approaches in the five years prior.

Single person applicants and couples without children comprise almost half of the households in temporary accommodation.

Number of people sleeping rough

We compile several different measures for central government to indicate the prevalence of people sleeping rough in our area. Each provides a 'snapshot' in time, rather than definitive figure, as many people move in and out of homelessness and rough sleeping at different points:

- 15 people were recorded as sleeping rough on a single night in June 2023 with 45 people recorded as having slept rough across that month.
- Our annual rough sleeping estimate and count recorded 36 people sleeping rough on a single night in November 2023. This rose from 25 people in 2022 and 15 in 2021.
- We have an identified 'target priority group' of 100 people who have been seen sleeping rough in two or more years out of the last three, or in two or more months out of the last 12.

West Northants was identified by DLUHC as a target authority area for funding for the cohort 'Adults with a history of rough sleeping who have a high level of support need'.

Theme 1 Improve collaborative partnerships to make homelessness everyone's business.

The causes of homelessness and rough sleeping are multiple and complex and not all are housing related, therefore no one organisation can tackle the systemic challenges alone. By working together across services / sectors we can achieve better outcomes for all who are affected by homelessness and rough sleeping. The statutory homelessness responsibilities on local authorities, high dependence on short-term government grants and continuing pressures on local government finances, make a collaborative, innovative approach critical.

Why this is important

- The government's [Ending Rough Sleeping for Good strategy](#) expects to see a whole system approach locally, building on the excellent partnership working during the pandemic. This approach is applicable to the prevention of all forms of homelessness, not just rough sleeping.
- The [Northants Integrated Care Strategy](#) and the West Northants Health and Wellbeing Board Strategy 2023-28 provides opportunities to collaborate on developing services.
- The West Northants Housing Partnership Board (HPB) was set up to facilitate collaborative solutions, embed a partnership approach and unite people from different sectors to co-produce solutions. The HPB will drive the delivery of partnership actions in the Housing and Homelessness strategies.
- Collective action is required so we can effectively tackle homelessness, rough sleeping and reduce health inequalities. We can improve services and interventions that support people when they are most in need and deliver better outcomes for them.
- Stronger partnership creates better chances of creating services that meet people's needs, improving their experience and outcomes.
- Around half of all homelessness approaches originate within three of our **Local Area Partnerships (LAPS)**, within the urban area of Northampton, however, we appreciate the different challenges residents in our rural areas can have, such as accessing services and support.
- Data is essential and a powerful tool for developing strategies, monitoring progress against action plans, designing service provision and intervention, commissioning services and evaluating what does and does not work. Although much data is collected currently, there is a lack of consistency across services in how it is collected, monitored, or used to evidence what works well or to identify gaps in services.
- We are experiencing an increase in the level of homelessness and rough sleeping locally. Our statutory homelessness responsibilities, high dependence on short-term government grants

and continuing pressures on local government finances, makes taking a collaborative, innovative approach vital.

- During the pandemic, existing relationships and partnership were the foundations for quick and effective partnership working around homelessness in a time of crisis. The pandemic raised the profile of homelessness and required greater working with Public Health, as a result of this there is a wider understanding on the issues around homelessness and rough sleeping and greater collaboration.
- Domestic abuse remains a significant cause of homelessness locally, causing long term harm, trauma and disruption to individuals and families. The implementation of our **Domestic abuse strategy** is supporting collaboration across the authority, with specialist providers, RPs, the Police and other statutory partners to improve access to Safe Accommodation and facilitate long term safety for victim survivors including children.
- There are many examples where collaborative working across key services and partners are achieving better outcomes for people affected by homelessness and rough sleeping:
 - Co-location of adult social care and Housing teams, has highlighted successful outcomes in the prevention of homelessness and improvement of living conditions for people experiencing issues such as hoarding and self-neglect.
 - Housing and Public Health jointly commissioned a comprehensive independent assessment of the health and wider needs of people who experience or are at risk of rough sleeping. This work will inform improvements to housing provision and access to health services, as too many of our vulnerable residents end up repeatedly seeking urgent health care interventions or experience significant risk to life, exacerbated by poor living conditions.
 - The creation of a Homelessness Mental Health Practitioner post, in 2021 has improved access to mental health services and support, working closely with Northamptonshire Homeless Treatment Team (NHTT) to provide support on a dual diagnosis basis.
 - Work with Public Health to establish the multi-agency, peripatetic, Northampton Homeless Treatment Team (NHTT), in conjunction with specialist local service providers, for people with drug and alcohol dependency, who sleep rough or are at risk, funded through Rough Sleeping Drug and Alcohol Treatment Grant (RSDATG).
 - Housing and NCT implemented a joint protocol, mandatory staff training and audit framework for 16 to 17 year olds at risk of homelessness. Joint working continues to develop a needs analysis and development opportunities for young people leaving care. This includes supporting NCT's Staying Close Project, which aims to provide independent accommodation for young people leaving care.

What people told us

- Work with partners to improve access to services and information and awareness of the support available
- Explore options to join up data on customers to reduce people telling their 'story' multiple time

- Co-location of staff from across different services improves collaboration and outcomes
- Support care leavers transitioning from care into independent living
- Early intervention is required to identify emerging issues
- The importance of identifying training needs across services/partners and ensure joint training opportunities are made available
- Concern over the short-term commissioning and being able to deliver good quality provision and lasting outcomes
- Need to ensure commissioned service meet the needs of individuals and are accessible to people
- Lack of appropriate data sharing between key organisations involved in a person's case remains a barrier to providing responsive and effective services. Current practices require people to re-count difficult experiences over and over again.

What we will do

1.1 Strengthen collaborative working

We will do this by working with a wide range of partners and organisations through:

- Providing strong governance and delivery of partnership projects through the Housing Partnership Board, task and finish groups and our local partnership forums and networks to harness the resources of all partners to respond to homelessness.
- Delivering a collaborative multi-agency homelessness approach that facilitates early interventions to ensure pathways to housing and support reduce homelessness and rough sleeping
- Exploring opportunities to work with other services within the council and external strategic partners for joint-commissioning opportunities to improve & enhance the delivery of a range of homelessness services
- Work with local communities and Local Area Partnerships to understand the barriers to accessing services so we can improve access to support for specific communities and localities.
- The delivery of joint training, education and learning opportunities to share knowledge and experience and to understand each other's business to enable better coordination and collaboration.
- Raising awareness of homelessness support and services available for people with local community & voluntary sector organisations so they know where to signpost individuals looking for support.
- Strengthening relationships with Registered Providers (RPs) who have a strong presence across the area and who deliver good quality housing, to improve sustainable move on options.
- Improve data collection, monitoring and use of intelligence across WNC and relevant partners to evidence what works and where gaps in needs and services remain.

- Secure support and investment across a range of council services and external partners to break down silos and pool resources to use resources more effectively to maximise the support available.

1.2 Embedding a person-centered approach

We will do this by working with a wide range of partners and organisations through:

- Improving coordination and integration of support services around individuals and families to minimise the need for people to repeat information about traumatic experiences
- Ensuring the whole person is 'Seen and Heard' through the establishment of specialist multi-disciplinary and co-located teams, will including Adult Social Care, Housing, Northants Children's Trust (NCT), Public Health, the Police, Drug and alcohol service and the VCS so there is a holistic approach
- Understand trauma informed approaches to develop service provision that supports better outcomes for customers.
- Working with partners to identify how those with lived experience of homelessness / rough sleeping can be included in the design and delivery of services.

Theme 2: Early intervention and prevention of homelessness

Homelessness in any form is disruptive to a person's sense of wellbeing, safety, and security. Early help and prevention will reduce the impact of homelessness on a household. Also, facing reflected in the lesser complexity of intervention required at an earlier stage, than if circumstances were to escalate and reach crisis.

Solutions need to be cross-cutting, with a council-wide, collaborative approach. All services will work hard to prevent homelessness from occurring and assist people to stay in their homes or support them to move to other settled accommodation.

Why this is important

- Too many households do not get the advice or help they need at a time when homelessness could be avoided. Accessing accurate information, advice and help can avoid problems escalating and provide time for alternative housing to be found before a crisis arises.
- We are potentially missing opportunities to prevent homelessness. In 2022/23, our rate of dealing with homelessness cases at prevention duty stage (42%) was lower than the regional average (50%).
- In 2022/23 we are dealing with a greater proportion of households at the relief duty stage locally (58%) compared to the regional average (50%). This means people are approaching us for help when the chance of preventing homelessness has passed.
- Public authorities have a [Duty to Refer](#) (DtR) people engaged with their services who may be homeless or at risk of homelessness to the Council (where they have consent to do so). We have trained partners to use the Duty to Refer and have high rates of referrals from Probation, our hospitals, and Northants Childrens' Trust (NCT).
- Registered providers are not legally covered by the Duty to Refer, but we work with local housing providers to use this easy method of referral, under the [Commitment to Refer](#).
- Almost half of customers who have approached the service for assistance have made one or more approaches in the previous five years. This is most prevalent amongst single people, but also households with dependent children.
- Debt and money advice services are vital to homelessness prevention. Our in-house and commissioned services are in the process of restructuring to ensure consistent provision. All have seen increases in demand, exacerbated by the cost-of-living crisis, which has impacted services capacity. All services contribute to homelessness prevention, but data is not currently systematically recorded.
- We support people to access available funds to retain their current home or to move in a timely fashion. We are developing a Homelessness Prevention Scheme to ensure

residents have fair access to grants, loans and other financial and practical assistance wherever they live within West Northants.

- Domestic abuse remains one of the four top reasons for homelessness approaches. We have a higher than average prevalence of domestic abuse cases being re-referred to multi-agency risk assessment conferences (MARACs), indicating that serious risks of domestic abuse are not being tackled or ameliorated. Domestic abuse is a driver of homelessness and repeat homelessness locally.

What people told us

- Too many people find it difficult to access information, advice and support from WNC services at the time and place they need it. This becomes more difficult where people have complex needs.
- We need to respond quickly and consistently when referrals are made to us by partner agencies, to embed positive working practices.
- Quality services are currently delivered by our Money Advice Service, and voluntary sector partners, but these are not accessible in all parts of West Northants.
- We have a number of financial and other 'tools' to prevent homelessness however we need to ensure that these are used consistently and clear outcomes and achievements are recorded.
- Making people recount difficult experiences over again creates barriers to accessing help and can negatively impact on wellbeing or recovery. This is especially the case when people have experienced trauma, such as domestic abuse, bereavement, or family breakdown.
- Partners working with those experiencing financial difficulties, including many people in work, have noted a continued escalation in demand and complexity of need for their services.

What we will do

2.1 Increase our early intervention services

We will do this by delivering, with a wide range of organisations and partners:

- accessible, high quality, up-to-date information and guidance, to help residents address their housing difficulties when these first arise
- a programme of awareness raising initiatives across community settings, including schools on tackling issues that may result in homelessness
- improved collection and analysis of data to identify households at risk of homelessness and inform service delivery

2.2 Provide effective homelessness prevention services

We will do this by developing and delivering services that:

- Ensure that residents can access the right service from the right organisation at the right time
- Strengthen consistent provision, access to and promotion of housing, debt and money advice services across West Northants
- Encourage housing providers to identify and assist households at risk of homelessness at the earliest point possible
- Support all statutory partner agencies to use the Duty to Refer and Commitment to Refer to alert Housing Solutions team of households at risk of homelessness to enable us to respond at the earliest opportunity
- Develop a range of effective financial and other interventions and assistance to prevent homelessness
- Ensure our West Northants Housing Allocations Scheme is effective in preventing homelessness through access to settled homes

2.3 Reduce the instances of people facing repeated homelessness

We will do this by delivering, with a wide range of organisations and partners, services that:

- Support households to make timely and accurate claims for financial support with their housing costs to create sustainable tenancies and avoid arrears
- Ensure that people experiencing domestic abuse have appropriate support to remain in safe, settled accommodation, avoiding need for repeated moves
- Develop resident's skills and strengths to support them to build skills and confidence and develop resilience and self sufficiency
- Identify and provide appropriate targeted support for people with more complex needs to help sustain tenancies

Theme 3: Increase provision and access to suitable and sustainable settled housing solutions

The Council's Housing Strategy (2022-2025) focuses on opportunities to improve and maximise the delivery of new affordable housing. The delivery of a range of affordable housing options in the right locations is an important factor in supporting the prevention of homelessness in helping to meet housing need and the provision of longer-term sustainable settled housing solutions.

Why this is important

- There has been an increase in the number of households in temporary accommodation, As of January 2024, there were just under 700 households in temporary accommodation; this has increased from 600 households in June 2023. We have a legal duty to provide temporary accommodation to households who approach us for assistance, who we have reason to believe may be homeless, in priority need and eligible for assistance
- As of June 2023, 65% of households had spent under 6 months in temporary accommodation, however there were 50 households who had stayed in temporary accommodation for longer than 12 months
- An increase in temporary accommodation costs and an increase in demand has seen significant costs on council budgets
- The most cost-effective provision is council owned accommodation, however currently our largest provision of temporary accommodation is nightly-let which is the most expensive.
- Single households and couples without dependents have made up 50% of households in temporary accommodation
- The number of households on the Council's housing register is approximately 4000.
- There have been 1268 new affordable homes developed since April 2021, however new affordable supply is impacted on the number of properties lost through Right to Buy.
- Discharge of main homelessness duty into the PRS has been very low, this is a result of limited engagement with private landlords and also local rent levels are very high.
- A temporary accommodation acquisitions project has purchased eight properties, with a further eight properties proceeding through conveyancing. This additional provision will provide more council owned properties that we can use for temporary accommodation, rather than the more costly nightly-let accommodation.
- Local Housing Allowance in the private rented sector does not cover the full rent within West Northants resulting in rent shortfalls and affordability difficulties for households.
- Ensured effective licensing and regulation of the local private rented sector. This has resulted in the council issuing £50,000 worth of financial penalties to 15 landlords operating 13 private rented properties, for non-compliance with the Housing Act 2004, and taking enforcement action against 10 landlords operating 18 unlicensed houses in multiple occupation, resulting in fines and contributions to court costs in excess of £400,000.

What people told us

- Effective tenancy support for those placed in temporary accommodation ensures that households understand the steps they need to take while experiencing homelessness, and are supported to move-on and sustain new settled homes
- That some residents struggle to afford homes let at affordable rent levels.
- That we need more homes at social rent levels.
- The council should use its enforcement powers against private landlords with substandard properties and poor management practices.
- There needs to be a comprehensive 'offer' to private rented landlords to increase access to the sector and support tenants in private rented homes when required.
- Explore options for increasing the supply of good quality, affordable private rented accommodation.

What we will do

3.1 Increase the supply of new affordable housing

We will do this by:

- Developing a council-led affordable homes development programme to increase the number of council homes.
- Strengthen our partnerships with registered providers to increase the supply of new social rented homes that are genuinely affordable, and look at options to increase the level of homes let at a social rent level
- Explore the provision of modular homes and investigate innovative ways of providing accommodation to prevent and relieve homelessness
- Maximising grant funding opportunities and ensure continual engagement with Homes England and DLUHC.
- Utilising and making best use of Council land assets and resources

3.2 Reduce the number of households in and the cost of temporary accommodation

We will do this by:

- Ensuring value for money in the procurement of temporary accommodation,
- Reducing the number of households needing temporary accommodation through effective, and early prevention tools
- Ensure that we have a sufficient supply of affordable temporary accommodation to meet demand and is of the right type, quality and in right location and better meets the needs of homeless households.
- Provide effective support and advice to households living in temporary accommodation, to develop a personalised move-on plan to understand their housing options to enable them to move onto settled, sustainable homes as quickly as possible.

- Increase the supply of Council owned temporary accommodation by continuing to deliver the temporary accommodation acquisition programme.

3.3 Improve access to good quality, affordable private rented accommodation

We will do this by:

- Utilise our full range of statutory powers to tackle substandard private rented properties.
- Improve the support and incentives available to the private rented sector into a single 'offer' for landlords

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Theme 4: Ensure that where rough sleeping occurs, it is rare, brief and non-recurring.

Rough Sleeping is the most visible form of homelessness and can negatively impact on an individuals' health and wellbeing. Many people with prolonged or repeat experiences of rough sleeping face a range of complex health and social issues. Support tailored to the needs of the individual can secure better outcomes, improve health and wellbeing and support recovery and avoid repeated homelessness.

Why this is important

- Experience of rough sleeping impacts negatively on health outcomes and increases the risk of early mortality. Nationally, the average age of death for women is 81 years compared to women who experience homelessness, which is 42 years. The average age of death for men is 76 years compared to men who experience homelessness, which is 44 years. Those who sleep rough over a longer period face a higher risk of dying prematurely and dying from injury, poisoning or suicide than the general population.
- We have an identified 'target priority group' of around 100 people in West Northants who have been seen sleeping rough in two or more years out of the last three, or in two or more months out of the last 12. 36 people were included in our annual rough sleeping estimate data, as sleeping rough on one 'typical' night in November 2023.
- Data shows that some people who experience rough sleeping make significant numbers of approaches to housing and emergency health care provision. This increases the crisis demand for those services, without individuals getting the help they need to resolve their situation. Among individuals making repeat homelessness approaches over the last five years, those making the highest number of repeat approaches were single people with a history of rough sleeping, mental health and drug dependency issues. This indicates that current service delivery models do not resolve these people's issues.
- The 'Health and housing needs of people experiencing rough sleeping' research recommended improvements across housing, health, and social care provision, to significantly improve outcomes for individuals, increase effectiveness of service provision and improve value for money.
- Most current supported housing provision is designed to be short term with an expected linear progression. However, local provision has only assisted a minority (8%) of people out of homelessness and into settled homes. It does not function as a 'coherent and effective response system', or sustainably end people's homelessness. People are staying in supported accommodation for far longer than services are designed for.
- It is currently far too difficult for people who have experienced homelessness to access private rented homes as settled move-on. Social housing has been almost the sole move-on route from supported housing, but there is a lack of supply, which can mean long waiting

times. The lack of alternatives reduces housing choices for those who have experienced rough sleeping.

- The 'Health and housing needs of people experiencing rough sleeping' research identified provision for individuals requiring high intensity support as a key area of unmet need.
- People newly experiencing rough sleeping need rapid interventions, with advice and support. Each night someone spends without safe accommodation will be detrimental to their health and wellbeing and is likely to require additional resource to help with recovery.
- Most current services are structured so that support ends when the person moves on. This can impede development of trust with key services and impede recovery for people who have experienced trauma and deprivation. It can limit the effectiveness of services.
- [Northamptonshire Safeguarding Adults Board \(NSAB\)](#) commissioned a [Safeguarding Adults Review \(SAR\)](#) following the death of a 46-year-old man called Jonathan in December 2019. There were concerns about how local agencies worked together to safeguard Jonathan. The SAR recommended improvements to ensure that agencies 'see the person and not just the problems' as key to securing better wellbeing outcomes for homeless adults with complex needs. This includes developing a greater understanding of the needs of those experiencing 'Multiple Exclusion Homeless' which includes trauma and deep social exclusion.
- The Government's '**Everyone In**' response at the start of the pandemic ensured that people sleeping rough and in accommodation, where it was difficult to self-isolate, were safely accommodated to protect them, and the wider public, from the risks of the virus. This collaborative way of working facilitated a greater understanding of those accommodated, resulting in a more holistic, tailored approach to meet individual needs. This has improved operational partnership working across all sectors.
- The [Kerslake Commission](#) notes that homelessness is experienced differently by women, who face an additional burden of gender-based harassment, abuse and violence. Women who experience homelessness also tend to have more severe and complex interrelated needs which can make recovery exceptionally difficult.
- Our [Joint Health and Wellbeing Board Strategy 2023 -27](#) commits to addressing health inequalities through improving access to health and wider services for vulnerable groups.

What people told us

- We provide effective responses when services are delivered in a truly joined up, multi-agency way. Positive examples are improved joint working with partner agencies, including multi-agency working with peripatetic drug and alcohol services (Northants Homeless Treatment Team (NHTT)) and the design and delivery of Multiple Exclusion Homelessness training programme, in conjunction with Adult Social Care.

- Our established and experienced Street Services Team provide a responsive service and enable a good flow through our Housing Panel into accommodation with partner organisations. This team have strong relationships with both statutory, faith and community services, providing quality management of, and support to, a cohort of people with complex needs and often challenging behaviour.
- Fully funded care packages for very vulnerable individuals were secured through seconding an Approved Mental Health Practitioner Social Worker into our Winter Shelter provision during 2022/23.
- More multi-disciplinary services are needed to address the range of needs experienced by an individual or household in crisis.
- Accessing services outside of standard working hours is very difficult for many people, including those in our rural areas. Being able to access an outreach service 'out of office hours' makes a real difference to people in crisis and to other professionals working to support them.
- A comprehensive programme of training is vital, to better understand the impact of trauma, addiction and multiple exclusion homelessness on individuals needing to access our services. There is a sense that we respond to the needs of services, not service users.
- We need to better address the experiences of women and others locally, who experience overlapping homelessness, domestic abuse, sexual violence and forms of exploitation, often repeatedly. Current service provision often inhibits us from understanding and responding to the needs of very marginalised groups.
- At present, most support available to people experiencing rough sleeping is short term and tied to specific accommodation interventions. This means that people experience repeated disruption and disjointed interventions, and are forced to re-live their traumatic experiences, which are not conducive to their recovery.
- Access to mental health services, dentistry and some primary care services is almost impossible for too many people who experience homelessness and have complex needs.
- There is concern that some very vulnerable people are placed in West Northants by other authorities, but stay in our area, without services being made aware of them, or adequate accommodation or support if the placement breaks down.
- Although the majority of those who experience rough sleeping do so within Northampton town, rough sleeping also occurs in our rural towns and villages. When this happens, it can be even more difficult for people to access the support and services they need. Concentration of services in Northampton tends to 'pull' people to that area.

What we will do

4.1 Reduce rough sleeping

- Implement recommendations of safeguarding adult reviews to improve service delivery and design
- Embed an understanding of Multiple Exclusion Homelessness throughout the sector

- Deliver and improve support to reduce rough sleeping using the funding awarded to West Northants and enhance services
- Assess the impact and outcomes of the rough sleeping initiatives funded projects, to enable us to develop business cases to secure future funding for essential services
- Improve data collection and analysis across services to better understand outcomes

4.2 Co-produce a joined-up pathway which supports people with complex needs who experience homelessness

- Develop a framework of supported accommodation provision and housing related support based on the recommendations of the 'Health and Housing needs of rough sleepers' report.
- Develop a coordinated and joined-up approach bringing together a range of partners to deliver personalised support to enable long term recovery
- Secure support and investment across a range of services (Housing, Health, Adult Social Care) by breaking down silos and pooling resources where appropriate
- Embed co-production with people with lived experiences into new service delivery

4.3 Help people settle into homes where they can thrive

- Develop and adopt housing-led principles throughout our support services, specialist housing provision and mainstream accommodation options.
- Increase our understanding of needs and experiences and deliver targeted support and services for women at risk of and experiencing homelessness.
- Improve access to rapid 'off-the-street' options for rough sleeping.

How our strategy will be delivered

In order to deliver the priorities that we have set out in this strategy we need to continue to work closely with our key partners. However, we also recognise that homelessness is an everchanging landscape, bringing new challenges all the time.

While this is a three-year strategy (2024-2027), we will develop a dynamic 12-month Delivery Plan, to be monitored and reviewed annually, ensuring its actions are flexible and resilient.

Governance

The Housing Partnership Board (HPB) will be a catalyst for strong strategic governance and leadership and the delivery of this Strategy.

Four steering groups aligned to the themes of our [Housing Strategy](#) will undertake the practical activities needed to achieve our priorities. Membership is senior operational or senior technical expert level and includes representatives from Adult Social Care, NCT, Public Health, our main Registered Providers, and our Assets and Planning teams. Theme 3 covers Homelessness and Rough Sleeping. Task and Finish groups will be set up to support delivery.

We have established partnership groups comprising the Homelessness Prevention Network in our rural areas and the Single Homelessness Forum in Northampton, which will feed into the HPB.

Our workforce

Across West Northants organisations and services, rely on a dedicated, experienced workforce to deliver services to people experiencing or at risk of homelessness. This can be rewarding, but challenging work. Those supporting people with complex needs or in complex areas of law have accrued skills and knowledge over several years. Many organisations are experiencing difficulties with staff recruitment and retention, exacerbated post-Covid and by the cost of living crisis. Local housing affordability issues affect staff, as well as those accessing our services. Throughout the sector there is a prevalence of fixed term contracts, often because of the short-term nature of funding. These can cause employment instability and add to workload pressures.

WNC are signed up to the Armed Forces, Care Leavers Covenants and are a Disability Confident employer, to offer greater employment opportunities and increase representation from people in these groups. However, there are limited roles and services that encourage applications or build in routes to employment from those with lived experience of homelessness. We will build in routes to employment within the sector, from those with lived experience and build a sustainable workforce, to deliver our strategic ambitions.