

Temporary Accommodation Strategy 2022-24

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1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Dartford Borough Council ('the 'Council') has a duty under the Housing Act 1996 (as amended) and the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 to secure temporary accommodation for homeless households in certain circumstances, for example, whilst homelessness enquires are undertaken or until suitable accommodation can be found under the main housing duty.
- 1.2 The Council's ability to secure temporary accommodation is subject to the availability of such accommodation. A variety of factors have impacted on the demand for temporary accommodation, such as the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, and more recently, the Covid-19 pandemic.
- 1.3 This document sets out the Council's strategy for the temporary accommodation needs of homeless households in the Borough. The Strategy compliments and builds on the strategic objective within the Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy 2019-23 'to provide a range of accommodation for homeless households, making innovative use of solutions in the private sector'.
- 1.4 Whilst it is recognised that the focus of the homelessness service is on the prevention of homelessness in the first place and that the use of temporary accommodation should be minimised where possible, it's use is an integral part of meeting the Council's homelessness duties and there must be a sufficient supply to meet need.
- 1.5 The aim of this Strategy is to look at the Council's approach to procuring temporary accommodation now and in the future for homeless households, including the potential demand, the challenges in procuring accommodation and how existing options and schemes could be maximised to ensure that the service and provision of accommodation is future proofed.
- 1.6 The Strategy is delivered by three strategic objectives:
 - Strategic objective 1: Temporary accommodation is procured at a fair price; costs are driven down whilst value for money is achieved.
 - Strategic objective 2: The provision of temporary accommodation is sufficient to manage demand and to meet homelessness duties.
 - Strategic objective 3: Temporary accommodation is suitable, compliant with health and safety specifications and in a decent condition.
- 1.7. The Strategy covers a reasonably short period of two years as the homelessness situation in the district (and regionally and nationally) is very dynamic and temporary accommodation demand needs to be reviewed with some regularity.

2. STRATEGIC AND POLICY LINKS

- 2.1. This Temporary Accommodation Strategy links with the Council's following key documents:

2.2. Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy 2019-23

The [Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy](#) sets out the Council's strategy for preventing homelessness in the Borough; securing that sufficient accommodation is and will be available for people in the Borough who are or may become homeless; and, securing the satisfactory provision of support for people in the Borough who are or may become homeless or who have been homeless and need support to prevent them becoming homeless again.

2.3. Homelessness Accommodation Policy

The [Homelessness Accommodation Policy](#) sets out the Council's policy for the prioritisation of homeless households for accommodation according to its location. On account of the difficulties associated with securing good quality, affordable accommodation within its administrative boundaries, the purpose of this policy is to ensure that when faced with insufficient units of in-Borough accommodation the Council prioritises those who have the greatest need to be accommodated within the Borough.

2.4. Housing Allocations' Policy

The [Housing Allocations' Policy](#) sets out the criteria and procedures that the Council uses to prioritise applicants for housing owned by the Council and a proportion of homes owned by our private registered provider (housing association) partners in the Borough. Applicants who are owed a main homelessness duty will be given reasonable preference, but with reduced priority, and placed into Band D. Additional priority may be given in certain circumstances, as set out in the Policy.

2.5. Corporate Plan 2021-23

The [Corporate Plan](#) includes a strategic aim to 'facilitate quality, choice and diversity in the housing market, assist in meeting housing need in Dartford and deliver high quality service to service users'. This is supported by a strategic objective to 'enable the best use of housing to meet the needs of local people'.

2.6. Equality and Diversity Document Framework 2018-22

The [Equality and Diversity Document Framework](#) sets out how the Council will meet the Public Sector Equality Duty under the Equality Act 2010.

3. LEGAL FRAMEWORK

- 3.1. Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended) provides the statutory underpinning for action by the Council to prevent homelessness and provide assistance to people threatened with or actually homeless.
- 3.2. **Prevention and relief duties** - The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 significantly reformed England's homelessness legislation by placing duties on the Council to intervene at earlier stages to prevent homelessness in its area. It also requires the Council to provide homelessness services to all those affected, not just those who have 'priority need'. These include:
- a) an enhanced prevention duty extending the period a household is threatened with homelessness from 28 days to 56 days, meaning that the Council is required to work with people to prevent homelessness at an earlier stage. This means either helping them to stay in their current accommodation or helping them to find new accommodation before they become actually homeless; and
 - b) a new duty for those who are already homeless so that the Council will support households for 56 days to relieve their homelessness by helping them to secure accommodation.
- 3.3. There are various sections of the Housing Act 1996 that trigger a temporary accommodation duty:
- S.188 – the duty to provide temporary accommodation to anyone the Council has reason to believe may be homeless and may be in priority need
 - S.190 – in the event of an adverse decision, the Council has a duty to provide temporary accommodation for a reasonable period of time in order to give clients the opportunity to make their own arrangements
 - S.193 – following acceptance of the main housing duty, the Council is required to continue to provide temporary accommodation until suitable, alternative accommodation can be found.
- 3.4. In addition to households applying to the Council for accommodation under homelessness legislation, other households can require temporary accommodation. This includes people who are rough sleeping, people who require emergency accommodation due to risk of fire or flood etc., and Council tenants who are being decanted due to major repairs or remodelling works to their homes.
- 3.5. **Main housing duty** - The Council is subject to an ongoing duty (the 'main housing' duty) to ensure that accommodation is available to an applicant who is eligible for assistance; in priority need; and unintentionally homeless. This duty is owed by the Council unless there is a local connection referral from another local authority.
- 3.6. The Localism Act 2011 (s148 and s149) introduced provisions which enable the Council to bring its main housing duty to an end, by making an offer of a private rented sector tenancy rather than a social housing tenancy.
- 3.7. **Suitable accommodation** - Accommodation must always be 'suitable' and there are particular matters the Council must have regard to when determining suitability, including space and arrangement, location, property condition, and social considerations relating to the applicant and their household.

4. ACCOMMODATION OPTIONS

4.1. Temporary accommodation

- 4.1.1. The Council makes use of various temporary accommodation options for homeless households in the Borough and has access to a variety of properties for the provision of temporary accommodation through several providers.
- 4.1.2. Temporary accommodation takes the form of two types of accommodation – shorter-term and longer-term accommodation.
- 4.1.3. **Shorter-term accommodation** - is nightly paid accommodation during the relief stage of homelessness and whilst a household's homelessness application is being assessed. This could be self-contained or shared accommodation. The Council does not place homeless households into shared accommodation unless it is absolutely necessary.
- 4.1.4. **Longer-term accommodation** - is for households where the Council has accepted an ongoing accommodation duty. This accommodation is provided under a license until a suitable offer to discharge that duty can be made through the household securing accommodation either in social housing stock or the private rented sector. The accommodation is provided through the Council's Dartford Private Leasing Scheme under leasing arrangements with local landlords. The Council will lease properties for a period of two, three, four or five years, and will undertake to maintain the fixtures and fittings of the property. The rent is guaranteed to be paid quarterly in advance and the Council is responsible for full tenant and rental management.

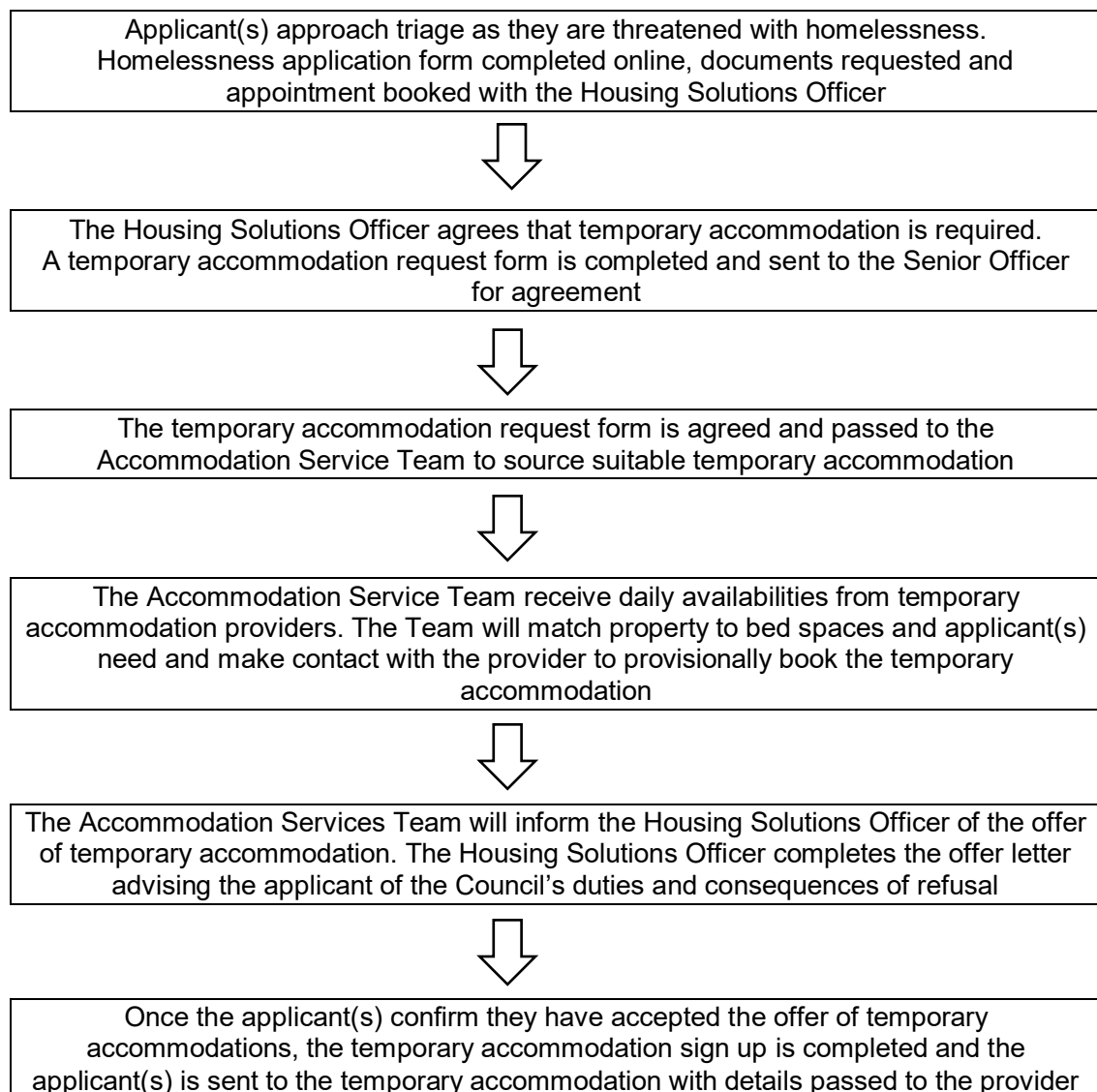
4.2. Rough sleepers

- 4.2.1. The Council has regard to the Government's Rough Sleeper Initiative to support people sleeping rough off the streets and develop their wellbeing and stability, helping to reduce people sleeping rough in both the short and longer term. The aim is to end rough sleeping by 2025. As part of the effort to assist rough sleepers during the winter months, the Council operates a Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP) to provide emergency temporary accommodation to rough sleepers to prevent deaths on the streets caused by extreme weather conditions. The SWEP is activated when the Met Office predicts one night of temperatures below 0 degrees anywhere in Kent.
- 4.4.2. As well as the SWEP, the Council also works with the Dartford Churches Winter Shelter, which is managed by a co-operative of volunteers to provide communal accommodation to rough sleepers from January to March.
- 4.4.3. During the Covid-19 pandemic, the Government announced (in March 2020), the 'Everyone In' initiative, to ensure that people sleeping rough could be helped off the streets into temporary accommodation during the national lockdown. In June 2020, the 'Next Steps Accommodation Programme' was launched to assist the 'Everyone In' cohort into medium and longer term accommodation to which the Council mobilised the provision of a 7-bed unit for winter provision via one of its local accommodation providers.

4.3. Procuring accommodation

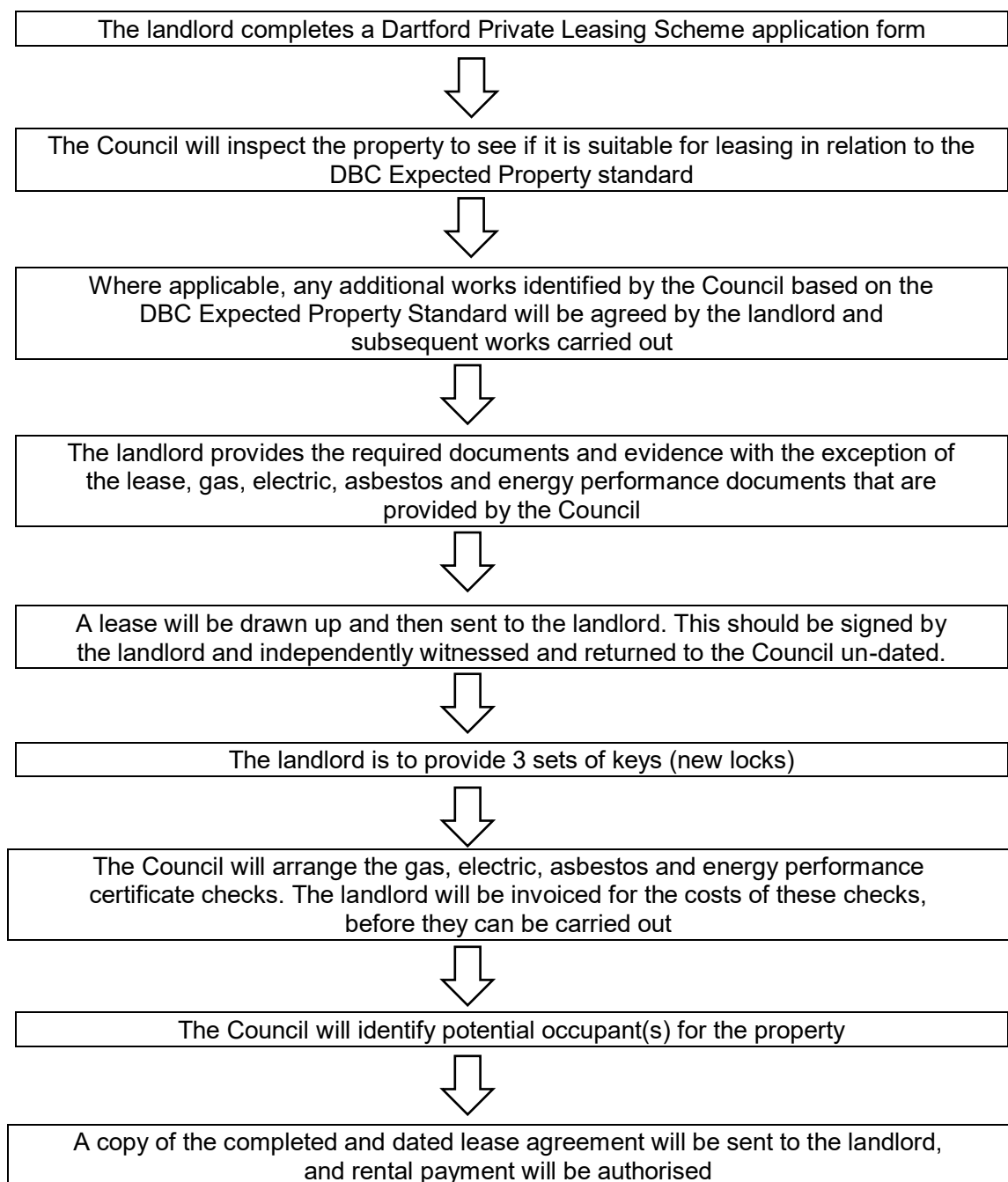
- 4.3.1. **Nightly paid temporary accommodation** - The Council has a dedicated Accommodation Service Team who procure accommodation for homeless households. There is also a Landlord Relationship Officer whose role is to source accommodation for households in temporary accommodation or under the prevention or relief duties. The process for procuring and booking nightly paid temporary accommodation is outlined in diagram 1 below.

Diagram 1: Process for procuring and booking nightly paid temporary accommodation



4.3.2. **Dartford Private Leasing Scheme accommodation** - The Council currently has 165 Dartford Private Leasing Scheme properties within its portfolio. The process for procuring Dartford Private Leasing Scheme accommodation is outlined in diagram 2 below:

Diagram 2: Process for procuring Dartford Private Leasing Scheme accommodation



4.4. Support within temporary accommodation

4.4.1 The service maintains a list of providers who provide support within temporary accommodation e.g. for people with complex needs, including mental health needs. This sets out the type of support each provider can offer (e.g. food parcels, GP registration support etc.) to assist in ensuring suitable placements are made appropriate to the type of support offered.

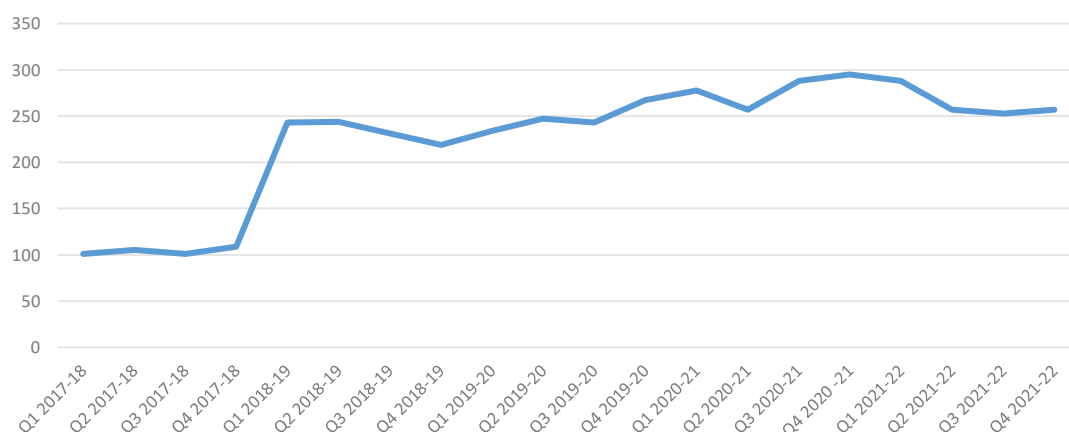
5. THE CHALLENGES

5.1. There are several challenges placed on the homelessness service overall in terms of the increased demand for temporary accommodation and challenges in procuring accommodation to ensure an adequate supply. Demand for temporary accommodation in the longer term is difficult to forecast as it is driven by a complex range of social, economic, and external factors, as well as changes to national legislation and policy. As highlighted below, the increase due to the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 is a case in point, together with the impact of Covid-19, which could not have been foreseen.

5.2. Demand for temporary accommodation

5.2.1. The increase in the demand for temporary accommodation can be seen in Chart 1 below.

Chart 1: Total number of households in temporary accommodation



5.2.2. The types of temporary accommodation used over the last two years can be seen in Table 1 below. This shows there was an increase in the use of B&B and nightly paid/private managed/self-contained accommodation during the height of the Covid-19 pandemic. Placements into private sector leased accommodation under the Dartford Private Leasing Scheme have remained at consistent levels.

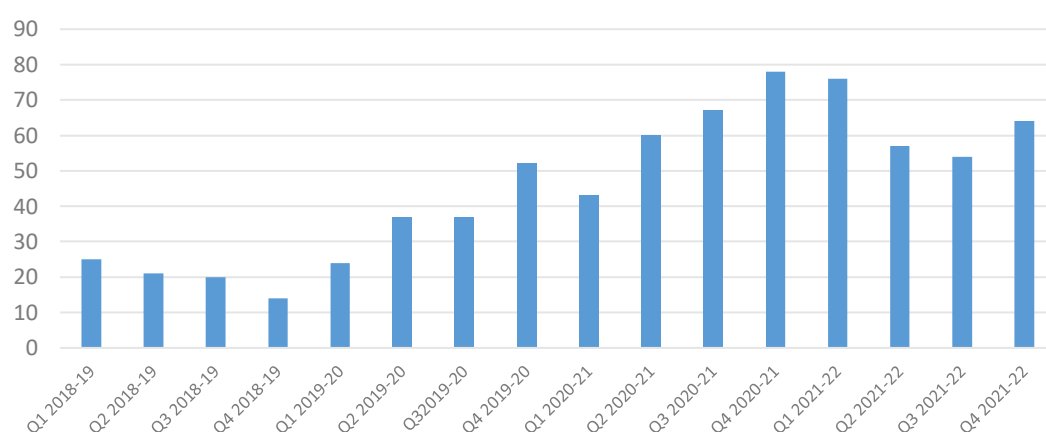
Table 1: Temporary accommodation used by type

	B&B (including shared annexes)	Nightly paid, privately managed, self- contained	Hostels (including reception centres, emergency units and refuges)	Private sector accommodati on leased by the Council or leased or managed by a registered provider	Local authority or Housing Association stock	Any other type of TA (including private landlord and not known)
Q1 2020-21	7	121	0	150	0	0
Q2 2020-21	9	108	0	140	0	0
Q3 2020-21	30	106	0	152	0	0
Q4 2020-21	34	111	0	150	0	0
Q1 2021-22	25	111	0	152	0	0
Q2 2021-22	9	89	0	159	0	0
Q3 2021-22	8	85	0	160	0	0
Q4 2021-22	8	92	0	157	0	0

5.2.3. The Council seeks to accommodate homeless households within the Borough wherever reasonably practicable, except in cases where there is a specific reason why the household should not be in accommodation within the Borough, for example because they face risk of violence. Where it is not reasonably practicable to secure accommodation within the Borough, the Council will aim to minimise the length of stay out of borough, and will take into account the distance of the accommodation and the circumstances of the household, for example the impact on employment, education or caring responsibilities, as well as the accessibility of essential medical facilities, support, local amenities, services and transport links.

5.2.4. Alongside the increase in demand for temporary accommodation, the number of households placed in temporary accommodation in another local authority district has also increased during the Covid-19 pandemic, as shown in Chart 2 below.

Chart 2: Households placed into temporary accommodation in another local authority district



5.2.4. **Homelessness Reduction Act 2017** - The need for temporary accommodation in the Borough has risen due to the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, which increased the time which those who are 'intentionally homeless' and 'in priority need' must be accommodated for through the introduction of the 56 day 'relief duty.'

5.2.5. **Covid-19 pandemic** - The Covid-19 pandemic has further intensified the need for temporary accommodation. A report published by Crisis¹ concluded that the increase seen in the pandemic was due to several factors, including:

- People who were sofa surfing and living in dangerous and transient accommodation became more visible as their living situation forced them to access help
- There have been bigger increases from people who are experiencing homelessness for the first time, who have been furloughed and those who are newly unemployed
- There was significant Government intervention through the Everyone In initiative. The intervention by local authorities to provide emergency

¹ The Impact of Covid-19 on Homelessness and Service Provision, Crisis, November 2020

accommodation to rough sleepers has clearly saved lives during the pandemic

- One of the biggest challenges facing local authorities is the ability to successfully move those housed in emergency Covid-19 accommodation into permanent and secure housing. The structural barriers that existed before the pandemic, including a lack of housing supply and a welfare system that does not address the underlying causes of homelessness have been exacerbated during the pandemic.

5.2.6. In order to protect the rights of tenants who have entered financial hardship as a result of the pandemic, the Coronavirus Act 2020 provided protection to social and private rented tenants by delaying when landlords can start possession proceedings and placed a ban on evictions. The ban on evictions were lifted on 1 June 2021, and from 1 October 2021, all notice periods have returned to their pre-pandemic lengths, which is anticipated to generate a potential surge in demand for temporary accommodation.

5.2.7. **Support for refugees** – The situation in Afghanistan and most recently in Ukraine, has mobilised the Government to set up schemes to support refugees from these countries to settle in the UK. At the time of developing this Strategy, there were 1,165 Ukrainian individuals matched with sponsors in 429 properties in Kent who have signed up for the Homes for Ukraine Scheme. The numbers assisted is expected to increase over time. The longer term impact of these resettlement schemes are yet to be seen, in particular, in terms of whether some host arrangements break down leading to approaches for assistance to local authority homelessness services and an increase for the demand for temporary accommodation.

5.2.8. **Cost of living increase** – The economic fall-out of the Covid-19 pandemic coupled with the situation in Ukraine has increased the cost of living, which is predicted to impact on the level of homelessness and demand for temporary accommodation. A further issue that could potentially be realised is in cases where shared accommodation energy bills are all inclusive, the energy bill increases will consequently affect some accommodation used by the Council.

5.3. Supply of temporary accommodation

5.3.1. The Council is generally finding temporary accommodation increasingly difficult to procure to meet greater demand and is finding that the number of landlords willing to let to households on benefits or low incomes is reducing. Rising rents and a very competitive market locally, is making it harder to procure new properties. The situation is impacted further by the pandemic.

5.3.2. **Local Housing Allowance** - Table 2 below shows the difference between private sector rents and Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates. The LHA governs the maximum amount of Housing Benefit or the housing element of Universal Credit a household can claim, and so if rents are higher than this level, the property is not likely to be affordable to the household. In every scenario, the market rents exceed the LHA in the Borough. The affordability of a property will form part of the suitability assessment undertaken by the Council when making decisions about where to place households.

Table 2: Private rents compared to LHA rates

Property size	Mean monthly rent in Dartford*	Median monthly rent in Dartford*	2021 monthly LHA rate	Shortfall between median rent and LHA
Room	£669	£683	£385.01 (shared accommodation rate)	£279.99
1 bed	£829	£800	£673.14	£126.86
2 bed	£1,046	£1,025	£847.68	£177.32
3 bed	£1,299	£1,300	£1,047.10	£252.90
4 bed	£1,676	£1,650	£1,296.44	£353.56

* Rents recorded between 1 October 2020 to 30 September 2021 (Source, ONS, Private Rental Market Statistics)

5.3.3. **Placements into the district by London boroughs** - The supply of privately rented accommodation is also being squeezed due to the increase in the shortage of affordable accommodation in London. This has led to many London boroughs placing homeless households into both permanent and temporary private rented accommodation outside of their areas, including into the Dartford Borough. As the hosting local authority pays the LHA, London boroughs are also in a position to pay landlords a significant amount more in incentives and LHA to encourage use of their own private sector leasing schemes. The pressures of London has a knock on effect where, (as explained in 5.2.3. and 5.2.4.), the Council is increasingly placing households into temporary accommodation outside of the borough due to the shortages created by placements into the area by London boroughs.

5.4. Temporary accommodation costs

5.4.1. Due to the increase in the demand for temporary accommodation, the amount spent on temporary accommodation is increasing, as highlighted in table 3 below. This shows that temporary accommodation costs were the highest in 2020-21 due to the efforts made to assist households in need as a result of the impact of the Covid-9 pandemic.

Table 3: Temporary accommodation costs

Year	Nightly paid	Dartford Private Leasing Scheme	Total temporary accommodation costs
2018-19	£1,337,150	£1,761,204	£3,098,354
2019-20	£1,363,616	£1,685,721	£3,049,337
2020-21	£1,576,421	£1,750,404	£3,325,825

6. STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

- 6.1. Despite the challenges placed on the homelessness service, the Council is committed to meeting its temporary accommodation duties at all times. Each strategic objective under this Strategy sets out a range of actions the Council will take to ensure that the provision of temporary accommodation is future proofed.

Strategic objective 1: Accommodation is procured at a fair price; costs are driven down whilst value for money is achieved

- 6.2. The Council is seeking to minimise its reliance on 'nightly paid' accommodation, whether this is with shared facilities or self-contained, which is usually spot purchased on the day to meet an urgent need. This is often a lower quality and higher cost option than longer-term accommodation, such as the Dartford Private Leasing Scheme, which provides a much more cost effective alternative for nightly paid accommodation.
- 6.3. The Council will aim to:
- Procure more properties under the Dartford Private Leasing Scheme and reduce the use of nightly paid accommodation to drive down costs, achieve value for money.

Strategic objective 2: The provision of accommodation is sufficient to manage demand and to meet homelessness duties

- 6.4. Demand for temporary accommodation is increasing yet conditions in the housing market can deter landlords from leasing their properties to homeless households. While the Dartford Private Leasing Scheme provides many benefits to private landlords, it is recognised that offering a financial incentive and package of on-going support and information, could encourage landlords to work with the Council in providing accommodation for homeless households.
- 6.5. The Council will aim to:
- Develop a private sector landlord incentive scheme to encourage more landlords to lease their properties under the Dartford Private Leasing Scheme.
 - Develop a policy on the landlord offer setting out what landlords can expect from working with the Council to provide accommodation for homeless households and what is expected from landlords in return.
 - Improve the promotion of the Dartford Private Leasing Scheme in order to procure new leased properties.
- 6.6. The Council will continue to work with central Government within the Rough Sleeper Initiative to end rough sleeping by 2025 and will maintain the support partnership with voluntary sector agencies to put in place a three year plan to

do so. The provision of resettlement support for all ex rough sleepers will contribute to tenancy sustainment and assist with prevention of homelessness and repeat homelessness.

The Council will aim to:

- Move the current reactive rough sleeper support offer to a homelessness prevention offer by developing options for rapid access into privately rented accommodation and supported options for those with vulnerabilities and support needs.

Strategic objective 3: Accommodation is suitable, compliant with health and safety specifications and in a decent condition
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- 6.7. Temporary accommodation must meet specific standards to ensure it is safe for occupants. A range of checks should be routinely carried out to satisfy the Council that accommodation is fit for purpose and is free of Category 1 hazards under the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS). The Council is currently in discussions with other Kent local authorities to develop a county-wide service level agreement for private landlords to enter into formal arrangements that will include confirming the condition of the property.

The Council will aim to:

- Formalise arrangements with temporary accommodation providers to routinely confirm the standard of properties through the development of a Kent-wide service level agreement

- 6.8. As well as the health and safety aspects of temporary accommodation, understanding the 'lived experiences' that homeless households themselves have in temporary accommodation can provide an important insight on the performance of both the Council and landlords in terms of the suitability of placements.

The Council will aim to:

- Develop mechanisms to collect service user feedback on their experience of living in temporary accommodation to inform any required improvements or changes to the services provided

7. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY

- 7.1. The Council is committed to welcoming and valuing diversity, promoting equality of opportunity and tackling unlawful discrimination in accordance with the Equality Act 2010. The Council, in delivering this Temporary Accommodation Strategy, will have regard to the Public Sector Equality Duty and ensures that no individual is discriminated against based on their sex, sexual orientation, marital status, pregnancy and maternity, gender reassignment, race, religion, belief, disability or age.

- 7.2. The Public Sector Equality Duty is a duty on the Council and that responsibility cannot be delegated to a contractor/service provider and is a continuing duty.
- 7.3. This Temporary Accommodation Strategy has been subject to a Customer Access Review to assess the impact it will have on equality. The review recommended inclusion of a commitment in the Strategy to develop service user feedback mechanisms to assist in monitoring the impact of the use of temporary accommodation on homeless households (as covered in 6.8.).

8. MONITORING THE STRATEGY

- 8.1. The Strategy will be monitored on a regular basis and updated accordingly.