



# Northumberland

## County Council

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**COMMITTEE: ASHINGTON & BLYTH LOCAL AREA COUNCIL**

**DATE: 11<sup>th</sup> JANUARY 2023**

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## **HOMELESSNESS AND ROUGH SLEEPING**

**Report of:** Elizabeth Morgan, Interim Executive Director of Public Health and Community Services

**Cabinet Member:** Councillor Colin Horncastle, Portfolio Holder for Community Services

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### **Purpose of report**

The following report provides an update for members of the service provision for residents who are homeless, or at risk of homelessness, in Northumberland providing an outline of the key data and the services available for people sleeping rough.

### **Recommendations**

It is recommended that members consider and comment on the contents of the report.

### **Link to Corporate Plan**

This report is relevant to the priorities included in the Northumberland County Council Corporate Plan 2021-2024 which states:

***Enjoying, Connecting*** - We will maintain, protect and enhance the environment, prioritising our commitments on Climate Change

***Living, Learning*** - We will care for our residents, support the most vulnerable in our society and help people to live healthy lives.

### **Key issues**

1. The Homelessness Act 2002 placed a duty on local authorities to carry out a review of homelessness in their area and formulate and publish a Homelessness Strategy based on the findings from the review. Our current strategy is written in accordance with this legislation and statutory guidance.

2. The Housing Act 1996, Part 7 has most recently been amended by the **Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 (HRA)**. This new Act represented fundamental amendments to the existing homelessness legislation. It introduced new requirements to prevent and relieve homelessness and, in that context, set out a range of new duties. These amendments came into force in April 2018.
3. The Northumberland Homelessness Strategy 2016-2021 was refreshed in 2019 to include measures set out in the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 as well as responding to respond to the Government's vision set out in their **Rough Sleeping Strategy (2018)** '*to support every person who sleeps rough off the streets and into a home*'.
4. In February 2022 consultation was carried out with partners and stakeholders to establish whether our current objectives were still relevant and that they would enable the council to tackle homelessness and rough sleeping in the County and meet the requirements of the HRA.
5. The new draft **Homelessness & Rough Sleeper Strategy 2022 – 2024** reflects the consultation input and the needs and demands for homelessness services and housing options advice and support across the county. This is currently being reviewed through the committee process in advance of being adopted.

## **Background**

The Council's Homelessness Strategy for Northumberland 2016- 2021 detailed 5 key strategic priorities for the delivery of homelessness and housing options support for Northumberland residents. Since that strategy was published in 2016 changes in national policy impacted upon the services we needed to provide.

**The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017** was the most notable change to legislation relating to homelessness in over 40 years. It transformed the way homelessness services are expected to be delivered and introduced new duties. The Act made changes to the current homelessness legislation contained in Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996, with a renewed focus on preventing homelessness.

**The Homelessness Code of Guidance 2018 (CoG 2018)** was published in February 2018 in readiness for the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. The CoG 2018 is considered alongside the legislation when assessing and dealing with applications for assistance under either the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 or Part 7 of the HA 1996.

The Government's **Rough Sleeping Strategy (August 2018)** set out the 2027 vision to support every person who sleeps rough off the streets and into a home. This was the beginning of Government plans to meet their 2027 ambition, when the ambition is that no one must sleep rough again.

The Northumberland Homelessness Strategy 2016-2021 was refreshed in 2019 to include measures set out in the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 as well as responding to the Government's vision set out in their Rough Sleeping Strategy (2018) 'to support every person who sleeps rough off the streets and into a home'. This led to the publication of the council's **Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy for Northumberland 2019 - 2021**

This strategy supported the Council's priorities for the delivery of our statutory obligations to people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness whilst also supporting the delivery of the Council's Corporate Priorities and the delivery of the principle within the Housing Strategy for Northumberland that having a decent home is fundamental to the health and wellbeing of everyone living in Northumberland.

As this strategy ended in 2021 a new strategy has been drafted, reflecting the consultation that took place earlier this year and the needs and demands for homelessness service and housing options advice and support across the county.

In addition to changes to homelessness legislation, the **Domestic Abuse Act 2021** was passed into law in April 2021. The Act aims to further improve the effectiveness of the justice system in providing protection for victims of domestic abuse and bringing perpetrators to justice and strengthen the support for victims of abuse by statutory agencies. The **Northumberland Domestic Abuse Strategy 2021-2024** outlines how Northumberland County Council will implement the recommendations of the refreshed Domestic Abuse needs assessment and the statutory duties associated with the provision of safe accommodation and support.

The Council's new draft Homelessness Strategy, **Homelessness & Rough Sleeper Strategy for Northumberland 2012–2024**, sets out the priorities and future actions for tackling homelessness over the next three years. A detailed action plan will be produced to further explore how the priorities can be implemented and monitored to ensure delivery of the identified priorities.

The priorities within this strategy have been identified as follows;

- **Priority 1**  
Improve services and accommodation options for rough sleepers and single homeless people
- **Priority 2**  
Provide early intervention, prevention, and relief of homelessness through effective partnership working
- **Priority 3**

Improve access to suitable, affordable, and quality permanent, temporary, and emergency accommodation across all sectors

- **Priority 4**

Link health, well-being, and housing together to improve the life chances and aspirations of those affected by homelessness

- **Priority 5**

Develop homelessness pathways for specific groups including victims of domestic abuse, young people, prison leavers and armed forces veterans

The updated strategy will shortly be presented to OSC and Cabinet for approval and adoption.

To support the delivery of the priorities within the Homelessness Strategy the Council currently hosts the **Northumberland Homelessness Partnership** which meets on a quarterly basis to discuss issues affecting people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness and how best to deliver the services required to support them.

### **The Statutory Role of the Council**

The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 (HRA) came into force on 1st April 2018 and has placed a greater emphasis on intervention and acting quickly to provide advice and prevent homelessness. It also extends the duty placed on the council to offer more help to people considered to be 'non priority'.

Previously no duty was owed unless someone was homeless or threatened with homelessness and they had a 'priority need'. The HRA extends this duty to provide that people who are 'non priority' are captured by the "relief duty" and are provided assistance with securing accommodation. The HRA also increases the timeframe where help must be provided.

A person is also entitled to advice and assistance even if they have no local connection to the Local Authority area.

### **Current Council Provision**

Housing Services currently manage 4 council-owned properties, providing 32 rooms and 73 bed-spaces, for temporary and emergency accommodation. These properties are generally shared accommodation, sharing kitchen and bathroom facilities. In addition, there are 3 self-contained flats, one in Alnwick and two in Berwick. The shared units are located across the county; Woodlands Lodge, Hexham, The Hawthorns in Ashington, Lamb House in East Cramlington and Middle Street, Berwick. The properties are staffed during general office hours, with out of hours cover provided for emergency admissions.

Provision at Lamb House was increased by 4 rooms (6 bed spaces) in 2017 with the conversion of the former Warden's House. This enabled the provision of an additional accessible room and bathing facilities for clients with a disability.

Due to the demand on Temporary Accommodation, we have acquired a further 6 dispersed units of Temporary accommodation via agreement with Advance and by

Purchase and Repair using Homes England funding. These are in the Ashington and Bedlington area and consist of both houses and flats, increasing our flexibility to support people for whom shared accommodation would not be appropriate.

In addition, we have also acquired 4 additional properties from Bernicia, specifically to support with the households who require Temporary accommodation following a breakdown of their placement under the Homes for Ukraine scheme, with further options also being explored with other social landlords.

In 2020 we successfully obtained Government funding under the Rough Sleeping Initiative (RSI) for 3 further properties and a Tenancy Support Officer. These 3 properties are specifically used for either rough sleepers or people at risk of rough sleeping. The Tenancy Support Officer provides a more intense level of support to try and break the cycle of rough sleeping and then move individuals onto more permanent accommodation. Since May 2021 we have had 20 referrals into the service and 5 have been successful with a placement.

### **Commissioned Provision**

With the enactment of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 it was recognised that there was a requirement for increased availability of temporary accommodation for clients with complex needs, and those requiring more low-level support to ensure that the Council's Homeless Team could meet the statutory requirement of Relief of Homelessness required by the Act.

Following a procurement exercise completed in September 2017 Changing Lives were successfully commissioned to deliver 11 units of Supported Accommodation and an additional 25 units of Dispersed Accommodation to clients with complex needs, expanding their current service provision across the county, and extending their client group from being all-male to including female clients.

In 2020 the Council worked in partnership with Changing Lives to provide additional bedspaces under the Somewhere Safe to Stay provision. This means that if someone is found sleeping rough they can quickly access a bedspace and can then access the support of Changing Lives staff and move on to accommodation that meets their needs.

### **Challenges**

In Northumberland single homeless adults who have an offending history, drug or alcohol issues or mental health problems often struggle to access mainstream housing in the social rented sector or decent private rented accommodation. They often move around, staying with family and friends and cycling in and out of low-quality accommodation. Whilst the procurement of services goes some way to meeting this need the accommodation of this group will remain a challenge.

Figures for rough sleeping in the county are reported to Government on annual basis in the Autumn via a statutory return. The count takes places on one night and partner organisations are asked to report how many people are found rough sleeping on that day. The official annual count in 2020/21 identified six rough sleepers and in 2021/22 the number recorded was reduced to four.

## **Homelessness statistics from 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2022**

In 2020/21 a total of 767 applications were made to the Homelessness and Housing Options Service of which:

- 249 were prevented<sup>1</sup> from becoming homeless within 56 days
- 242 were relieved<sup>2</sup> from being homeless within 56 days
- 42 went through to main duty homelessness of which 23 were assessed as having no duty owed
- 234 were advice only, cancelled or closed.

In 2021/22 a total of 5408 applications were made to the service of which:

- 398 were prevented from becoming homeless
- 258 were relieved from being homeless within 56 days
- 51 went through to main duty homeless of which 18 were assessed as having no homelessness duty owed
- 60 cases still under investigation
- 4641 were advice only, cancelled or closed

The significant difference in the number of applications to service from 2020/21 to 2021/22 was due to the change in the way cases were recorded on the system. Previously if a case was resolved through advice and information they were not recorded on the system.

The low figure of cases accepted as homeless and in priority need reflects the impact of the Homeless Reduction Act where the expectation is that fewer applicants will progress to a full homeless application with increased preventative and relief work taking place over a longer period before a formal application is made.

	2020/21	2021/22
Successful Prevention cases	249	398
Successful Relief cases	242	258
Main Duty homeless cases	42	51
Advice only, cancelled or closed	234	4641
Total applications made to the service	767	5408

### **Reasons for Homelessness**

The figures below show that the main reason for homelessness in Northumberland remains consistently domestic violence, however there was a 10% decrease from

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<sup>1</sup> The 'prevention duty' places a duty on housing authorities to work with people who are threatened with homelessness within 56 days to help prevent them from becoming homeless.

<sup>2</sup> If someone is homeless the Council must help to secure suitable accommodation for them and their household. This is known as the relief duty.

2020/21 to 2021/22. The second highest reason for homelessness, exclusion from the family home, accounted for around 33% of all reasons for homelessness.

The largest increase in reason for homelessness was seen in 2021/22 in loss of private rented tenancy which showed a massive increase of 224% from the previous year. This was due to the impact of Covid-19 where many households found themselves in financial difficulty as a result of furlough, reduced working hours or loss of employment.

**Table 2: Reason for homelessness**

Reason for homelessness	2020/2021	2021/2022
Departure from institution: Custody	0	1
Domestic abuse – victim	129	115
Domestic abuse – alleged perpetrator excluded from property	0	3
End of private rented tenancy – assured shorthold tenancy	55	178
End of private rented tenancy – not assured shorthold tenancy	2	4
End of social rented tenancy	10	86
Eviction from supported housing	6	14
Family no longer willing or able to accommodate	128	123
Friends no longer willing or able to accommodate	16	24
Fire or flood / other emergency	0	5
Home no longer suitable due to disability / ill health	0	2
Left HM-Forces	0	1
Left institution with no accommodation available	5	2
Mortgage repossession	0	2
Non-racially motivated / other motivated violence or harassment	21	21
Other	65	30
Property disrepair	2	6
Racially motivated violence or harassment	4	
Relationship with partner ended (non-violent breakdown)	90	88
Required to leave accommodation provided by Home Office as asylum support	0	5

Total	533	710
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### **County Areas of Homelessness**

An analysis of postcodes showed that over the period from 2020 to 2022 60% (146) of all cases of domestic abuse were from the southeast of the county. The figures also showed that in the whole of Northumberland a total of 135 household had dependent children which amounted to 252 children who were either threatened with homelessness or made homeless due to domestic abuse.

### **Services to Support People Sleeping Rough**

NCCs Ending Rough Sleeping Plan identified a total of six individuals who were known to be entrenched rough sleepers and very difficult to engage in services. A target of the Plan was to reduce this number to zero. This was achieved by enabling access to housing with support and ensuring that their tenancy was maintained and eventually to moving on to more permanent accommodation.

With the help of RSI funding from the Government we have been able to commission a Rough Sleeping Outreach service. This is provided by Changing Lives. The officers receive referrals from the Homelessness and Housing Options officers, Councillors and from members of the public. The officers will visit the areas that have been reported to them to locate the Rough Sleeper, they will try to engage with the person and offer support and assistance to that person. If applicable they will offer the SSTS/crash pad service to get that person off the streets. If the person declines, they will still offer support with food, warmth etc. They will continue to visit the person to engage with them to see if they change their mind. It can often take a few visits before the person trusts them enough to take up the offer of accommodation.

Once the person is in the crash pad/SSTS placement then they work with Changing Lives to identify any support needs. They will then work with the support worker to link in with support agencies in order to get the person the best support for their identified need.

Once a bed becomes available in the main Changing Lives project then the person can be moved into there which is longer term accommodation. They can then still work with the support worker but have more secure accommodation.

From 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022 there have been 120 individuals referred into the Crash pad/SSTS facility.

The council continues to report monthly figures to the government on the number of people identified as sleeping rough and how they progress through the rough sleeper accommodation pathway.



## Conclusion

Services to residents are provided county-wide with specific officers based in the south-east, west and north of the county ensuring that a consistent offer is provided to all requiring support and assistance.

## Implications

<b>Policy</b>	Supports the delivery of the Corporate Plan and the priorities within the Housing Strategy for Northumberland 2019-2022 and the Private Sector Housing Strategy 2021-2023
<b>Finance and value for money</b>	There are no direct financial implications arising from this report. Sustaining tenancies and reducing homelessness has a positive impact on the budget.
<b>Legal</b>	The Homelessness service is a Statutory Service and is delivered in line with requirements of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.
<b>Procurement</b>	none
<b>Human Resources</b>	none
<b>Property</b>	Details the council's ambitions for homelessness & housing options services This is likely to lead to an increase in council-owned stock being used as temporary accommodation.
<b>Equalities</b> (Impact Assessment attached) Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	An EIS has been completed for the associated strategies to ensure that fair access to housing for all residents is considered.
<b>Risk Assessment</b>	none
<b>Crime &amp; Disorder</b>	People who are homeless are both more likely to be the victims of crime; and may be more likely to commit crime for survival, to acquire money or shelter.
<b>Customer Consideration</b>	Enables provision of suitable accommodation for all residents

<b>Carbon reduction</b>	none
<b>Health &amp; Wellbeing</b>	Sustaining tenancies and reducing homelessness & rough sleeping will have a positive impact upon the health & wellbeing of residents.
<b>Wards</b>	All

**Background papers:**

Draft Homelessness & Rough Sleeper Strategy for Northumberland 2022-2024

**Report sign off.**

***Authors must ensure that officers and members have agreed the content of the report:***

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Monitoring Officer / Legal	Suki Binjal
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