

Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2019 – 2023

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Foreword

Hastings is a great place to live. Our vibrant, diverse and welcoming community attracts residents and visitors to enjoy all the town has to offer.

However, Hastings continues to face challenges. Almost 1 in 3 Hastings residents live in areas that are among the poorest 10% in England. Male life expectancy in Hastings is the tenth worst in England. Without good housing and homelessness services, we will not be able to address the problems which are behind these trends.

The community in Hastings is very aware of the difficulties the town faces in terms of homelessness, and particularly rough sleeping.

This is shown by the wide range of community organisations and charities working locally who provide support to the people who need it most. These include food banks, medical care and substance dependency support.

Councils cannot address homelessness alone. Our strategy will provide a framework to make sure we continue to develop and improve the services we provide with our partners.

Introduction

Increasing levels of homelessness affect not only individuals and families. It also has a negative impact on the wider

community and the town's image, business confidence and perceptions of community safety.

This strategy will look at how we are working to reduce homelessness and create an environment where people are able to lead independent and fulfilling lives.

Funding reductions to this council and our partners in both the statutory and community sectors can make it harder for people to get the support they need. We have been working in partnership with other service providers to secure grant funding to enhance our work with vulnerable groups, including rough sleepers. We will continue to do everything we can to make sure these changes help the most vulnerable in our community as much as possible.

Demand for homelessness services has increased a lot since our last strategy was published in 2016. Economic uncertainty will continue to cause an increase in demand for homelessness services in the years to come.

We will make sure that we review our services to get better outcomes for residents who need to use our housing solutions.

Our vision

We will not be able to prevent homelessness in all cases, but when someone is homeless we want to be able to find the right solution quickly.

We will:

- Strengthen partnerships at a strategic and operational level
- Co-ordinate work across voluntary and statutory sectors to avoid duplication and make best use of resources
- Learn from the experience of people using and delivering our services to make them better in the future
- Work differently with housing providers in the private and social sectors to make the best use of existing stock and increase supply of new housing

This is so that we are able to:

- Ensure best practice in homelessness prevention
- Address the impact of homelessness locally
- Reduce the barriers that people face when they need to use our homelessness services
- Enable people to access housing support in the quickest and most effective way possible

Summary of findings from the Homelessness Review

Before developing this strategy we carried out a comprehensive review of homelessness in our town. Among the issues raised in the review are:

Homelessness Presentations

The number of people presenting to the council as homeless has remained relatively stable over the past 3 years. People aged 35 or under account for over half of all presentations. In 2018/19, 18% of people presenting as homeless had a mental health support need. The most common reason for homelessness is eviction from the private rented sector.

Social housing

There are 5990 units of social housing in Hastings. The largest social landlord is Optivo who own approximately 4 times the number of homes owned by the next largest association, Orbit. Turnover of social housing is substantially lower than was once the case at around 0.92% of the total social housing stock.

There are currently 1777 households waiting for social housing in Hastings, and waiting times are very long. The average waiting time is 537 days. Waiting times for family accommodation are much higher; families searching for a 2

bedroom house can wait up to 3 years for a property, even with the highest priority banding.

Private rented sector

The private rented sector is comparatively large and accounts for 38% of all housing stock in Hastings. There are currently 13,342 units of private rented accommodation in the town. The size of this sector increased by 99% between 2001 and 2019, and in some wards of the town accounts for over half of the total housing stock. This growth looks set to continue, at least in the short term.

However, in the longer term new energy efficiency requirements for rented properties and changes to tax incentives for landlords may create volatility in this sector. Despite the growth in the sector, the market for private rented accommodation has become increasingly competitive and unaffordable for homeless households. Rents have increased faster in Hastings, compared to the rest of East Sussex and national trends. The quality of accommodation on offer can also vary considerably.

Emergency accommodation

Consequently, there has been a very significant increase in the number of people living in emergency accommodation. People are also spending longer in emergency accommodation before moving on to long term housing. This trend negatively affects the quality of life of households in

emergency accommodation and has a significant financial impact on the council. The council has plans to reduce its use of emergency accommodation, but these will take at least another year to fully implement.

There is also a lack of supported accommodation locally, which often means that individuals with multiple and complex needs are placed in mainstream emergency accommodation.

Local Housing Allowance

Local Housing Allowance has failed to keep pace with rising rents locally, and is now typically 40% lower than median rents in the private sector. As a result, there is a growing affordability gap for households, particularly those with larger families.

Funding reductions to the council and its partners

Funding reductions to the council and other statutory and community organisations, particularly social care, has contributed to the rising demand for homelessness services. For instance, people who would previously been able to access supported accommodation are now accessing emergency accommodation in the first instance. The council has been working in partnership to manage the impact of these reductions on vulnerable groups.

Short term funding from Central Government

The council is heavily reliant on national grant funding streams to enhance its homelessness services. Much of this funding is short-term which creates challenges developing a strategic approach to reducing homelessness.

Strategic fit

The Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy is one of three documents which make up our new Housing Strategy. We are developing similar strategies to increase the supply and quality of housing in our town.

The strategies for supply and quality of housing are expected to be adopted in spring 2020.

The Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy shows a number of local and national priorities:

National context:

The National Rough Sleeping Strategy 2018, which was published in August 2018. The strategy sets out the government's promise to halve rough sleeping by 2022 and end it completely by 2027.

The strategy shows the importance of partnerships between statutory and community sector partners.

The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017

The Homelessness Reduction Act came into force in April 2018, key measures in the act include:

- *Support for those who are 'threatened with homelessness'* can begin at 56 days before they may become homeless instead of 28 days as before
- *A new duty to prevent homelessness for all eligible applicants* threatened with homelessness, even if they are not in priority need
- *A new 'Duty to Refer'* – which applies to prisons, young offender institutions, probation services, Jobcentre Plus, social service authorities, emergency departments, urgent treatment centres and hospitals. Public services need to let local authorities know if they come into contact with someone they think may be homeless or at risk of becoming homeless as long as they have the persons consent

The Act has enabled us to review how homelessness prevention services are delivered in Hastings.

Local context:

The council's corporate plan includes a key plan of how we need to tackle homelessness and disadvantage. This means that we will continue our work to reduce homelessness in the town and develop a new homelessness strategy.

Partnership working

East Sussex Housing Options Officers Group (ESHOG) –

This group is made up of the local housing authorities, county council and accommodation providers.

This is a strategic group that reports to the East Sussex Chief Executives Group on the delivery of housing and homelessness services across the county.

ESHOG is chaired by Hastings Borough Council's Assistant Director for Housing and Built Environment.

Rough Sleeping Initiative Strategic Board (RSI)

This strategic board brings together senior level representatives of Sussex healthcare Trust and Sussex Partnership Trust, social care, substance misuse and housing professionals.

The board meets every six months and is chaired by the Assistant Director for Adult Social Care at East Sussex County Council.

The purpose of the board is to make sure that learning from the Rough Sleeping Initiative helps us to plan our future service delivery for vulnerable groups.

The strategic board also plays an important role in finding and securing different sources of funding. This means that we can

develop and improve the rough sleeping services that we provide.

Hastings Street Community Partnership

We work closely with statutory and voluntary sector partners. The group looks at ways we can address the issues the street community, including rough sleepers, face.

The meetings help partners to identify any gaps and duplications in services, to understand how we can improve the support that we provide.

Housing and Support Services (HASS)

This is a multi-agency meeting which includes both statutory and voluntary sector partners. This group is responsible for overseeing the delivery of the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy and action plan.

Governance and delivery of the strategy

The Housing and Support Services Group (HASS) will be responsible for developing an action plan. It will decide the key milestones and targets that we will meet in line with the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy.

This action plan will also show which organisation will be responsible for each task. The group will meet every 3 months to review performance against the action plan, to make sure that we are delivering the best possible services together.

The council's Cabinet, which is made up of the leader of the council and other councillors, will get an annual report on the 3 different sections of the Housing Strategy.

This will provide us with an opportunity to review progress and make sure that the priorities we have set ourselves are still suitable and achievable.

This approach is the same as the performance monitoring of the Rough Sleeping Strategy nationally.

Strategic priorities

A summary of our priorities is listed below. Each priority is explained in more detail later in the strategy.

	What will we be doing?	How will we know if it's working?
Priority 1 - Reduce rough sleeping	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Developing the approach started by the Rough Sleeping Initiative and Rapid Rehousing PathwayExpanding our holistic approach with health, mental health, social care and substance misuse partnersWorking with partners to increase the range of short and long term housing solutions available for rough sleepers, including Housing First accommodation.Working with the Hastings Street Community Partnership to co-ordinate support and enforcement work across the statutory and voluntary sectors	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Better rough sleeping prevention services, to reduce the number of new rough sleepersReduced number of people becoming entrenched rough sleepers (this means that they have been seen sleeping rough for 31 nights or more in a 3 month period)Increased number of temporary accommodation units for rough sleepers, with at least 2 units for vulnerable womenIncreased the number of Housing First units by 10 per year, and reduce waiting timesGood communication between enforcement and support servicesBetter co-ordination of statutory and community sector activities
Priority 2 – Minimise our use of emergency accommodation, by improving access to housing solutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Developing a strategy to increase the supply of affordable housing in both the social and private rented sectorsIncrease the number of council owned emergency accommodationExpand the private sector leasing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Increased number of successful homelessness preventions, reducing demand for emergency housing placementsFall in the average length of stay in emergency housing

	<p>element of the Social Lettings Agency</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expand the different types of homes for people with multiple and complex needs, including helping people to move-on from supported housing • Give financial support to homeless households to find new housing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduced number of people who are unable to sustain emergency housing • Improved move-on from properties leased through the Social Lettings Agency. This will be measured by the number of people living in leased properties for 6 months or more before finding long term housing.
Priority 3 – adapt our services to meet local needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on tenancy sustainment, whenever possible • Develop links between homelessness services and specialist employability support • Use trauma informed working practices across homelessness services • Look at our process for offering social housing • Work with statutory partners to raise awareness of homelessness prevention through the new duty to refer • Adapt our services to meet the needs of specific groups, for example young people at risk of homelessness • Engage people using and delivering our services to improve our work to reduce homelessness and rough sleeping 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase in the number of evictions from private landlords successfully prevented • Increase in the number of homeless households who get into training and employment (at least 156 through the Live, Work, Thrive) • Understanding of homelessness services amongst partners increases, so that people at risk of homelessness are referred to the council at an earlier stage • Trauma informed training given and becomes part of our working practices • Hastings Homemove Allocation Scheme reviewed and updated

Priority 1 - Reduce rough sleeping

Why is this a priority?

The number of people rough sleeping on a typical night in Hastings has increased by 85% over the past 3 years, from 26 people in 2016 to 48 in 2018.

The number of people rough sleeping can vary considerably throughout the year, with some rough sleepers also spending time sofa-surfing or moving between other towns.

People who sleep rough regularly over a long period of time are more likely to die young than the general population. In 2019The average age at death was 45 years for male rough sleepers and 43 years for female rough sleepers in 2018; in the general population of England and Wales, the mean age at death was 76 years for men and 81 years for women (ONS 2018).

It was estimated that 35% of people who die while sleeping rough or living in homeless accommodation died due to alcohol or drugs use, compared to 2% in the general population.

Homelessness is often seen as the cause of rough sleeping.

However, many rough sleepers have a range of other support needs including:

- Substance dependency
- Mental health

- Physical health
- Care needs
- Dealing with trauma

It is essential that these needs are also addressed, in order to help individuals access new accommodation and minimise the risk of them returning to rough sleeping in the future.

Although increases in rough sleeping reflect broader national trends, the need for support services is particularly important in Hastings compared to the rest of the county.

In August 2018, the government published a rough sleeping strategy which sets out a commitment to halve rough sleeping by 2022 and end it by 2027.

Projects to reduce rough sleeping

Hastings Borough Council has led successful work across the county to access additional grant funding. This money has been used to deliver better services for rough sleepers.

Recent projects include:

Sussex Rough Sleeping Prevention Project (March 2017 to March 2019)

Hastings Borough Council led a partnership project with Eastbourne, Lewes, Rother and Wealden housing authorities. The project was able to deliver intensive homelessness support to people at high risk of rough sleeping.

The project worked with 282 people who were at risk of rough sleeping and 94% of those supported were successfully prevented from rough sleeping.

The project team were able to work with Job Centres, food banks and charities to refer people at risk of rough sleeping.

Project officers also had a smaller caseload, to deliver quick responses and an intensive level of support.

This project was funded by the Department for Communities and Local Government.

Hastings and Eastbourne Rough Sleeping Initiative (RSI) (June 2018 – March 2020)

Hastings and Eastbourne Councils worked together on a project for the most entrenched rough sleepers in both towns.

The aim of the project was to

- Improve access to housing, health, mental health, social care and substance dependency services
- Create new temporary and long term housing solutions for rough sleepers

The project had provided housing for 44 former rough sleepers in the first 9 months, and is continuing to deliver intensive wrap around support for people who have been rough sleeping for long periods of time.

This project is funded by the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government, until 31 March 2020.

Rapid Rehousing Pathway (March 2019 – March 2020)

We are leading a successful bid in partnership with the five East Sussex housing authorities.

This project supports rough sleepers with low / medium level needs and people who are at high risk of rough sleeping.

The project is designed to help people access new housing. We have based it on a supported lettings model and the team provide ongoing support to individuals once they have moved into their new home. This will help them to keep their tenancies and to reduce the risk of them returning to rough sleeping in the future.

The project has achieved seven successful relief interventions for rough sleepers, and a further five preventions since it began in April 2019.

Grant funding

Services for rough sleepers are heavily reliant on grant funding from central government. While the additional resources are welcomed, the short-term nature of the grants makes it hard to take a strategic approach to reducing rough

sleeping. It also increases the risk of duplication between projects and services.

Another challenge for all local housing authorities is that projects are required to be up and running within very short timescales. This can make it difficult to recruit staff and contractors to deliver the services.

This short-term funding can make it difficult for people with multiple complex needs to engage with us. This is because it can take a long time for them to trust services before they can be effective.

The Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government intend to announce the next round of funding as part of their rough sleeping strategy in November 2019.

In the longer term, we will explore a co-funded model with our partners. This approach has worked well in other areas. However, given the ongoing funding reductions to many partners and the increasing demand for homelessness services, it is essential that we continue to maximise the grant funding we secure.

What can we do about it?

Outreach

The council has commissioned a rough sleeper outreach service through its Community Partnership Fund until March

2021. The service is delivered and co-funded by the Seaview Project.

Outreach is vital in making sure rough sleepers are linked with the right support as soon as possible. Outreach data also gives us a clearer picture of the numbers of people who are rough sleeping at any time and the support they need.

We also use outreach information to monitor the impact of our existing projects and plan new services.

Developing prevention and relief services

In the future, we want to combine the services provided by the Rapid Rehousing Pathway and Rough Sleeping Initiative into one single service.

This will make it easier for rough sleepers to access the projects when they need them. Also, the project team can respond to changes in the needs for each person as and when it happens.

This means the client will benefit from dealing with one team only, from start to finish. This will be more effective, reduce the client's anxiety and provide a more consistent service.

The new service will also carry out prevention work with people who are at high risk of rough sleeping.

Multi-disciplinary working

Rough sleepers often struggle to use services because of their complex needs. This means that they are unable to get the support they need when they need it most.

Because of these challenges faced by the majority of rough sleepers the Rough Sleeping Initiative (RSI), provides a team of specialists who work together to support clients. The team is made up of people from services including:

- NHS East Sussex Healthcare Trust
- NHS Sussex Partnership Foundation Trust
- social care
- substance misuse
- housing

The team will also work with other services in the community, at locations that are easy for people who are rough sleeping to access.

The team currently works with the most entrenched rough sleepers, but in future we need to increase their capacity so they can also work with all rough sleepers. There is also scope to develop closer links with criminal justice partners.

The team must also have capacity to enable them to increase and reduce the level of support they provide during the recovery phase after people leave the streets, depending on each individual's needs.

We are also working closely with health partners to develop a local response to the NHS long term plan.

Temporary housing

Through the Rough Sleeping Initiative we have also created an assessment centre. This provides temporary housing with support for rough sleepers.

Most of the temporary housing provided by us is in shared units. Through the work of this project, we have found that there is a gap in the provision of temporary housing for vulnerable women.

We have learnt that we need to provide women, who are rough sleeping, with self-contained supported accommodation. This makes the transition to moving off the streets more successful. This will mean that their chance to break the cycle of rough sleeping is much higher.

We will continue to work with delivery partners to find funding opportunities to increase the supply of temporary housing for all rough sleepers.

We will also look at our community-based support, so we could make short-term placements in mainstream temporary housing.

Consideration has been given to using non-permanent structures for temporary accommodation, for example converted shipping containers. So far we have not been able to identify suitable sites to place these units. Concerns have

also been raised that without appropriate support, these units could become a focus for anti-social behaviour.

Housing First

Housing First is a long-term housing solution for rough sleepers who require a high level of ongoing support.

Through the Rough Sleeping Initiative, we have created a team of housing first officers who provide tenancy sustainment support to former rough sleepers. So far, we have created 5 new Housing First tenancies in Hastings.

We are working with Optivo Housing Association who can provide housing for the Housing First units. But the low turnover of social housing delays properties becoming available.

We will therefore look to copy this approach with other providers to increase the supply of new units.

We intend to create 10 new Housing First tenancies each year.

Dealing with encampments

There has been a recent increase in the number of caravans and tents around the town, which is aligned to the rise in

rough sleeping. The council has a duty to provide support to homeless households, but also has a responsibility to carry out enforcement activity to remove unauthorised encampments. This is done for the benefit of both those whose long-term health is at risk from rough sleeping and for the wider interests of local residents.

Street Community

Not everyone who is a member of the broader street community is also a rough sleeper. While there is some overlap between these issues, rough sleepers are generally more likely to be the victim of crime and anti-social behaviour. We are keen to apply examples of national best practice to engage the street community.

Current legislation for dealing with anti-social behaviour is far from effective, and we would urge the government to review the legislative and guidance, and how this is applied. We understand it is planning to do this in early 2020. The council intends to contribute to the review.

Through the Hastings Street Community Partnership, we will support increased communication and understanding between teams with support and enforcement responsibilities.

Charity and community sector

There are many charity and community organisations in Hastings who give support to rough sleepers.

Some charity organisations have been commissioned to deliver outreach, street engagement and tenancy sustainment services through council-led projects. Many work independently. Hastings Street Community Partnership will continue to co-ordinate this work developing links between organisations. The partnership will continue their work to develop a positive giving campaign locally.

Priority 2 – Minimise our use of emergency housing, by improving access to housing solutions

Why is this a priority?

The number of people living in emergency accommodation has risen by 192% over the past 3 years, from 51 at the end of 2016/17 to 149 at the end of 2018/19.

Crucially, the average length of time people spend living in emergency accommodation has also increased and currently stands at 161.1 days.

The profile of people living in emergency accommodation has also changed. Around half of our current placements are families (2 bed need plus).

This trend negatively affects the quality of life of individuals and families living in emergency accommodation and shows the challenge for homeless households in accessing long term accommodation.

The main reasons for the increase in our use of emergency housing:

- Lack of affordable accommodation in the private rented sector. There is an increasing affordability gap between LHA and average rents in the private sector, meaning accommodation is inaccessible for benefit-dependant households.

- The market for private rented accommodation has become competitive, landlords are often reluctant to accept tenants with a poor history of tenancy sustainment.
- Limited supply and low turnover of social housing – turnover of social housing is currently around 0.92% of the total stock. Average waiting times on the housing register are 537 days, although this can be significantly higher for family sized accommodation.
- Clients with increasingly complex needs are accessing mainstream homelessness services. As a result of funding reductions to partner services, particularly social care, individuals with increasingly complex needs are accessing mainstream homelessness services and emergency accommodation.
- Around 15% of people living in emergency accommodation have a diagnosed mental health condition, but reported levels of depression and anxiety are much higher. These individuals often have low levels of independent living skills and struggle to find new accommodation. Given the lack of supported accommodation locally, many are placed in general needs emergency accommodation.
- The Homelessness Reduction Act 2018 introduced new duties for local authorities to provide emergency accommodation.
- A lack of supported accommodation. The number of supported accommodation units in Hastings was reduced by 12 beds in the last round of funding reductions to adult social care services. The units have since been brought

into use through the Rough Sleeping Initiative. This leaves 150 units, delivered by 6 providers. Demand for these services is now far greater than the supply of accommodation.

Increasing use of emergency accommodation has a significant financial impact on the council. In 2018/19 the net cost of emergency accommodation to the council was £699,870. In 2019/20, the cost is expected to be over £1,000,000. These costs divert resources away from other services, including our homelessness prevention activities.

Increasing the supply of housing

The key to reducing our use of emergency accommodation is to increase the supply of affordable accommodation in both the social and private sectors. This includes making the best use of existing housing stock and bringing forward our plans for additional housing, including those developed on council-owned land. The steps we will be taking to achieve this will be set out in a separate strategy.

In the meantime, we need to make sure we can provide appropriate emergency accommodation as cost effectively as possible.

Council-owned emergency accommodation

In 2018, the council began acquiring its own properties for use as emergency accommodation. We focused on purchasing family-sized units as these are:

- the most difficult to source on the rental market

- achieve the biggest cost savings on our emergency accommodation spend
- and are easiest for us to manage in-house.

Using the first round of funding we have acquired 17 units of accommodation, avoiding costs of £200,000 per year and leaving us better placed to provide suitable accommodation. However, this is not enough to meet our needs.

We will now carry out a second round of investment and acquire a further 15 units of accommodation by March 2021.

In the future, if these properties are no longer required for emergency accommodation, we could use them to generate additional rental income for the council or sell them to recover our costs.

Expanding the Social Lettings Agency

A Social Lettings Agency was set up in 2015 to improve access to the private rented sector. The Social Lettings Agency leases properties from private landlords to provide temporary accommodation for homeless households. Leasing properties is a cheaper alternative to traditional emergency accommodation.

The private rented sector has continued to grow, and it is more important than ever that homeless households are able to access affordable accommodation. We currently lease 20 properties through the Social Lettings Agency, and this will be

increased to 56 units by the end of March 2021. This increase reflects the rise in demand for emergency accommodation. We will prioritise leasing family sized accommodation and offset the additional costs of running the scheme on savings from our emergency accommodation spend.

We will continue to work with people living in leased properties through the Social Lettings Agency to help them find a long term home.

Nationally, Social Lettings Agencies are viewed as part of positive solutions for areas with high demand for emergency accommodation (such as Hastings). We will work with partners, including the Department for Work and Pensions, to lobby for increases to Local Housing Allowance, which in turn would improve the viability of these schemes.

We can also link landlords leasing their properties to the Social Lettings Agency to funding opportunities to improve their properties.

An interim review of the Social Lettings Agency will be carried out in spring 2021 to ensure it still meets our needs.

Improve emergency housing options for single, complex households

We've seen an increase in the number of individuals presenting to us with complex needs, such as mental health issues, substance dependency and anti-social behaviour.

These individuals are often made homeless following an eviction by a family member or friend, and have low levels of tenancy sustainment and independent living skills.

Because of the shortage of supported accommodation in the town, many are placed in mainstream emergency accommodation, which they struggle to sustain.

We will ensure that the need for new accommodation for this cohort is clearly understood in our local plan, which will be reviewed during the life of this strategy. This will enable us to support providers who are best placed to deliver these services to expand in Hastings.

When placements are made in mainstream emergency accommodation, it is vital that the right tenancy sustainment support is in place from the start. This includes making use the community-based support services which are commissioned by East Sussex County Council.

We want to develop stronger links between homelessness support and local NHS services, Social Care, Probation and substance dependency services.

A new contract for community-based support services will be commissioned in 2020, we're supporting the development of a new specification through a project group of partners.

Improve move-on options from supported accommodation

We have a limited supply of supported housing in Hastings. People often struggle to move on to long-term housing when they are ready to leave their supported housing. This means the spaces are not free for other people who require higher levels of support.

We will work with supported accommodation providers to improve move-on options for this group.

In 2020, we will use a portion of our Flexible Homelessness Support Grant Allocation to begin a new rent-guarantor scheme. This will be for people leaving supported accommodation who are ready to move into the private rented sector.

Using the funding allocated to the pilot, we plan to support around 25 people per year.

Our own tenancy support services, and community based support, will be used to help people leaving supported accommodation. This support will ensure that they are able to manage the transition from housing-based support to living independently. It should also reduce the risk of them becoming homeless in the future.

Financial support to secure long term housing

Financial barriers are often a big issue for homeless households. The council will continue to provide the following support to help overcome these:

- Interest free loans for rent in advance and deposits
- Interest free rent guarantor scheme for people leaving supported and emergency accommodation

The level of funding we are able to provide will depend on if Flexible Homelessness Support Grant (or any replacement funding) is continued beyond March 2020.

Priority 3 – Adapt our services to meet local needs

Why is this a priority?

The priorities set out in this strategy respond to local needs for homelessness services, many of these are a reflection of the housing crisis nationally.

The high levels of risk associated with homelessness services, particularly as a result of ongoing economic uncertainty, rising demand and short-term funding mean we will need to review our priorities and working practices more regularly than we have in the past.

The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 gives local authorities new duties to prevent homelessness – we are continuing to explore ways we can work with partners to intervene as early as possible when people are at risk.

What can we do about it?

Homelessness prevention - Tenancy sustainment

Social and private rented housing has become more and more competitive. Helping people keep their existing housing whenever possible is a key way we can prevent homelessness.

Many people presenting to us as homeless have low levels of independent living skills. We have been piloting a project through the Ministry for Housing Communities and Local Government's Accessing the Private Rented Sector Project to provide additional tenancy sustainment support.

This approach has been successful in preventing a number of new placements in emergency accommodation. Funding for the next round of the project will be announced in November 2019.

On the assumption that Flexible Homelessness Support Grant will continue beyond March 2020 the council will set aside some its allocation to provide interest free tenancy sustainment loans. A small pilot of this approach in 2018/19 enabled us to prevent 15 evictions. The loans have been used to help tenants clear rent arrears and prevent evictions, as well as bridging short term affordability gaps, while they search for alternative accommodation.

We now want to expand this approach to increase our number of homelessness preventions.

It is important that we also work with households who are already living in emergency accommodation, to improve their tenancy sustainment skills which will help them to access new accommodation and minimise the risk of them becoming homeless again in the future.

The council works with local partners to commission a range of specialist housing and financial advice services, which support our homelessness prevention activities.

Links to employment and training

Local Housing Allowance has failed to keep pace with rising rents in the private sector. Households who depend on benefits are at a higher risk of homelessness and will struggle to find new housing.

We have partnered with Rother District Council, Education Futures Trust, Fellowship of St Nicholas and Sussex Community Development Association to deliver a project as part of the European funded Connecting Hastings and Rother Together (CHART) programme – Live, Work, Thrive. The project will provide specialist employability and tenancy sustainment training for homeless households, particularly those living in emergency accommodation, to improve their chances of finding new accommodation.

Our delivery partners have experience engaging with vulnerable groups, and we will also expand our links with landlords and local employers through the project. Live, Work, Thrive will run from January 2020 until December 2021.

Learning from the project will increase understanding of the links between employment and homelessness and improve

the chances of homeless people to find and keep accommodation.

Trauma informed approach

“There is a vicious circle between trauma and homelessness. Trauma drives homelessness and homelessness can increase traumatic exposure. Trauma drives social difficulties and mental health problems which can cause homelessness.” (Feantsa, 2017)

Many people coming to us as homeless have experienced some form of trauma earlier in their life. Not only can trauma contribute towards the causes of homelessness, it also affects people's ability to cope with their situation. This includes how and when they work with services.

Someone who has experienced trauma is at greater risk of being stuck in a cycle of repeated homelessness. This cycle may not be broken unless we recognise and address the links with trauma and homelessness.

Research by the South London and Maudsley Hospital has shown that certain working practices within organisations can reinforce trauma. These include, having to continually retell your story, feeling as if you are being treated as a number and not having an opportunity to give feedback.

In response, a PIE practise was developed. This provides

more training for teams working with people who have experienced trauma about mental health and wellbeing.

We will expand our training for the teams working in homelessness services. This will increase our awareness and understanding of trauma.

We will also review our working practices, both internally and with our partners to make sure they do not reinforce trauma for our clients in any way.

Duty to Refer

The Duty to Refer was introduced in October 2018 as part of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. It introduced a requirement for some public bodies (such as job centres, prisons and hospitals) to refer people who they think are at risk of homelessness to the council for advice.

The council led work to implement the new duty last year. This includes developing joint protocols between the local housing authorities and each of the agencies involved.

We worked with the five local housing authorities in East Sussex. We also gave training to partners on how to identify someone who may be at risk of homelessness. This way, staff were more able to take the right course of action to help that person.

The referral process is working well, but we want to do more to improve links with homelessness services for people leaving prison and hospital. Through the East Sussex Housing Options Officers Group, we will find out if there is a need for an outreach role, linked to the Duty to Refer, to meet this need. If there is enough demand for the post, we will apply for grant funding.

Co-location of services

During the delivery of the last strategy, we ran projects which included homelessness services that were based with our partners. A good example of this was making sure that community-based support officers were able to work in our local job centres as part of the Sussex Rough Sleeping Prevention Project.

As homeless people often need help from many different services, being able to work in the same locations helps to create smoother referral routes between projects and services. It also improves understanding between organisations as staff learn about each other's roles and responsibilities.

Specialist employability coaches, provided by Education Futures Trust, Fellowship of St Nicholas and Sussex Community Development Association, will be co-located part-time within the housing options service as part of the Live, Work, Thrive project. We're also keen to expand co-location to

include community based support and tenancy sustainment services.

Access to social housing

Supply of social housing is so limited that it is often not a realistic option for many homeless households.

However, for households who are unable to find accommodation in the private sector (for example, because they require a property with specific adaptations or are a very large household), we need to make sure they are able to access the social sector as quickly as possible.

How we prioritise people for social housing is set out in the Hastings Homemove Allocation Scheme.

We currently have a choice based lettings scheme, this means that people on the waiting list for social housing bid for suitable homes when they become available. We need to review our allocation scheme, to make sure those most in need are able to get social housing. This may mean a shift from a purely choice based scheme to more direct lets in order to minimise the time people spend in temporary housing.

In 2020, we will be piloting a new approach with Optivo (our largest social landlord) to provide temporary accommodation. The pilot will provide around 10 properties per year. Where

these placements prove successful, these placements can be converted to a conventional tenancy. The approach we are piloting has proved successful in other areas with similar need to Hastings.

Young people

The local housing market is continuing to change at a fast pace. We need to work with young people, local schools and youth organisations, as early as possible, to help them understand what type of housing is available.

There continues to be a significant challenge in terms of teenage pregnancy in the town, and it is important that we are able link young people to advice and broader support around sexual health through our homelessness services.

The county council currently commissions 11 units of supported accommodation for young parents, and requirements for this service will need to be reviewed before the contract is re-tendered.

The five district and borough authorities have been working in partnership with East Sussex County Council's Children's Services team to improve access to homelessness services for young people. We have appointed a Young Person's Housing & Accommodation Manager, who works across the local authorities to improve homelessness prevention.

We're also working with children's services to look at opportunities to co-locate homelessness services within community hubs for young people around the county in the future.

We need to improve access to the services we have available online for young people, including how we use social media.

Domestic Abuse

We will continue working with partners, including specialist accommodation providers, to understand how we can encourage earlier reporting of domestic abuse and swift achievable interventions to prevent it. The council remains committed to working with partners to eradicate domestic abuse in all its forms. One example of this is the White Ribbon Campaign end harassment, abuse and violence against women.

The county council also commissions a 10 bedded refuge locally, and works collaboratively with us to manage the unit.

Learning from experience

We need to make sure that the experiences of people using and delivering our projects is shared at a strategic level to ensure these activities are delivered in a joined up way and that the approaches we are trialling are used to design core services in the future.

Responding to uncertainty

There are significant risks associated with homelessness services, particularly if demand for emergency accommodation continues to rise. Given the continued economic uncertainty, ongoing dialogue and a fluid approach to setting priorities is essential.

The new schemes we will be implementing are designed to be flexible, so we can adapt them to meet changes in demand for our services and the resources available to us.