

DARTFORD
BOROUGH COUNCIL
HOMELESSNESS &
ROUGH SLEEPER
STRATEGY 2019-
2023

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1. Introduction and National Context

- 1.1. This draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy builds on the Council's 2017 review of homelessness in the borough and the subsequent development of a Homelessness Strategy in 2018; taking account of new legislation and working practices brought about by the implementation of the Homeless Reduction Act 2017 and the Government's Rough Sleeper Strategy 2018.
- 1.2. The Council recognises that for many people living in Dartford, access to secure good quality housing can be challenging in the light of economic uncertainty and welfare reforms. We also recognise the serious impact that homelessness can have on people's lives especially those that are vulnerable and at greater risk of homelessness.
- 1.3. Prevention of homelessness is at the heart of the Council's strategic priorities and we are committed to early intervention in our service delivery with access to advice and assistance to all those that approach the service, whether they are vulnerable or not.
- 1.4. Nationally, incidents of homelessness have been rising for a number of years and the increased use of temporary accommodation is a direct consequence of this. For example, there were nearly 57,000, annual homelessness acceptances in 2016/17, 17,000 higher than in 2009/10. In addition main housing duty acceptances stood at 42% above those in 2009/10.
- 1.5. At the end of March 2018 the most common reasons for loss of last settled homes nationally were:
 - Parents, other relatives or friends no longer willing or able to accommodate (28%).
 - Loss of rented or tied accommodation due to termination of assured shorthold tenancy (25%).
 - Violent breakdown of relationship involving partner (12%).
 - Other reason (e.g. homeless in emergency, sleeping rough or in hostel, returned from abroad) (7%).
 - Non-violent breakdown of relationship with partner (6%).
 - Loss of rented or tied accommodation due to reasons other than termination of assured shorthold tenancy (6%).
- 1.6. On 31 March 2018, the total number of households in temporary accommodation arranged by local authorities under homelessness legislation was 79,880, up 66% on 31 December 2010.

Summary of national homeless statistics	2009/10	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	% increase 2009/10- 2017/18
Rough sleeping in England – snapshot	1,768	2,744	3,569	4,134	4,751	69
Local authority statutory homelessness cases	89,120	112,350	114,780	115,580	109,380	23
Local authority statutory homelessness acceptances	40,020	54,430	57,740	59,120	56,630	42

- 1.7. With rising homelessness and temporary accommodation the Government proposed improvements to the legal framework to prevent and tackle homelessness more effectively.
- 1.8. The framework was given Royal Assent as The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 which commenced on 3rd April 2018. The Act amends the legislative framework laid out in the Housing Act 1996 and places new duties on Councils to:
- a) Improve advice and information about homelessness and the prevention of homelessness, tailored to individual needs.
 - b) Extend the period at which a client may be considered as ‘threatened with homelessness’, and thus potentially owed a duty to be housed, from 28 days to 56 days.
 - c) Prevent and relieve homelessness for all eligible people, regardless of priority need and local connection.
 - d) Prepare needs assessments and personalised housing plans, setting out the actions housing authorities and individuals will take to help secure accommodation.
 - e) Work together with other agencies and public bodies to prevent and relieve homelessness through a mandatory duty to refer.
- 1.9. The Act also places a duty of specified public bodies to refer those clients they are working with and are homeless or threatened with homelessness, to a local authority homelessness service. This duty commenced on 1st October 2018.
- 1.10. Recent central government policy and initiatives have been focused on reducing the impact on vulnerable households and to ensure local housing authorities are providing effective prevention activities and consistent frontline services, for all those who approach.
- 1.11. The Government aims to halve rough sleeping by 2022 and end it by 2027.

It launched its new Rough Sleeping Strategy in August 2018 and requests that all homelessness strategies are reviewed and rebadged by the end of 2019 to include a specific focus on addressing rough sleeping.

- 1.12. Alongside this framework, the Government has also implemented widespread and significant welfare reforms, including the roll out of Universal Credit.

2. Objectives for this Strategy

- 2.1. The vision for the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy is:

To proactively prevent homelessness and rough sleeping through strong partnership working and provide an inclusive and accessible service to all

- 2.2. The Council's four strategic priorities for this Strategy are as follows:

- **STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE ONE - PREVENTION & RELIEF**

To prevent and relieve homelessness and rough sleeping wherever possible in line with the requirements of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 and the Government's Rough Sleeper Strategy 2018.

- **STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE TWO - ACCOMMODATION**

To provide a range of accommodation for homeless households, making innovative use of solutions in the private sector and continue to increase the council housing stock through development and acquisitions.

- **STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE THREE - PARTNERSHIP WORKING**

To work with local organisations to provide a coordinated approach to tackling and preventing homelessness.

- **STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE FOUR - MONITORING**

To keep up to date with homelessness trends, customer satisfaction, government policy, legislation and good practice.

- 2.3. These objectives are especially relevant in the current climate. The provision of proactive services to help households avoid homelessness altogether or minimise the detrimental effects, should homelessness be unavoidable, remain at the heart of what the Council aims to achieve for the residents of the Borough.

- 2.4. The challenge going forward will be to continue the successful homeless prevention measures, especially for households dependent on welfare benefits who find it more difficult to afford private rents or access home ownership.
- 2.5. Many of the services and initiatives provided by the Council can offer better value for money in terms of preventing homelessness compared to dealing with the aftermath of actual homelessness.

3. Local Context

3.1. Homelessness Review 2017

The review of homelessness, covering the period 2014-2017, produced key findings which mainly reflected national trends. These are set out below:

- Despite a long period where the number of homeless decisions and acceptances were generally decreasing, this trend shifted in 2014/2015, with twice as many applications and acceptances than the previous year. This trend continued to 2017/2018.
- 781 decisions on homelessness were made in this period. Of these 498 households were accepted under the main homelessness duty (they were eligible, unintentionally homeless and in priority need).
- The primary priority need category for applicants accepted under the main homelessness duty continued to be because the applicant had dependent children, mainly in a lone parent household. This was followed by the applicant being vulnerable because of mental illness and vulnerable because of a physical disability.
- The majority of applicants accepted the main homelessness duty were from a white ethnic group and aged between 16 and 44 years old.
- The main reason for homelessness was loss of tied or rented accommodation in the private rented sector, mainly because of the termination of an assured shorthold tenancy. This cause of homelessness increased significantly since the last review. Parents, relatives or friends no longer willing to accommodate was the second highest cause of homelessness followed by violent breakdown of a relationship.
- A total of 189 homelessness preventions and relief took place outside of the statutory homeless framework.
- The levels of homeless households placed into temporary accommodation was steadily increasing with more households in temporary accommodation at the end of quarter 4 in 2016/17 than previous quarters. This increase in the use of temporary accommodation was mainly due to the lack of suitable accommodation in the private rented sector.

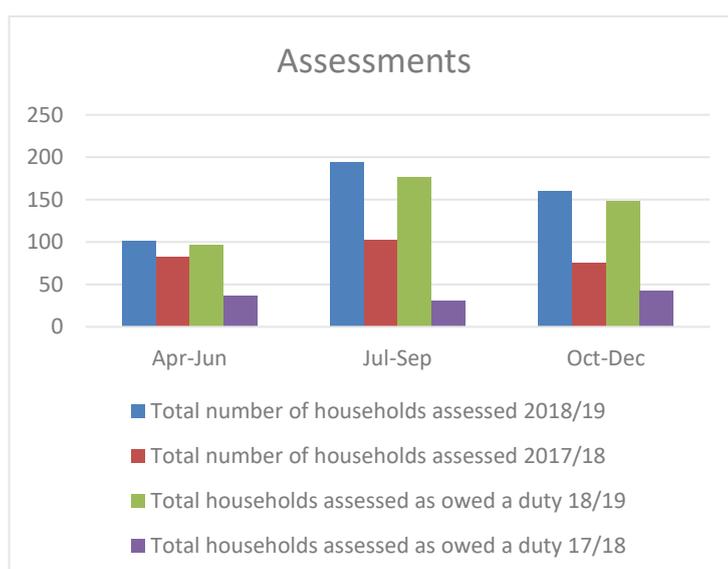
- Factors surrounding rising housing costs and the difficulty of procuring private rented accommodation, contributed to the numbers of homeless households in temporary accommodation. In addition, a lack of available private sector accommodation in the borough resulted in a growing proportion of homeless households being accommodated in another borough.

3.2. A copy of the full 2017 Homelessness Review report is available to view on line at <https://www.dartford.gov.uk/by-category/housing2/housing-strategy-and-policy-documents>.

3.3. Post implementation of the Homeless Reduction Act 2017 - from April 2018
Data collected from April 2018 shows that there has been a significant increase in the numbers of households presenting as homeless; due mainly to the new duties described in 1.6. In 2018/2019, up to December 2018, there were 456 new cases opened compared to 262 in 2017/2018. Of these, 423 cases were owed a prevention and relief duty in 2018/2019 compared to 110 in 2017/2018. Of these, 30 Households were accepted as having a full homelessness duty in 2018/2019.

Approaches for assistance under the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 post 3 April 2018					
Month	New cases opened	Prevention duty accepted	Relief duty accepted	Not threatened with homelessness in 56 days - no duty owed	Main duty to house accepted
April - June	102	66	31	5	5
Jul - Sept	194	119	58	17	6
Oct - Dec	160	86	63	11	19
Total	456	271	152	33	30

3.4. The chart below shows the number of assessments made in 2018 compared to the same period in 2017.



- 3.5. The main cause of homelessness is now parents or friends no longer willing to accommodate (25%) followed by the loss of an assured shorthold tenancy (21%). domestic abuse (11%), relationship breakdown (11%), end of a social rented tenancy (6%) and the end of other types of private tenancy (3%). 'Other reasons' or 'no reason known' account for the remaining causes.
- 3.6. Approaches from April 2018 show the following key features:
- 59% of approaches were aged 25-44
 - 39% were females with dependent children
 - 5% were males with dependent children
 - 38% were single adults
 - 11% were couples with dependent children
 - 55% of households had support needs including mental health problems and/or physical disability
 - 2% were referred from other local authorities or agencies
- 3.7. The main reason for a prevention duty ending is that households have secured accommodation for 6 months or more. The reasons for a relief duty ending are more varied including households securing accommodation, 56 days has elapsed, contact has been lost or the application has been withdrawn. 65% of relief cases accepted were subsequently ended and 68% of prevention cases were also ended.

4. Temporary Accommodation

- 4.1. If a main homelessness duty is owed, a household may have to be placed into temporary accommodation (TA) before an offer of settled accommodation is made.
- 4.2. The Council may also place applicants into TA under an interim duty to accommodate, (pending a decision as to whether a main homelessness duty is owed); if they have reason to believe the applicant may be homeless, eligible for assistance and in priority need.
- 4.3. The definition of TA includes nightly paid accommodation (privately managed accommodation with shared facilities or self-contained accommodation), hostels, local authority/private registered provider stock, leased properties and other stock.
- 4.4. The number of households placed in nightly paid accommodation steadily increased from 2014 the main reason being the lack of suitable move-on accommodation in the private rented sector but began to fall in quarter 1 of 2018/2019. At the end of quarter 4, 2018 there were 56 households placed in nightly paid accommodation, compared to 108 in the same quarter in 2016/2017. The majority of all TA placements are single parents with dependent children.
- 4.5. The Council does not place homeless households into shared accommodation unless it is absolutely necessary.
- 4.6. The length of time spent in TA largely depends on the availability of suitable

accommodation in the borough, however, the aim is to minimise the length of time spent in TA, particularly for households with dependent children, pregnant women and 16/17 year olds.

5. Tacking Rough Sleeping

- 5.1. The Government's National Strategy for Rough Sleeping is committed to halve rough sleeping by 2022, and to end it for good by 2027. It has set aside £100m of funding and a three-pronged approach to ending rough sleeping through prevention, intervention, and recovery.
- 5.2. It is also committed to a wider review of homelessness and rough sleeper legislation, which will include the Vagrancy Act.
- 5.3. In Dartford, there were an estimated 12 rough sleepers in 2018/2019 identified on a given night compared to 9 in 2017/18 and 2016/2017, 10 in 2015/2016 and 19 in 2014/2015. Although this is a reduction since 2014, there is still a slight increase from the last year and the Council will continue to work in partnership with other agencies in the borough to work towards the Government's aim of eliminating rough sleeping by 2027. The Council has developed a number of initiatives to combat rough sleeping including:
 - Funding contribution to the Winter Shelter to ensure that enough support is in place for rough sleepers accessing the service
 - The Housing Solutions team provide a drop in for those using the shelter and work in partnership with the support staff to ensure occupants have effective move on plans
 - A commitment to ensuring there are no repeat names on the rough sleeper estimate by providing access to suitable affordable accommodation.
 - Providing a fast track referral mechanism for the Council's outreach provider

6. Homeless Prevention

- 6.1. The Council tries where possible to prevent homelessness with the main prevention activity being assistance in the private rented sector. Spend in this area includes deposits and rent in advance, loans and the Deposit Guarantee Scheme. Spend in 2018/19 was £237,649.
- 6.2. The Council developed an innovative Homeless Prevention Hub which is sited within the Council Offices. This was set up in response to the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 implemented in April 2018. The Hub is made up of a number of agencies to ensure that homelessness is prevented as far as possible by providing a joined up approach to each homeless situation. The agencies that are included in the Hub are:
 - Department for Work and Pensions

- Revenues & Benefits
- Citizens Advice Bureau
- Porchlight
- Mental Health Support
- Specialist Children's Services & Early Help
- Housing Solutions Team
- One You

6.3. A review of the hub was undertaken in June 2019 and a multi-agency meeting was held. As a result the following agencies will be joining the hub:

- Hospital Discharge Team
- Kenward Trust
- YMCA
- LIFE Housing

7. Actions to date

7.1. In 2017, the Council recognised that its approach to housing and homelessness would require specific, tailored actions to meet the requirements of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 and its ongoing work to prevent homelessness. Since the last Homeless Strategy was implemented in 2018 the Council has:

- Implemented a triage system to enable homeless enquiries to be dealt with more effectively
- Funded a crash pad for 16/17 year olds so a there can be a holistic response to their homelessness. As a result no 16/17 year olds have been placed in bed and breakfast accommodation since 2011
- Introduced a dedicated homeless service, in partnership with Porchlight, which enables single homeless persons, including rough sleepers to consider a wide range of housing options at a weekly drop in based at the council offices.
- Reviewed and updated the council website to ensure that advice and information is available on housing and preventing homelessness, securing accommodation, the help that is available and on the rights of homeless persons
- Produced information leaflets that can be sent to customers or downloaded from the website for specific client groups at risk of homelessness, in line with s179 of the HRA 2017
- Developed packs for customers that provide comprehensive information on their housing options including rental market data.

- Developed a homelessness triage system that will manage the demand on the service and ensure that applications are proactively responded to that will maximise prevention opportunities
- Implemented new IT systems to meet the requirements of the HRA 2017.
- Reviewed all outgoing correspondence to ensure it met the requirements of the HRA 2017
- Developed a referral mechanism to ensure relevant partners and agencies can refer customers that may be at risk of homelessness
- Secured 20 additional units for temporary accommodation for homeless households through proactive working with the YMCA
- Carried out a review of the Housing Allocations' Policy to ensure it complied with the HRA 2017
- Facilitated regular meetings with Dartford Revenues & Benefits team to make use of the Discretionary Housing Payment pot. Housing Benefit representatives now form part of the Hub.
- Ensured that the pre-eviction protocols are being utilised by the Housing Management team and partner Housing Associations - this is ongoing
- Reduced the use of nightly paid accommodation by 40%
- Developed an accessible internet based referrals module for partner organisations to refer homeless clients
- Worked with the Winter Shelter in Dartford to maximise housing solutions for rough sleepers

8. Resources and Costs

- 8.1. At the end of 2018/2019 the cost of providing temporary accommodation was £1,375,385.47. This cost has been steadily increasing year on year reflecting the rising costs of suitable temporary accommodation.
- 8.2. A Homelessness Grant of £106,500 is received from central government each year. This Strategy will be resourced by using this grant in a more pro-active approach to deliver the initiatives proposed.
- 8.3. The Council was allocated £139,239 of New Burdens Funding ahead of the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 in April 2018. This funding has now been spent implementing the provisions of the Act.
- 8.4. In May 2019, Dartford Council was part of a bid for the Government's Private

rented Sector Access Fund along with 35 other local authorities and received £171k to assist clients secure housing in the private rented sector.

- 8.5. The Council has also made use of other minor funding streams that have been made available wherever possible. However, the cost of providing the service always outweighs income.

9. Action Plan

An updated Action Plan, is attached at Annex A. The Plan also contains new actions that have been developed; to be implemented during 2019-2021.

10. Monitoring and Review

- 10.1. The Council will again deliver this Strategy in partnership with a number of partner organisations including housing associations, Kent County Council, Shelter, the YMCA and Porchlight etc.
- 10.2. Monitoring will take place quarterly by senior officers, in collaboration with partners, as part of the council-led Homeless and Rough Sleeping Strategy Implementation Group.

Annex A Dartford Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy Action Plan

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE ONE - PREVENTION & RELIEF		
To prevent and relieve homelessness and rough sleeping wherever possible in line with the requirements of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 and the Government's Rough Sleeping Strategy 2018		
No	Task	Target
1a	Work in partnership with the Winter Shelter to ensure that all rough sleepers' accommodation needs are assessed.	March 2020 and ongoing
1b	Utilise monies received from the Private Access Fund to implement around 200 insurance policies for landlords to enable improved access to the private rented sector.	March 2020
1c	Fully implement the Shared Digital Workspace to improve information sharing with the members of the Hub.	December 2019
1d	Review the roles and responsibilities of the Housing Solutions Team to ensure an effective service is provided to all those seeking assistance.	March 2020
1e	Review the Dartford Private Sector Leasing Scheme.	December 2019
1f	Work in partnership with KCC's commissioned provider, Look Ahead, to implement a new support service for Dartford residents.	Ongoing
1g	Explore future government funding opportunities to improve outcomes for homeless households in the borough.	Ongoing

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE TWO - ACCOMMODATION		
To provide a range of accommodation for homeless households, making innovative use of solutions in the private sector		
2a	Convert 20 Dartford private leased properties to Assured Shorthold Tenancies	December 2020
2b	Develop a new Rent Guarantee Scheme to support low income households to access the private rented sector	December 2019
2c	Develop and implement a Social Lettings Agency to increase the supply of temporary accommodation	September 2020
2d	Recruit a Landlord Relationship Officer to secure additional accommodation in the private rented sector	August 2019
2e	Develop a landlord package and options to support low-income households to access the private rented sector and encourage partnership working with private sector landlords.	December 2019
2f	Ensure there is a regular agenda item at the Landlord Forum to develop relationships with local landlords	December 2019 (to be developed following the recruitment of a new Landlord Relationship Officer).
2g	Explore the extended use of Housing Association properties to discharge functions under homeless legislation	On going
STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE THREE - PARTNERSHIP WORKING		
To work with local organisations to provide a coordinated approach to tackling and preventing homelessness		
3c	Ensure that the pre-eviction protocols are being utilised by the Housing Management team and partner Housing Associations	On going
3d	Look for more affordable and cost effective housing solutions to the use of temporary accommodation	On going
3e	Lead on the steering group for the One Stop Shop for Domestic Abuse and ensure there are regular reviews	On going
3f	Attend the Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) to ensure high risk victims of domestic abuse are appropriately housed and supported	Bi-weekly

3g	Attend the North Kent Domestic Abuse Forum to ensure a joined up approach for victims of domestic abuse	Bi-monthly
3h	Attend relevant Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) and MAPPA Housing Panel meetings to identify and minimise potential risks to the authority	On going
3i	Review the Young Person's Team processes with Kent County Council and YMCA, including the use of the crash pad based at the YMCA.	December 2019
3j	Participate in Joint Housing Panels (KCC and relevant providers) to enable access to supported accommodation in the district	Monthly
3k	Develop an accessible Referrals Module on Locata and maximise participation from partner organisations to prevent homelessness	January 2020
3l	Attend the Kent Housing Options Group (KHOG) and continue to look at opportunities for partnership working across Kent	Quarterly
3m	Continue to work with the Winter Shelter in Dartford to look at housing solutions for rough sleepers in Dartford	On going
STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE FOUR - MONITORING		
To keep up to date with homelessness trends, customer satisfaction, Government policy, legislation and good practice		
4a	Keep up to date with government policy, legislative changes and good practice in the area of homelessness and disseminate this to partners	On going
4b	Use new Homelessness Case Level Information Classification (H-CLIC) data to monitor and analyse homeless trends in the district. (new system to replace Government P1E statistical returns)	Quarterly
4d	Monitor out of London placements and participate in meetings with London Boroughs, KCC and other relevant organisations to discuss any ongoing issues	On going
4e	Annually evaluate the extent of rough sleeping in Dartford by carrying out a rough sleeper estimate	Annually

4f	Collect satisfaction feedback from service users	Annually
4g	Carry out a mystery shopping exercise on the homelessness service	January 2020