

# Sunderland rough sleeping and homelessness prevention strategy

**2019-2021**





# CONTENTS

	Page
Foreword	3
Introduction	5
Strategic context	6
Homelessness in Sunderland	12
The reasons for homelessness in Sunderland	14
Begging in Sunderland	15
Homelessness provision	15
Our current approach to prevention, intervention and recovery	17
Supported temporary accommodation (UTA)	18
Supporting our most vulnerable groups	19
Rough sleepers	20
Summary	27
Key strategic themes and priorities	31
Strategic priority 1 (prevention)	32
Strategic priority 2 (intervention)	35
Strategic priority 3 (recovery)	39
Strategic priority 4 (partnerships)	43



# FOREWORD

This strategy sets out a framework to prevent and eliminate homelessness from our city. Homelessness can adversely impact in many areas including health, the economy, education, crime, families, neighbourhoods and policing. It affects us all.

Homelessness is everyone's responsibility. If everyone plays their part, we can make real progress in not just tackling homelessness but improving lives for our people, our communities and our society. Homelessness must be 'brought in from the cold' and the margins of society to be embraced by everyone.

This strategy reflects changing times in the homelessness sector. The Homelessness Reduction Act introduced in April 2018, places on local authorities and the public sector new duties and gives a firm focus on prevention and advice; aiming to stop homelessness at its source

With reductions in funding and in the shadow of decommissioned services it is important that we do things differently and reach out widely to work with all our partners to achieve shared goals of homelessness prevention and intervention.

This strategy has been developed with our partners, who have shown a real commitment to eliminate homelessness and to improve the lives of the most vulnerable people in our city.

The unwavering commitment and enthusiasm by all the partners working in the city, gives me hope and optimism in the delivery of programmes, projects, services and support that will help prevent and eliminate homelessness and offer people a brighter and inclusive future in Sunderland.

## **Cllr Rebecca Atkinson**

Portfolio Holder for Housing and Regeneration



# INTRODUCTION

This strategy and action plan is our framework on how we will tackle homelessness in Sunderland.

There is a strong emphasis on the early intervention and prevention of homelessness. Preventing homelessness is more cost effective but more importantly delivers far better outcomes for the individuals concerned.

Homelessness is a complex area and we have worked hard to gain a better understanding of the triggers of homelessness in the city. There are many reasons why people end up presenting as homeless; including relationship breakdown or the end of a tenancy. These triggers are often coupled with other issues such as mental health needs or substance misuses (or both) which result in a 'tip' into homelessness. Therefore, it is important that we view the prevention of homelessness as not just a housing issue but that we work with partners to address the underlying issues in a proactive way, including Social Care and Public Health.

On average 2,000 households approach Sunderland City Council each year for assistance relating to homelessness and housing advice. Since the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act the numbers of people being accepted under the new duties of relief and prevention are increasing.

The increase in demand for services is challenging with the back drop of reduced funding support. It is therefore even more important that we challenge the way we work to make the most effective use of resources to tackle the wide-ranging homelessness issues presented.

We know that we cannot achieve this alone. The people that contact our Housing Options Team are often known to health, the criminal justice system, social services and the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP). Quite often people are known to other local authorities outside of Sunderland. It is essential that we work with partners locally and deliver a holistic approach regionally and nationally so that we can get the best outcomes for every person and family.

Together we need to tackle the root causes of homelessness by creating opportunities for people to break the cycle of chaos that they are in. With a wealth of high-quality service providers in the city, each one of them has a role to play in achieving the prevention of homelessness, intervention to those who need our support and a range of sustainable housing solutions to meet all needs.

The Homelessness Strategy for Sunderland does not stand alone and most of the priorities and actions within it operate alongside existing strategies, plans and policies. The national and local context for this strategy is set out below.

## Strategy development process

The following agencies are committed to ensuring that the Strategy is delivered and are members of the Homelessness Strategy Working Group:

- Sunderland City Council
- Back on the Map
- Bernicia
- Changing Lives
- Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)
- Gentoo
- Homeless Link

- Home Group
- NACRO
- Northumbria Police Service
- Northumbria Probation Service
- Oasis Aquila
- Hostels, Tatham Lodge and Salvation Army
- Ashley Foundation
- Sunderland Clinical Commissioning Group
- Together for Children (TFC)
- YMCA
- Salvation Army

## Strategic context

### National

#### Homelessness Reduction Act 2017

Since April 2018 the Homelessness Reduction Act<sup>1</sup> placed a duty on local authorities to intervene at an earlier stage to prevent homelessness and to take reasonable steps to help those who become homeless to secure accommodation.

The Act introduced a change to the point at which a person is classed as being threatened with homelessness from 28 days before a person is likely to become homeless to 56 days.

It requires local housing authorities to provide new homelessness services to all people in their area and also expands the categories of people who they have to help to find accommodation and give advice to.

A new duty is placed on local housing authorities to assess all eligible applicants' cases and agree a personalised housing plan.

There is also a new duty on public bodies to notify councils when they are concerned that someone may be homeless or at risk of homelessness.

#### Rough Sleeping Programme and Rough Sleeper Strategy

The Government has embarked on an ambitious programme, working with local areas and across Government, to fundamentally reform the response to homelessness. The aim is to put prevention at the heart of this approach to reduce the number of people who face a homelessness crisis in the first place.

The programme, which was launched in 2016, included a £10 million rough sleeping grant fund, to help new rough sleepers or people at imminent risk of sleeping rough, get the rapid support they need. The aim was to reduce the flow of new rough sleepers to the street through more targeted prevention activity. It is aimed at those at imminent risk of sleeping rough, to ensure they get the help they need before spending a single night on the streets and to recover and move-on from their homelessness.

In Sunderland, funding was provided by DCLG which has enabled the provision of:

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/homelessness-code-of-guidance-for-local-authorities/overview-of-the-homelessness-legislation>



- Extra advice and support to rough sleepers
- An outreach worker to support those who may find themselves sleeping rough, ensuring that they have the accommodation and support they need
- Support to people begging on the street
- Additional Housing First placement
- Emergency crash pads provided by the Salvation Army
- The employment of a Tenancy Support Worker to prevent evictions from the Private Rented sector which is the biggest cause of homelessness in Sunderland

The Rough Sleeping Strategy was published in August 2018 and is based around three core pillars:

- Prevention
- Intervention and;
- Recovery.

The Strategy recognises that homelessness is everybody's issue and that communities, businesses and society need to come together to eliminate rough sleeping. We use these pillars as the thread that runs through the Strategy for Sunderland and the approach is embedded within our action plan.

## **Local**

### **Housing Strategy for Sunderland 2017-2030. Growth, choice, quality**

The council's City Plan has clear vision and objectives for the future of the city. A key outcome within the City Plan is its aim of more and better housing.

Sunderland's Housing Strategy sets out a clear direction for how it will work with partners, residents and communities to offer more choice in housing by developing new homes and improving existing neighbourhoods. This will help communities be sustainable in the longer term and contribute to the city's prosperity and wellbeing. It strongly commits to supporting our most vulnerable residents to gain access and maintain good quality housing which meets their needs.

The strategy is divided into our three greatest housing priorities:

- maximising housing growth and increasing the choice of housing
- making the best use of existing homes and improving our neighbourhoods
- supporting vulnerable people to access and maintain housing.

This Rough Sleeping and Homelessness Prevention Strategy sits under the umbrella of supporting vulnerable people, which recognises that everyone has the right to access a good quality home to allow them to lead a fulfilling and independent life.

We believe that communities must respond to the needs of all its members, including those who are vulnerable, in order to be strong, inclusive and sustainable. We recognise that vulnerability is not necessarily permanent and therefore provision for a range of appropriate general needs and specialist supported accommodation with support services is needed to ensure people lead healthy and happy lives.

### **Sunderland's housing market**

Sunderland lies in the heart of the North East of England and boasts a magnificent coastline along with expansive green space and a vibrant city. Sunderland has over 277,000 residents and is well placed for jobs and amenities. It's a city that is a great place to live and work.

BRE modelling data shows that across Sunderland there are a total of 130,013 dwellings. Sunderland's housing market is characterised by:

- a lower than national level of owner occupation (47% compared with 62.6%)
- higher private renting (26% compared with 20.3%)
- higher levels of social renting (27% compared with 17.1%)
- approximately 23% of households are claiming Housing Benefit, compared with a UK average of 15.36%
- Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates are significantly lower than neighbouring city, Newcastle. Our shared accommodation rate is almost 20% lower and our four-bedroom rate is around 8% lower, meaning that the amount of funding coming from central Government as Housing Benefit subsidy is comparatively lower than our neighbours.

The housing sector is currently experiencing a period of significant change because of the financial downturn, financial viability of new developments and changes in government policy, in particular, welfare reform has resulted in residents and landlords having less money to spend on housing.

A key impact of this has been the increased need for affordable housing for families who can no longer afford to buy a house at market value and at the same time fewer affordable homes are being built. These changes have particularly affected our vulnerable families who are turning more and more to the private rented sector to find homes. Sunderland, like other authorities, has witnessed a growth in the private rented sector, with private renting above the national average but still below the levels of socially rented housing.

Many homeless households who would have in the past secured a tenancy with councils or housing associations have no choice but to accept a tenancy in the private rented sector. Whilst the sector plays a key role in alleviating homelessness this is not without concern; high up-front costs of deposits and rent in advance are a barrier and some properties are in poor condition with tenancy agreements that do not offer long-term security. The Crisis Homeless Monitor 2018 also shows that the end of a private rented tenancy is now the leading reason for homelessness in Britain.

The Sunderland Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) 2017 and Addendum 2018 identifies an imbalance of 542 affordable housing units (both for affordable rent and affordable home ownership) per annum. The council's current requirement for affordable housing is for 10% to be provided on all residential developments of 15 units or more. This council's emerging Core Strategy and Development Plan will identify sites to meet this need and ensure that targets are ambitious enough to achieve the change required and the proportion of affordable housing units on sites of 10 or more will be increasing to 15%.

For many people presenting as homeless, particularly single people under the age of 35 years, even affordable housing is not a financially viable option. Single room rent and local housing allowance means that welfare benefits will not cover living costs in their totality. Like many other areas Sunderland is witnessing a growth in smaller households, in particular single households. This is reflected in information we hold about households who are in housing need which shows that single adults under the age of 65 are the largest group of households in housing need, however it must also be noted that the proportion of the population aged 65 years and over is expected to increase from 18.6% in 2015 to 24.7% in 2033.

Our population is also changing. Over recent decades Sunderland has experienced a trend of net outmigration to surrounding neighbouring authorities and other parts of the UK. This has been particularly pronounced within the younger age cohorts of the working population, however more recently there is evidence demonstrating that this trend is changing.

There are around 2,000 households on the Council's Housing Register waiting for the offer of an affordable rented home. The current scheme is under review, but it is likely that many people on the register may never be offered a home in accommodation of their choice. Equally a number of properties are going through the nominations process but have not been able to be let to applicants on the register. Property

location will be a determining factor in the desirability of a property, but this is also likely to be a reflection of the imbalance in terms of the type of housing being offered in the city.

Almost 1,000 applicants have cited a bungalow as their choice of accommodation. The SHMA indicates that older people with support needs and single homeless people with support needs were the two largest client groups requiring accommodation in the social rented sector. The new Allocation Scheme will reflect changes in welfare reform and homelessness legislation, with a focus on prevention, and will also ensure that the correct infrastructure is in place to deliver and provide more choice.

The SHMA identified that 14,949 or 12% of households within the city were in housing need. The largest category of need was a mismatch of housing need to the dwelling that the household were living in which includes issues like overcrowding or difficulties in maintaining their home. The second largest, which consisted of 2,770 households, was homeless households or insecure tenure including notices having been served or the household being in rent arrears.

### Sunderland's health needs

The increasingly ageing population will have an impact on health and care services. In addition, Sunderland experiences higher levels of deprivation than the national average.

Unhealthy lifestyles remain a key cause for increased rates of premature death. Many people in Sunderland continue to follow unhealthy lifestyle behaviours when compared to England. This is directly linked to a range of social, economic and environmental factors.

A key challenge for the Sunderland health economy is the need to manage the high and increasing levels of long term conditions in the population, including increasing proportions of people with multiple long term conditions.

Preventing premature deaths due to cancer, cardiovascular disease and respiratory disease remains a priority for health partners across the city. This requires a targeted approach to reducing the gap in life expectancy. Current strategic plans include a strong focus on identifying and managing long term conditions, including through self-care.

Large increases are predicted in the elderly, and particularly the very elderly, populations. This has significant implications for health care over the next five, ten and twenty years. Even if the general levels of health in these age groups continue to improve, the shape and structure of health services and housing offer will need to change to meet the needs of this growing population.

Sunderland's population makes relatively high use of hospitals, with standardised rates of elective admissions that are 40% higher than the England average and standardised rates of emergency admissions that are 18% higher than the England average.

### Issues for the homeless population

Comparison of our local Homelessness Health Needs Audit undertaken in 2016 with the results of the Homeless Link Health Needs Audit undertaken in 2015 shows the following key measures:

Measure	Local Audit	Homeless Link Audit
% who are male	68%	71%
% who are white	83%	89%
% reporting a disability	51%	36%
% who smoke	71%	79%
% alcohol problems	18%	27%
% drug problems	21%	41%
% physical health problems	52%	78%
% mental health issue	69%	86%
% registered with GP	91%	92%
% registered with a dentist	57%	58%
% admitted to hospital	33%	26%
% attended A&E	28%	35%

In summary, we know that in Sunderland, the homeless population:

- Is younger, more ethnically diverse, and has a higher proportion of males than the general population
- Has higher levels of key unhealthy behaviours (such as smoking, alcohol misuse and drug misuse) than the general population
- Has significantly higher number of disabled people compared to the national average
- Has high levels of both mental and physical health conditions, developing long term conditions earlier than the general population
- Has the following top five physical health needs: joint and muscular problems, dental health, eye health, fainting and blackouts, respiratory and circulation problems
- Has the following top five mental ill health conditions: depression, anxiety/phobia, PTSD, schizophrenia, personality disorder
- Access to GP services is between 1.5-2.5 times more and access to hospital services is around four times more than for the general population.

A summary of the high level health challenges for Sunderland is therefore as follows:

- Responding to changes to the population structure including fewer children and younger working age adults, more elderly people and increasing ethnic diversity
- Tackling poverty through increasing employment and educational attainment
- Addressing teenage pregnancy, smoking during pregnancy, breastfeeding, child obesity and the mental ill health of young people
- Tackling the big four lifestyle risk factors – smoking, excessive alcohol use, poor diet and low levels of physical activity – including multiple unhealthy behaviours
- Preventing early deaths from cancer, cardiovascular disease and respiratory disease
- Tackling poor mental health through prevention and building individual and community resilience,

including programmes targeted at children and young people

- Managing the likely increase in the level of long term conditions, including increasing proportions of people with multiple long term conditions
- Delivering better integrated care for individuals and reducing the over-reliance on hospital services, through promotion and support for self-care
- Recognising and addressing the needs of people with poorer mental health and wellbeing.

All of these challenges are relevant to the homeless population, whose needs are even greater than those of the general population. People who become homeless have some of the highest and costliest health needs in the local community, but those needs are often overlooked when services are planned and commissioned.

Homelessness is a complex issue that crosses departmental boundaries and is everyone's responsibility including health, education, social care, housing, criminal justice systems and welfare services.

### Household income and poverty

Significant numbers of Sunderland residents receive one or more benefits/tax credits (the average would equate to at least one claim per person). In 2015 the population of Sunderland was 277,200, of which 177,500 were working age. The total number of individual claims to all DWP/HMRC benefits/tax credits was 216,000<sup>2</sup> (or 281,772 if the 65,572 Housing Benefit/Council Tax Support claims are also included).

The ongoing impacts of welfare reform in Sunderland therefore are potentially likely to exacerbate and be further exacerbated by a range of other factors given a number of structural issues linked to overall health/disability indicators and relatively lower wages and employment levels than regional and national comparators. These are reflected in the Indices of Multiple Deprivation.

- Sunderland is ranked as the 33rd most deprived council in England, with 23% of its population in the top 10% of the most deprived areas. (IMD 2019)
- Indebtedness: A 2016 Money Advice Service report detailed that Sunderland has the highest level of Indebtedness in the northern region at 20.6% (with the national average as 16.1%). The report also details that people are more likely to be indebted if they are younger; living in rented accommodation, a single parent or more exposed to welfare system changes. The report also estimates that around 83% of over indebted people do not seek advice
- The Financial Inclusion Commission reported that nearly 2 million UK adults do not have bank accounts and that financially excluded people pay a 'poverty premium'<sup>3</sup> of £1,300 each year. 13 million people do not have enough savings to support themselves for a month if they experience a 25% cut in income, and 15 million people (31%) report one or more signs of financial distress
- 44.2% of households receive an income of less than £300 each week, 25.7% receive between £300 and £500 each week and 29.9% receive at least £500 each week.

---

<sup>2</sup> 216,000 is the number of claims for a range of benefit made, not the number of people claiming

<sup>3</sup> The poverty premium is the idea that the poor pay more for essential goods and services. In the UK, the premium costs the average low income household £490 a year.

## Homelessness in Sunderland

Sunderland data since April 2018 to March 2019

**2,108** clients applied for Housing Advice

**1,641** Homeless Reduction Act Applications



248 households threatened with homelessness **prevented**



523 households had their homelessness **relieved**



28 Assessed as **not homeless**



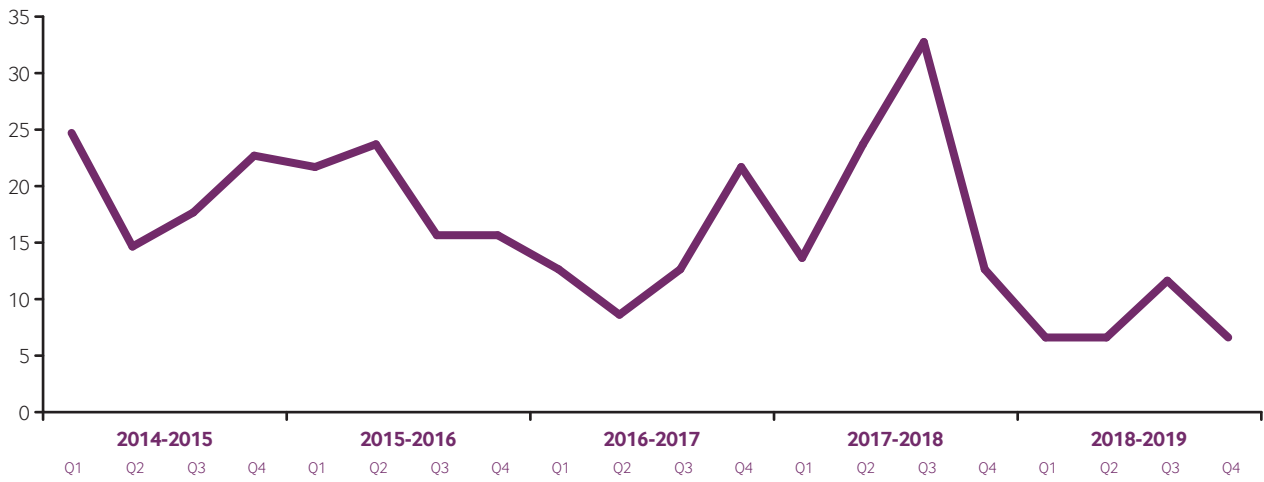
27 **Homeless Acceptances**

### As well as...

9 applications withdrawn prior to assessment

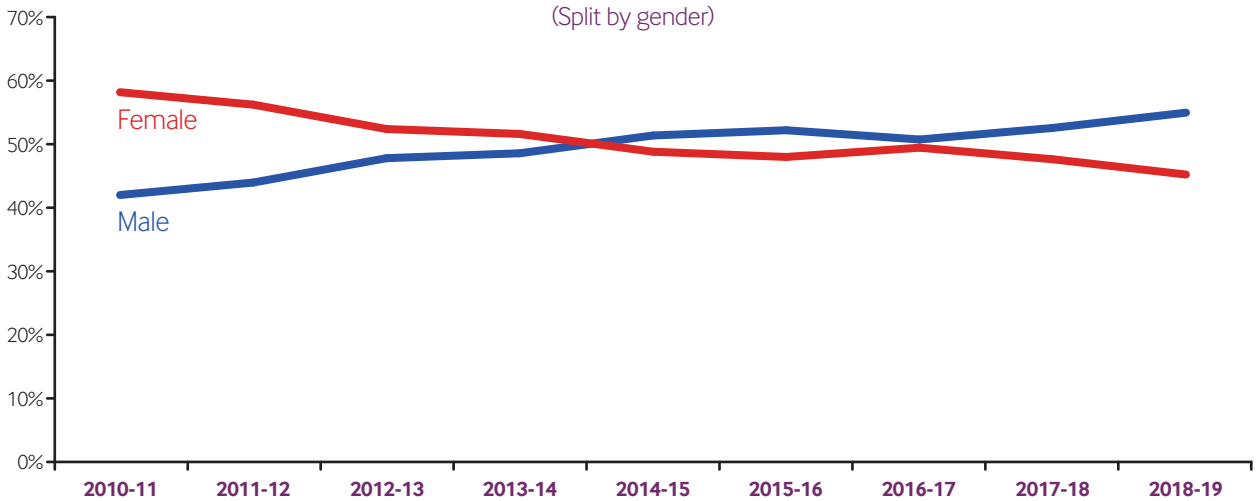
165 households placed in temporary accommodation

### Eligible, unintentionally homeless and in priority need



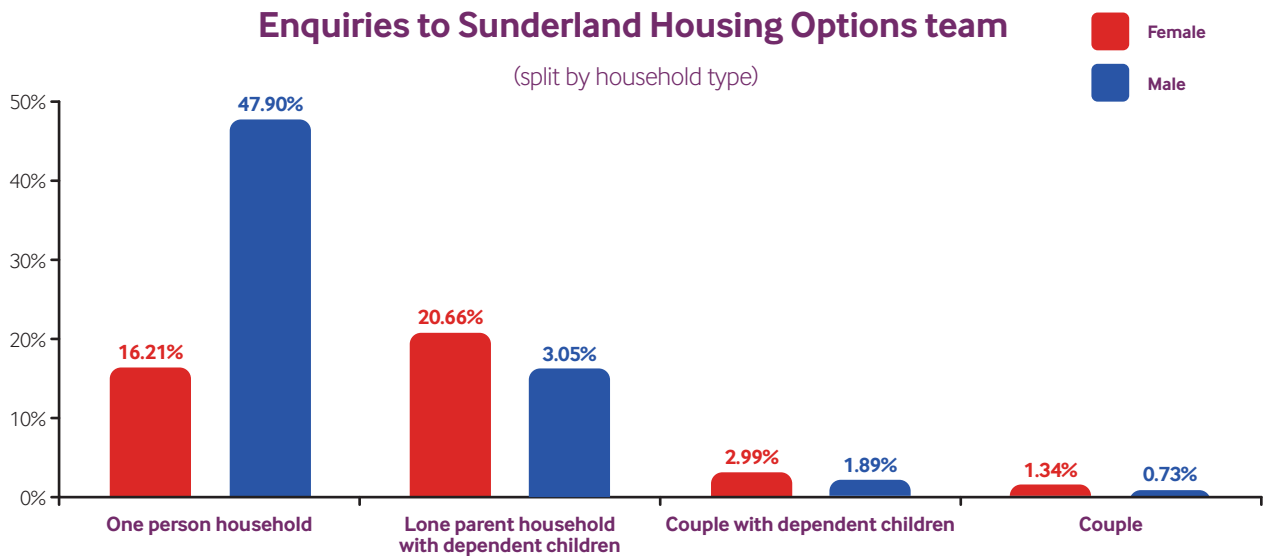
### Enquiries to Sunderland Housing Options Team

(Split by gender)



## Enquiries to Sunderland Housing Options team

(split by household type)

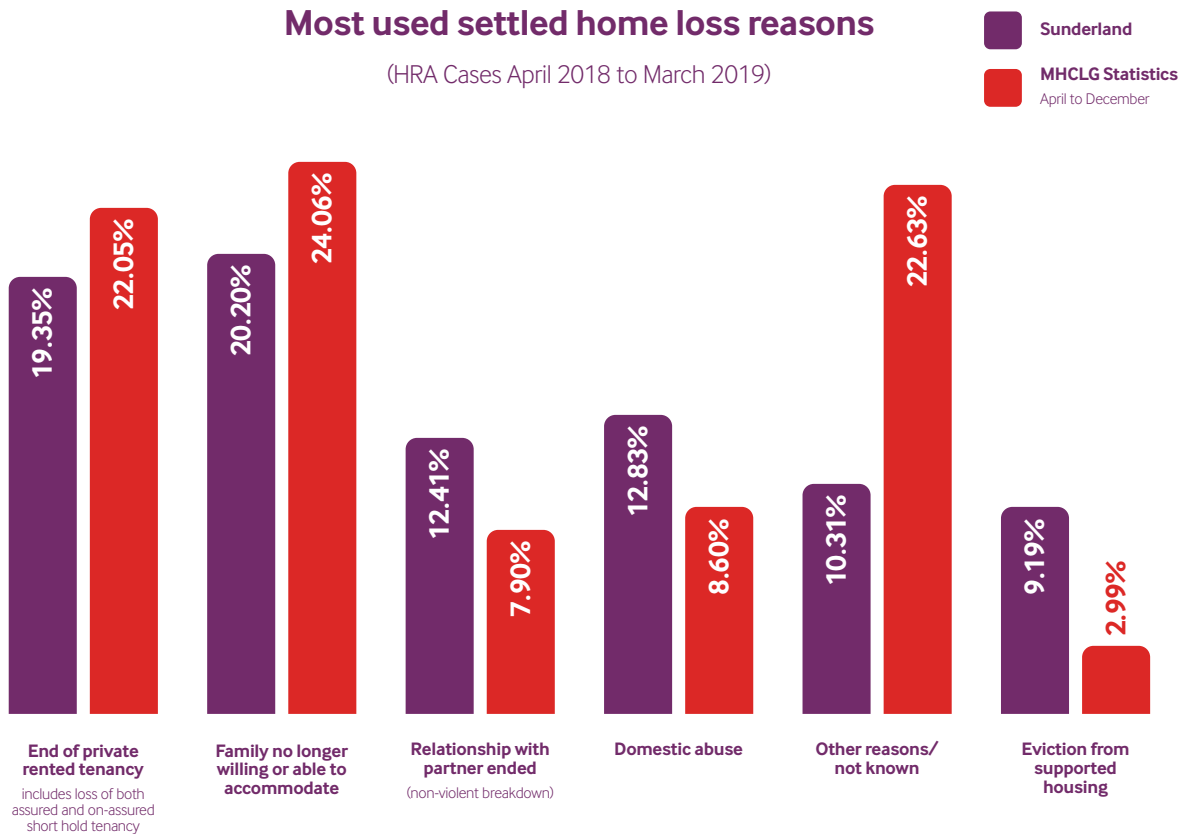


## The reasons for homelessness in Sunderland

Typically homeless people are thought of as those people who are sleeping rough. From a legislative perspective however local authorities have a duty to assess and provide assistance to households who are threatened with homelessness within 56 days. Homelessness can affect anyone at any time for many reasons.

## Most used settled home loss reasons

(HRA Cases April 2018 to March 2019)





It is clear that there is not a one size fits all approach and we need to look at a range of solutions, with a range of partners to meet a range of needs. Lack of housing is rarely the main reason that people present to the Housing Options Team but where it is the main reason it is usually quite simple to deal with. Whilst the main reasons cited for homelessness in the city might be loss of tenancy or relationship breakdown, the majority of individuals who present would describe themselves as having needs including mental ill health needs (sometimes diagnosed, sometimes not), physical ill health, offending history, being at risk of domestic abuse or having substance dependencies. The combination of these factors, are the root cause of their homelessness.

People can arrive at the point of homelessness after a long chain of life events where individual circumstances come into play with wider forces such as poverty, unemployment and disadvantages and often by the point of presentation they have reached crisis point. The wide number of factors that have a complex interplay which each other and have resulted in an individual becoming homeless, need to be reflected in our solutions. The strategic priorities and action plan set out within the second part of this strategy will attempt to address some of the gaps and issues that have been identified.

## Begging in Sunderland

Begging is a recent phenomenon in Sunderland. Not all beggars are homeless but public perception assumes they are. There are also perceptions that there are groups of professional beggars who are controlled and given patches in rotation. Partners have raised concerns about anti-social behaviour and the impact that begging will have on business, tourism and feelings of safety in the city centre.

As part of their Rough Sleeper Service in Sunderland, Changing Lives have been monitoring the increased level of begging within the city centre. There are several reasons for the work:

- to identify the reasons for street begging
- to identify if there is a significant degree of homelessness among the individuals begging, and;
- to engage the individuals to see if a change in their circumstances can be supported

A survey carried out in May 2018 of individuals begging indicated that most beggars were 'housed' and just under 25% were street homeless. Of those housed, all, except for one, were living in unsecured temporary accommodation. 3 of the 22 individuals who were engaged with were from outside the local area and were either in receipt of a dispersal order from their local authority or had been placed in temporary accommodation in Sunderland by their originating authority.

## Homelessness provision

Changes in legislation and national policy have created real challenges for the city. We have had to think more innovatively about how we deliver quality housing services with fewer resources for vulnerable households and homeless residents.

Since the demise of the Supporting People Grant alongside the continued austerity measures imposed by the Government, this has severely impacted on both bed based and floating support type services in the city as well as low level preventative services.

Changes in day care services and community groups also has an impact on people in contact with services at an early point. The unprecedented cuts and cost pressures over the last nine years gave rise to a decision in 2016 to decommission some housing related support services. At the time it was felt that services could be delivered and funded in a different way and that the impact would not be too severe for service users. In many respects some of the legacy services that were in place have been forced to review their offer and as a result have transformed their approach to achieve positive outcomes.

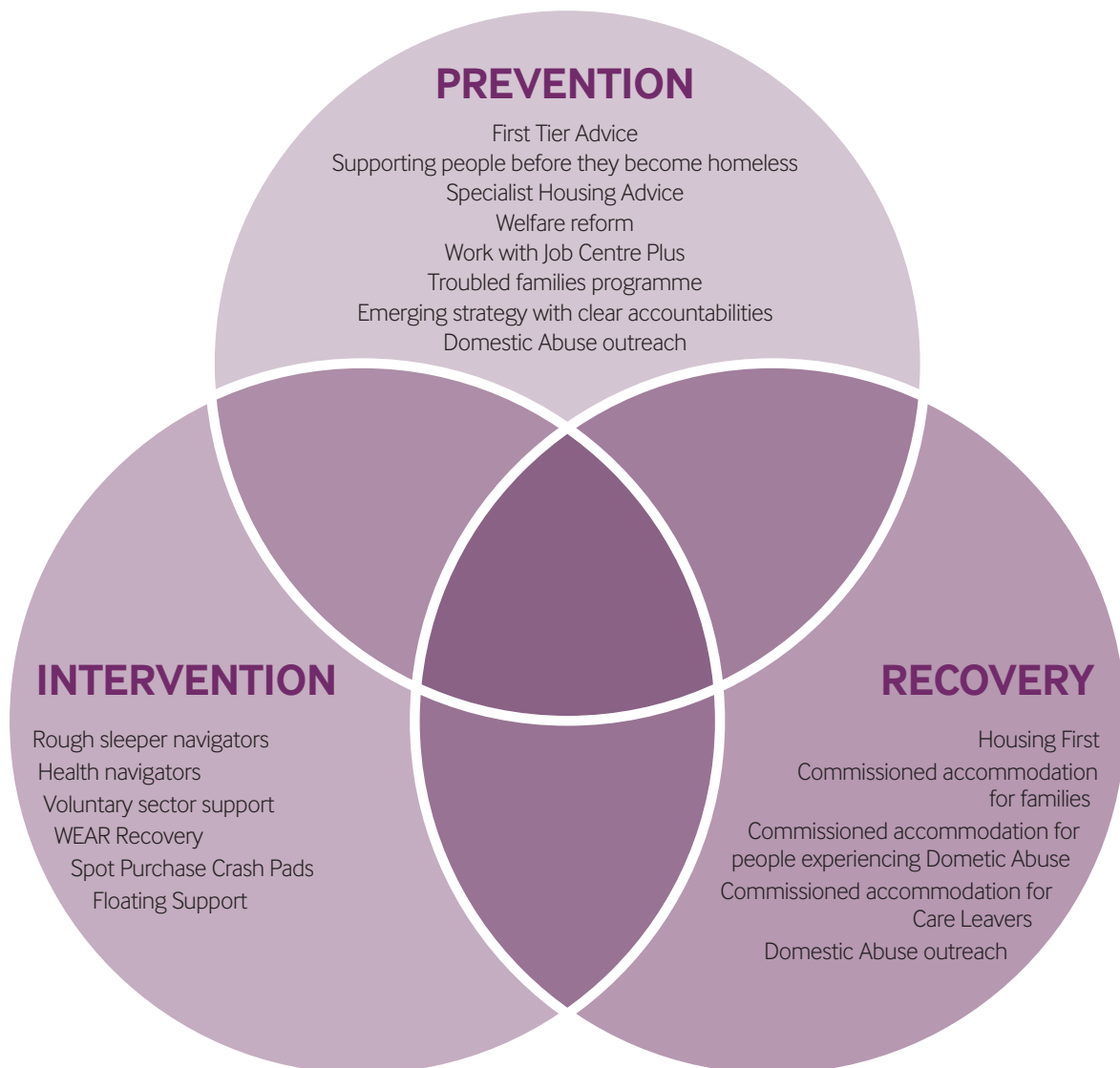
We have now had the opportunity to review the impact of this approach and recognise that we need to rebuild services, with a focus on creating wider housing opportunities for move on accommodation, in the context of additional finance not being available to do this.

Current commissioned accommodation for adults:

- 14 units for families with complex needs
- Wearside Women in Need: 10 units
- Floating support within Salvation Army together with 2 emergency bed spaces
- Housing First: 24 individuals supported
- Commissioned accommodation for young people
- 29 bed spaces for looked after children
- Non-commissioned accommodation
- 68 bed spaces in unsecure temporary accommodation (private Houses in Multiple Occupation or hostels)
- 92 bed spaces in temporary accommodation managed by Registered Providers
- 75 bed spaces for young people with YMCA and Centrepoint
- 79 direct access to leased accommodation with NACRO

# OUR CURRENT APPROACH TO PREVENTION, INTERVENTION AND RECOVERY

Our challenge is to develop a strategy that builds on the foundations we already have in place to address the ambitious targets that are set out within the Government's Rough Sleepers Strategy across the themes of Prevention, Intervention and Recovery. The table below shows the current services operating in the city.



We have mapped our prevention services – those services that tackle issues that can lead to homelessness by providing timely support for those at risk. We are strong in our approach to supporting people who may be adversely affected by welfare reform and have mechanisms in place to work with complex families as well as specialist support for those experiencing domestic abuse, however demand still far outstrips supply. We want to put prevention at the centre of service delivery and stopping people from becoming homeless in the first place. We identify that there are gaps in terms of working more closely with the private rented sector, mediating to prevent homelessness and for people with complex needs who are 'going around' the system after eviction from supported accommodation.

We acknowledge that services designed to intervene for those who are already sleeping rough have been reduced, resulting in an over reliance on unsupported temporary accommodation in the city. The strategic priorities section of this strategy will address the support that we need to put into place to meet individual circumstances quickly by working with partners to develop alternative forms of temporary accommodation.

An integral part of our strategy is that in the longer term, those sleeping rough will be rapidly housed and offered comprehensive support to ensure their specific needs are addressed so that they can move into suitable permanent accommodation at the earliest opportunity. We are working with a range of partners to ensure that our approach to Recovery supports people to find a new home and rebuild their lives.

## Unsupported temporary accommodation (UTA)

There are several hostels within the city, particularly in the Sunnyside area and surrounding locality that are providing UTA to almost 156 single homeless people at any one time, the reality is that many individuals end up staying in the accommodation for long periods of time.

The profile of clients living within UTA consists mainly of single homeless people, of which around 81% are male and 19% female. Their needs are becoming more varied and complex and there is concern that they require more personalised services than current provision allows for. In these UTAs individuals receive minimal levels of support even though many of them have multiple and complex needs and are at risk of rough sleeping, exploitation and exacerbation of existing health conditions.

The concentration of UTA in the Sunnyside area attracts low income and vulnerable households, leading to high levels of crime, anti-social behaviour, fragmented communities and high levels of transience and homelessness. The abundance of this kind of accommodation in Sunderland is likely to be masking a hidden rough sleeping problem, as individuals with the most entrenched lifestyles, who are often excluded from mainstream accommodation, form the majority of people who live there.

Over the last few years real positive inroads have been made with:

- the council acquiring one UTA
- a Hostel Co-Ordinator who worked with hostel owners to improve standards, minimise risk of exploitation through raising awareness of safeguarding, drug dependency, mental ill health and developing a better understanding of the needs of individuals who live there
- Assertive in-reach carried out by Changing Lives as part of their Housing Response Service, provides welfare support to tenants in the hostels, identifying unmet health needs and providing trauma informed care and social engagement activities.

More recently Hostel Managers have received training to support public health outcomes around the provision of Naloxone (heroin overdose antidote) within their premises and have taken part in Suicide Prevention training facilitated by Washington Mind.

Oasis Aquila has been delivering day provision for homeless people or people who are in vulnerable housing since May 2018. The brief intervention service helps to meet the practical needs of individuals through the provision of showers and washing machines as well as engaging with other services to help deal with the route cause issues as part of an outcome-based approach. This is being developed into a 'hub' with housing advice and other services now being offered.

During the period April 2018 to March 2019 the Housing Options Team made 83 placements in some form of temporary accommodation. 35 of these were in hostels including the Salvation Army, Poplar House, Barclay Lodge and the YMCA and 23 were in Bed and Breakfast. The remainder were placed in refuges or other nightly paid accommodation.

Housing Benefit data indicates that during the period between June and September 2018, 288 people lived in the following hostel accommodation: Salvation Army, Poplar House, Barclay Lodge, Abbey Lodge and Tatham Lodge. Over the course of the 22-week period, most tenants were in the property for most of those weeks, with some being there for all 22 weeks and out of 288 individuals, only 18 changed accommodation once during their stay. We do know that the number of people staying in the accommodation during this time will be higher than the 288 due to the proportion of people who finance their own stay or are funded through other sources. The remainder of people living within this accommodation will be self-referrals, presented from out of area or referred from another agency. It is estimated that 14% of people living in the hostels originate from outside of Sunderland.

## Supporting our most vulnerable groups

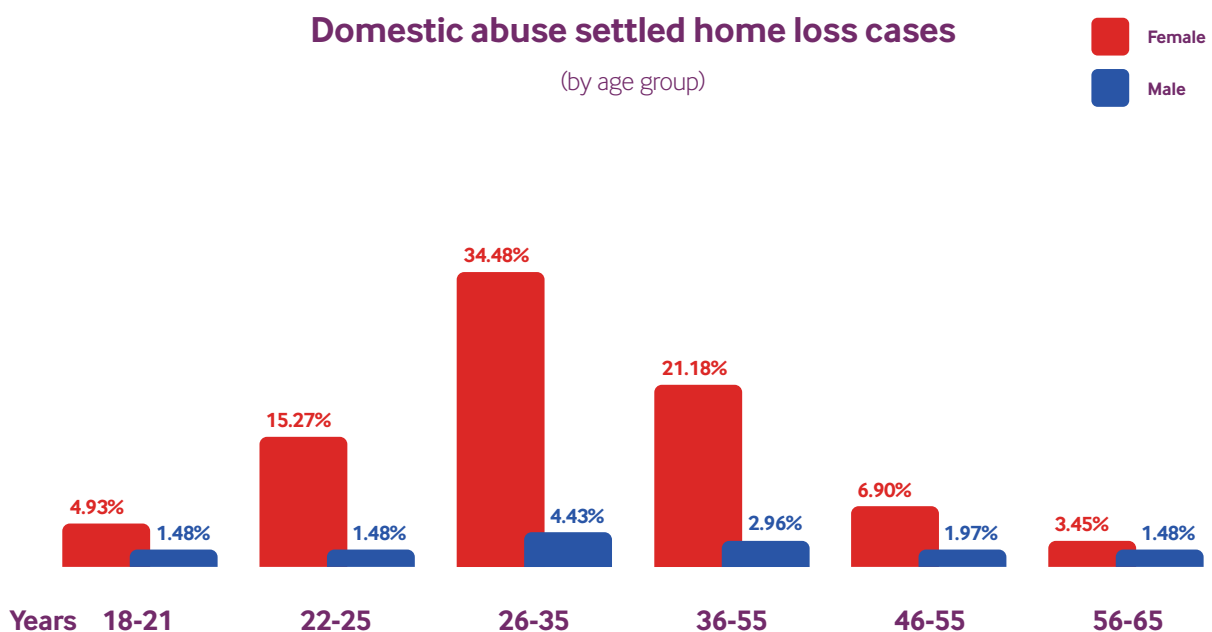
### Survivors of domestic abuse and other forms of violence

In Sunderland in 2017-18, there were 7,127 incidents of domestic abuse reported to the Police. Given that domestic abuse is known to be under-reported (by around 50%), there are likely to be closer to 14,300 incidents per year in Sunderland.

The Crime Survey for England and Wales (2015-16) reported that the estimated number of people who have experienced any domestic abuse (partner or family non-physical abuse, threats, force, sexual assault or stalking) since the age of 16 was 20%. Based on an adult population aged 16-59 years in Sunderland of around 160,000 it is estimated that approximately 32,000 people within this age group in the city may have been, or are, currently affected by domestic abuse.

The 7,127 incidents in 2017-18 had 4,400 people attached to them and 578 were assessed as being at high risk of serious harm or homicide. There were also almost 3,000 incidents with children involved who are living with domestic abuse.

Between April 2018 and March 2019 there were 203 incidents reported, there have been 85 cases started by Sunderland Housing Options Team which cited Domestic Abuse as the Settled Home Loss Reason with over 75% presenting as already homeless.



Domestic abuse has some of the highest levels of repeat victimisation of any crime at around 38% (where it

is reported) but research has shown that a victim will have been assaulted on average 35 times before they seek help from the police.

The national policy framework is wider than domestic abuse, and is around tackling violence against women and girls (VAWG). It is important to note that this policy framework does not exclude violence against men and boys: it simply has a stronger focus on women and girls due to the root causes being gender inequality and disproportionate levels of severity and frequency of abuse. VAWG includes:

- Domestic abuse
- Stalking and harassment
- 'So-called' Honour Based Abuse and Forced Marriage
- Female Genital Mutilation
- Sexual exploitation
- Some types of Modern Slavery such as trafficking people into prostitution of others or domestic servitude
- Prostitution/sex work
- Sexual violence and abuse.

Many people experiencing domestic abuse may have a range of complex needs including: drug and alcohol dependency, mental ill health, learning and physical disabilities, alongside symptoms of trauma from the abuse they have experienced. They may be victims of other forms of violence and abuse, such as sexual violence, stalking and harassment, forced marriage etc.

Some of the current challenges in Sunderland include:

- the volume of referrals to specialist domestic abuse provision and capacity issues both within refuge accommodation and outreach provision;
- the accommodation and support needs for some groups of domestic abuse victims have traditionally not always been well met, for example issues specific to Black and Ethnic Minority women; employed women ineligible for housing benefit and for whom dispersed options are a more affordable choice than refuge; women with teenage sons who cannot access refuge accommodation; families with pets; older women and LGBT men and women; and
- a shortage of appropriate and secure dispersed and move-on accommodation for victims of domestic abuse with complex needs with specialist outreach and re-settlement support. Refuges are often unable to accommodate people with complex and chaotic needs.

## Rough sleepers

The current Government has made the addressing of rough sleeping a priority and has committed to ending it for good by 2027. People living on the streets are some of the most disadvantaged people in society – at risk of severe illness, violence and early death. Rough sleepers have an average life expectancy of 47 years for men and 43 years for women, compared with the national average of 79 years for men and 83 years for women.

In Sunderland the level of rough sleeping is low compared to other cities. The most recent City rough sleepers estimate, which took place in Autumn 2018, indicates that there were five people sleeping rough in Sunderland.

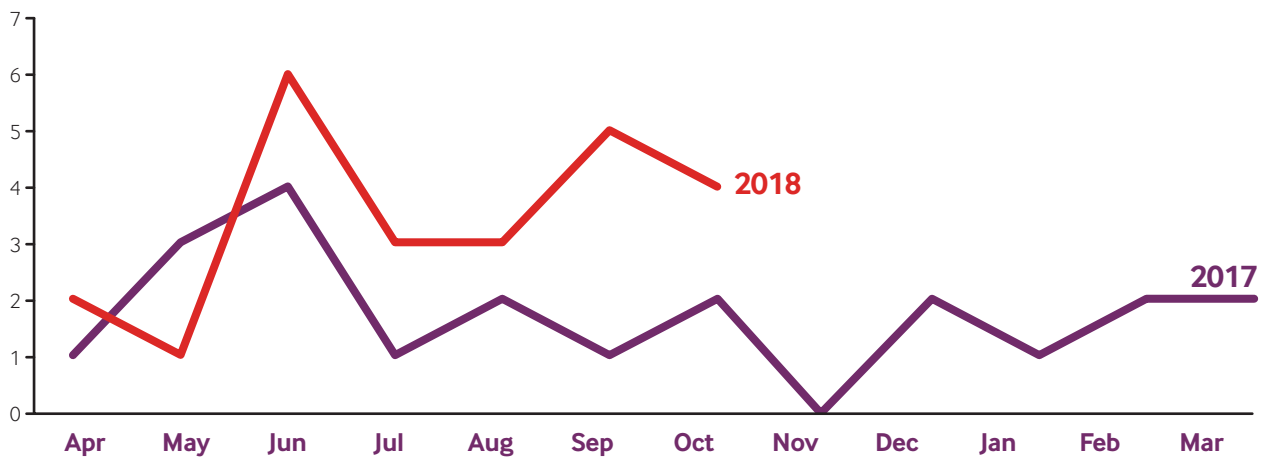
This figure represents an increase from the count in Autumn 2017 which was zero and 2015 and 2016 when there were 4 rough sleepers counted. Rough sleeping counts and estimates are single night snapshots of the number of people sleeping rough in local authority areas. In the same year there were

thought to be 51 rough sleepers in the North East region. The majority of these were in Durham, Newcastle and Gateshead.

Between April 2018 and March 2019, there were 17 cases where rough sleeping was cited as the 'accommodation' at time of application to the Housing Options Team. Many of these rough sleepers are male but research from York University indicates that women sleeping rough may not report to homelessness services and may therefore be missing from data on rough sleeping. This figure is evenly balanced with information gathered by the Changing Lives Homeless Response Service and is likely to represent a more accurate picture of the number of rough sleepers in the city.

The two lines represent the figures for those individuals who claimed to have spent at least one night sleeping rough in Sunderland per month for 2017 and 2018. It is believed that reasons for the rise in 2018 includes exclusion from hostels, reluctance to register with the Housing Option Team and the Housing Options Team having discharged their duty under the Homeless Reduction Act 2018.

**Individuals who claimed to have spent at least one night sleeping rough in Sunderland per month**



It must be recognised that homelessness is about much more than housing. Homeless people often have complex underlying problems that can be worsened by living on the streets.

Sunderland has a large population of complex individuals living within unsupported temporary accommodation. Many of these individuals are excluded from mainstream housing because of anti-social behaviour, a history of criminal offences, or rent arrears. Coupled with this, many have a chaotic lifestyle that is characterised by substance misuse and would make sustaining a tenancy difficult unless appropriate levels of support were provided. If this accommodation, or a suitable alternative, did not exist it is likely that the numbers of rough sleepers in Sunderland would be higher.

### Individuals with multiple complex needs

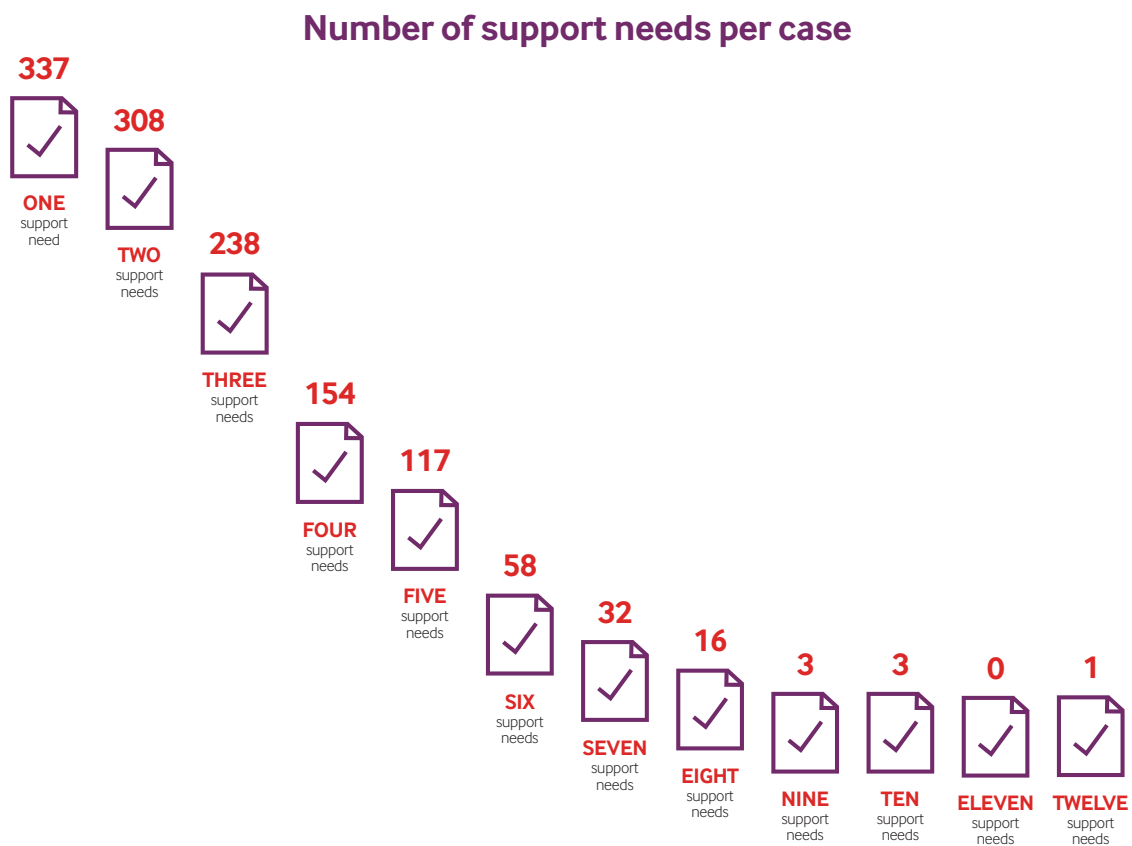
Support for people with dual diagnosis or mental ill health and drug or alcohol addiction is extremely complex to access. This is coupled with the fact that quite often the individuals who require the services disengage themselves.

A large proportion of individuals who are rough sleeping or are vulnerably housed often have unmet physical and psychological health needs. This client group is extremely costly to the NHS and the criminal justice system due to the fact that individuals often present to services when they are in crisis and their unmet needs are at their highest. Projects such as Housing First have taken place in the city, working with individuals with the most entrenched lifestyles, and have demonstrated the positive outcomes that can be achieved by taking a needs-led, psychologically informed approach to trauma. Individuals receiving the

services have demonstrated improved access and appropriate use of health services and much reduced interaction with the criminal justice system. Whilst the case studies are remarkable, there are large gaps in terms of the number of people requiring services. A challenge is to become better equipped to recognise and meet the needs of this group.

Sunderland has committed to the Making Every Adult Matter (MEAM) approach to supporting people with multiple needs. The MEAM approach provides the opportunity to bring together key stakeholders across all sectors, to focus on fresh thinking towards identifying new approaches to tackling multiple and complex needs in Sunderland.

The graphic below shows the number of people presenting to the Housing Options Team who have one or more support need. By far the most common support need is a history of mental ill health. This factor needs to be taken into account during the design of any future services.



### Asylum seekers and refugees

As part of the process of assessing asylum seekers applications, asylum seekers are dispersed around the country and temporarily housed whilst the Home Office decides on the asylum application and whether a person can stay in the country. A dispersal policy was introduced by the Home Office in 2000 so that asylum seekers could be accommodated in areas where there is a greater supply of affordable housing. 95 local authorities volunteered, including Sunderland. An advisory cluster limit of one asylum seeker for every 200 of the settled population was agreed.

Within the 12 North East authorities, Sunderland receives the sixth highest number of asylum seekers in the region, behind Newcastle, Stockton, Middlesbrough and Gateshead. In Sunderland the numbers represent 0.14% of the population.



From September 2019, Mears Group is contracted by the Home Office who will manage the services and the properties in Sunderland. At the end of March 2019, there were 441 bed spaces predominantly placed in four wards in the city, located near the city centre and services, under the new contract bed spaces are being procured across the City as long as the properties are suitable. If asylum seekers are granted leave to remain in the country once their application has been assessed, they have the option to stay in the city and the Housing Options Team will help them find suitable accommodation under homeless legislation.

Between the period April 2018 and September 2018, 143 asylum seeker households moved into accommodation in Sunderland and 138 households moved out. Of these, 56 (26 were family members and 30 single people) received a positive decision to remain in the country.

In 2017-18, 16 households presenting to the Housing Options Team cited their reason for homelessness as a loss of National Asylum Support Service (NASS) accommodation. From April 2018 - March 2019, 24 households cited this reason. This indicates that only 12.5% of asylum seekers who are granted their leave to remain choose to stay in Sunderland, suggesting that the majority choose to live elsewhere once they have received this decision.

Our homeless data indicates that there are a slightly higher number of individuals from BME communities who present as homeless than is proportionate to the numbers of BME individuals living in Sunderland. It is not clear what percentage of people presenting as homeless from the BME community have been asylum seekers in the past but it is important to recognise the different support needs of this cohort who are more likely to have dependent children, have experienced trauma and are less and less likely to be experiencing issues around substance misuse.

### **Care leavers and young people**

Together for Children (TFC) provide a wide variety of accommodation options for homeless 16-17 year olds who are looked after, are a child in need or are care leavers. These young people are dealt with under the Children's Act 1989 which takes precedent over the Housing Act 1996. Homeless 16-17 year olds who opt out of being 'looked after' go directly to the council's Housing Options Team to receive assistance under the Housing Act provisions.

In reality this means that young people who are not looked after, children in need or care leavers do not have access to the specialist commissioned accommodation in Sunderland. Sometimes these young people can be carers themselves.

Our processes have recently been amended to improve the journey for young people who are leaving care and are approaching their eighteenth birthday, who are now supported by their personal advisor to apply for housing through the council's housing register, where they are given a reasonable preference, rather than following a homelessness route.

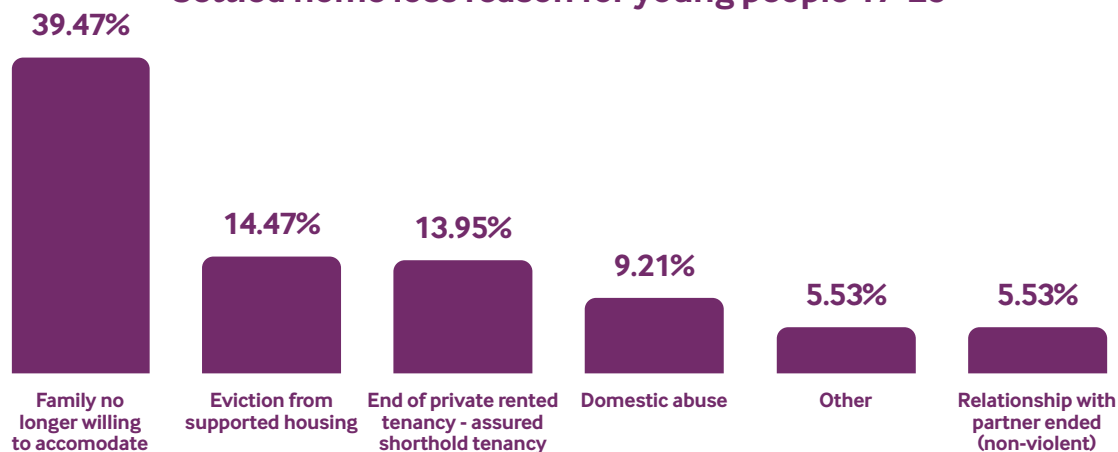
Whilst some over 18's who have been in care stay in their provision, others are placed in temporary accommodation which is not local authority commissioned and where the levels of support are often insufficient. We recognise that a growing number of young people have complex needs which need to be addressed if their housing situation is to improve. Quite often young people lack the skills required to manage a household in terms of budgeting and maintenance and this has been exacerbated by cuts to general youth provision and services. Therefore it is important that we equip young people with the necessary knowledge to be able to sustain their tenancy.

Following a visit from the Government's Homeless Advisory Support Team (HAST), which recognised the good practice of accommodation provision and multi-agency pathways, we are actively working towards the implementation of an action plan that will result in closer working practices between the Housing Service and TFC so that young people receive consistent information and will experience a more seamless service.

Between April 2018 and March 2019 there were 66 HRA applications made by 18 year olds. 32 cited family no longer willing to accommodate as the reason for the loss of their settled home and 19 were evicted from Supported Accommodation. 19 were of no fixed abode and one was Rough Sleeping at application.

Family not willing to accommodate needs to be addressed through mediation and more detailed work needs to be carried out as to why there are high levels of eviction from supported accommodation.

### Settled home loss reason for young people 17-25



### Veterans

There is a significant body of research on the subject of homelessness as experienced by veterans of the UK Armed Forces, which helps to provide a good understanding of the size of the problem and the experiences of those involved. Numbers of homeless veterans have fallen since the late 1990s and has been attributed to a combination of reduced output from the Armed Forces, improved resettlement provision and better intervention from ex-Service charities. Characteristics of homeless veterans are largely the same as the wider homeless population but have been found on average to be older, have slept rough for longer, be less likely to use drugs and more likely to have alcohol-related problems. Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) has been found among a small number of homeless veterans although other non-military related mental ill health problems were more common.

Within the North East each local authority area has signed the Armed Forces Covenant. The covenant in Sunderland reflects the city's obligation to ensure that members of the armed forces, past or present, and their families are not disadvantaged and that in some cases special consideration should be given to these individuals. Sunderland City Council's Housing Allocations Scheme and those of our housing partners includes criteria to ensure that veterans will not suffer disadvantage from any residence criteria.

Between April 2018 and March 2019 50 people stated they served in HM forces in some point in their lives before making a homeless application in Sunderland. Our knowledge suggests that these figures are much lower than the real homeless picture for veterans in the city, many of whom would fall into the category of hidden homeless and are sofa surfing or living in unsupported accommodation. There are a number of services supporting veterans in the city who are experiencing homelessness, including:

- Changing Lives who support those who have been in the armed forces and are experiencing homelessness. Between April and October 2018 they worked with 35 individuals of which 15 claimed to be homeless the other 20 were at risk of eviction or homelessness. Their main work surrounds housing, rehousing to more stable tenancies, supporting mental ill health issues and substance misuse (mainly alcohol), GP registration and assistance with rent arrears

- Veterans in Crisis who work to identify and support veterans who are homeless, have alcohol or drug dependencies, mental ill health issues or who suffer social isolation. Veterans in Crisis have developed a local partnership with Gentoo and have successfully rehoused 29 ex-service men and women since April 2018, who did not present to the council's Housing Options Team.

The North East of England is the second biggest recruiting ground for the armed forces in the country with the North West being the highest. Within the North East, Sunderland is the highest. There are currently 26,500 veteran families living in Sunderland and by 2020 it is expected that there will be a further 6,000-10,000 families returning to live in the city due to changes in the direction of the armed forces. The planned restructuring of the armed forces will see an increase in the number of reservists who will remain in their home and in their current employment until they are required to serve in unexpected emergencies. If the anticipated increase in families returning to the city does occur, this will place pressure on a range of services including housing, education and health.

### Individuals being discharged from prison

Individuals leaving prison are at high risk of homelessness for several reasons:

- they may have been homeless before entering prison
- are dependent on drugs or alcohol, or
- are unable to get support finding the right sort of accommodation on release



Individuals often lose accommodation when they enter custody. On release they can struggle to find accommodation or get the housing element of Universal Credit quickly enough. Many prison leavers are not considered to be in priority need.

Between April 2018 and March 2019 there were 27 clients who had presented as homeless since 1 April 2018 who cited that they were homeless on departure from custody at the time of their homeless application. Of those:

- 15 were deemed already homeless and 9 threatened with homelessness.

It is likely that many prison leavers often quickly become 'hidden homeless' (living in unsuitable temporary accommodation, sofa surfing or squatting) or sleep rough to avoid going back to an unstable family home.

The Rough Sleeping in London report (CHAIN) showed that a third of people seen rough sleeping in 2015 to 2016 had experience of serving time in prison. In the Crisis 'Nations Apart report' (2014) it was reported that out of 480 single homeless people across Britain, who were spoken to as part of survey, 41% of them had served a prison sentence at some point.

People leaving prison are known to re-commit crime to avoid homelessness. Having stable accommodation can significantly reduce the risk of re-offending. In the 2017 end of year evaluation of the Changing Lives Housing Response Service, showed that 26 of the 32 individuals receiving the service had a history of offending. Out of those that were housed in permanent accommodation none had reoffended, which is likely to be a result of a culmination of factors including the support they received, the fact they are in a supported and stable home and they are no longer trying to survive whilst rough sleeping.

The Homelessness Reduction Act will help decrease the chance of people leaving prison in England from becoming homeless. The Act puts an obligation on prison and probation services to refer people, with their consent, to the local authority if they are at risk of homelessness. The way this works in practice in Sunderland is split into two pathways:

- High risk offenders are generally released to approved premises, which is accommodation that always has probation staff on site and monitors behaviour and compliance. This is for a maximum period of 12 weeks (unless extreme circumstances are agreed for extension). The intention is that upon entry to the Approved Premises, move on plans will be developed and agencies will be contacted to help make arrangements for further accommodation
- Medium risk offenders are to seek accommodation whilst in custody for release. This could be with family or friends etc. or they could be released to a Bail Accommodation and Support Service (BASS) if they are going to be homeless. BASS is commissioned by the Ministry of Justice.

Sometimes however we experience prison leavers being released with no accommodation and they report to the council's Housing Options Team on the day of release. The duty to refer within the Homelessness Reduction Act should also give the local housing authority notice, allowing us to source suitable accommodation in anticipation of the release.

## **Human trafficking and Modern Day Slavery**

Modern Day Slavery (MDS) is the recruitment, movement, harbouring or receiving of children, women or men through the use of force, coercion, abuse of vulnerability, deception or other means for the purpose of exploitation. Individuals may be trafficked into, out of or within the UK, and they may be trafficked for a number of reasons including sexual exploitation, forced labour, domestic servitude and organ harvesting.

The Home Office estimates there are 13,000 victims and survivors of modern slavery in the UK; 55% of these are female and 35% of all victims are trafficked for sexual exploitation.

MDS is an emerging crime and to date the police have dealt mainly with individuals being recruited into the UK however it is thought that UK nationals are becoming more subject to MDS and targeted through vulnerabilities such as addictions and homelessness. We are aware that MDS is on the increase it is still very much hidden in plain sight however there is a growing picture of intelligence through Northumbria Police Force and their partners.

Sunderland Council has adopted a zero-tolerance approach to modern day slavery by signing up to the Co-operative party's Modern Slavery charter as well as introducing a whole-Council Modern Slavery Policy which incorporates the Charter and is aligned to the Slavery and Human Trafficking Statement<sup>4</sup>. This will ensure that modern slavery risks are also addressed through: the councils' safeguarding procedures; staff awareness raising and training; HR and other recruitment policies; community safety partnership working; and responses to allegations and incidents.

Homeless and vulnerably housed individuals are at particular risk of exploitation in this way and whilst this is widely recognised, research commissioned by the anti-slavery commission has shown that there is little co-ordination between those who work with homeless people and those who are responsible for safeguarding those at risk. Sunderland has made some headway in this area by rolling out information through its Safeguarding Board to partners who may come into contact with those at risk however we recognise that more needs to be done to raise awareness and increase levels of reporting.

## Summary

The review has shown that there are some key factors in Sunderland across health, housing and the economy that are influencing the shape of homelessness in the city and give a useful context in which the strategy is set:

- Mental ill health and multiple complex needs are confirmed as strong factors that both lead to homelessness and prove to be an obstacle to rehousing. We need to be better at meeting the needs of this group of people
- The private rented sector is growing in Sunderland and whilst it is not growing at the rate it is nationally, end of tenancy in the private rented sector is the biggest cause of homelessness in the city. A challenge is to understand how we will intervene in the sector to both prevent homelessness and sustain tenancies
- Whilst there is not a shortage of housing there is a shortage of affordable housing and the SHMA has identified that there is an imbalance of 542 units per year of affordable housing units – for many people who are presenting as homeless (especially those under 35) even affordable housing is not a financially viable option. Indeed the majority of people presenting as homeless are in twenty to thirty age bracket and we have seen an increase in the number of single men
- Our social rented sector at 27% is significantly larger than the national average of 17% and tenants within this sector are well supported to sustain their tenancies
- Sunderland is ranked as the 33rd most deprived council in the country with around 44% of households receiving an income of less than £300 per week and approximately 23% of residents are claiming benefits compared with a UK average of 15%. Poverty and low incomes prevent people from accessing potential housing options, and make others hard to sustain
- Domestic abuse is increasing in the city and we need to offer a range of safe accommodation and support choices to meet this need
- Sunderland has high levels of people with long term conditions and multiple long term conditions which places pressure on health and care services. The key unhealthy behaviours which are prevalent in the general population are even more acute in the homeless population and need to be considered as part of commissioning plans going forward

---

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.sunderland.gov.uk/article/12178/Modern-slavery-and-trafficking>



- There is a concentration of private hostels in the city that provide temporary unsupported accommodation for some of the most vulnerable individuals who are often excluded from other forms of accommodation. Staying in this accommodation often exacerbates existing conditions and as a city we need to aspire for more. That is why it is a priority as part of this action plan to develop a range of alternatives that are tailored to meet individual needs.





# KEY STRATEGIC THEMES AND PRIORITIES

The key strategic priorities set out within this strategy and action plan are embedded from the Homelessness Reduction Act and Rough Sleeping Strategy. The themes of prevention, intervention and recovery are specifically geared towards local needs that have been identified through the review process.

It is envisaged that the actions that are linked to our priorities will make good headway in terms of tackling homelessness in the city and this will be supported by the emerging Local Plan, which will ensure that the right type of development is focused in the right places to meet the needs of local people, and by the Housing Strategy Action Plan which aims to maximise growth, improve existing neighbourhoods and support vulnerable people to access and maintain housing.

We know that achieving this vision in these times of financial constraint will be challenging, however with our partners we will continue to strive to achieve our ambition of ensuring that everybody has a suitable home to live in and has the right level of skills and support to be able to sustain it.

# STRATEGIC PRIORITY 1

## Help people remain in their own homes and prevent homelessness

Preventing homelessness is much more cost effective than dealing with its consequences. In 2012 the DCLG estimated that the average annual cost of homelessness was between £24,000 and £30,000 per person. More importantly, we also know that preventing homelessness and dealing with the root causes delivers far better outcomes for individuals. We want to look at new and effective ways of preventing homelessness:

- we will improve the advice and prevention tools that are specific to the main causes of homelessness in the city for example relationship breakdown and loss of private rented tenancy
- we will continue to analyse demand for homeless services including the impact of gender on homelessness to understand the causes of homelessness in the city so that measures can be put in place to tackle them
- we will adopt no first night out principles to prevent rough sleeping
- Public Health will explore and understand what work can be done to prevent substance misuse.

### Welfare reform

The current phase of welfare reform has brought the biggest changes to the welfare system since the 1940s. Reforms such as the 'bedroom tax', sanctions and Universal Credit are thought to be fuelling the worsening homelessness situation in England. Sunderland has a strong network of advice providers and an excellent track record of supporting vulnerable people who are adversely affected by cuts in welfare. We will build on this to prevent homelessness by:

- reviewing our use of Discretionary Housing Payments
- supporting access to financial advice, skills and employment services
- working with the voluntary sector to deliver impartial advice and identify those at risk of homelessness
- raising awareness of the existing network of advice that is available for people
- exploring the possibility of supporting vulnerable people (with their consent) who lack the capability to manage their finances due to lifestyle factors through the power of attorney to help prevent non-payment of rent and service charges.

### Have a clear strategy that is reviewed and transparent

This is Sunderland's first Homelessness Strategy in recent years. The information contained within Part 1 is relevant at this point in time and our priorities have been developed as a response to the current context. We strive to deliver effective outcomes and be accountable to our commitments within this strategy but they need to remain relevant and current which will be achieved through annual review.

- The implementation of the action plan arising from this strategy will be overseen by the Homelessness Working Group. Links will be fed into the Housing Strategy Group, the council's Strategic Housing Board, Safeguarding Boards, Sunderland Strategic Partnership Board and the Health and Wellbeing Board
- We need to improve data so we can understand future commissioning. As part of this we need to identify groups at risk e.g. Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender community. We will do this by gathering data from a range of sources, not just the information collated from people who present to the Housing Options Team

- we want to adopt a corporate commitment to the prevention of homelessness so that the action plan contained within this strategy is owned and delivered by all parties involved in its development
- we will develop a Homelessness Charter which will set out a set of standards detailing how people who are faced with homelessness should be treated.

### **Strengthen relationships with partners to help prevent homelessness, specifically those who work with our most vulnerable groups**

We believe that we can prevent people from becoming homeless in the first place by working with partners to identify risk and intervene earlier. We will:

- Ensure there are effective outreach services to identify needs at an early stage. We will endeavour to continue the Rapid Response Rehousing service and re-commission the health navigator in A&E
- Raise awareness with other agencies of early signs of homelessness as part of the implementation and monitoring of the duty to refer
- Develop a range of early intervention pathways with agencies who work with our most vulnerable groups. Pathways should be specific and relevant to individual groups.

### **Learn from our mistakes**

We know that sometimes things go wrong and services could be improved or better co-ordinated. Occasionally a lack of service co-ordination results in barriers to accessing services and failure to support vulnerable people when they are in crisis. We will:

- work with partner agencies to remove barriers to accessing services
- carry out multi agency case reviews to ensure that we can try and prevent this from occurring again where fatalities of homeless or vulnerable people occur
- learn from best practice on a national and regional level to ensure that services are kept up to date and relevant in terms of meeting outcomes
- analyse our complaints and use these to make improvements to service delivery as well as feeding into partners.



# STRATEGIC PRIORITY 2 (INTERVENTION)

## Support our most vulnerable groups

As part of the strategy review process we have identified the most vulnerable groups who are at risk of becoming homeless. Under the intervention theme of the strategy we need to offer a range of accommodation and support choices to meet specific needs and complexities:

### Survivors of domestic abuse and other forms of violence

Sunderland needs to be able to offer a range of safe accommodation choices for victims of violence and abuse according to their needs and complexities. Some will need to be supported in their own home where it is safe to do so. For others, immediate access to emergency short-term refuge provision may be the safest options. There is also a need to ensure there is 'through-put' in the refuges with shorter stays, quicker access in to permanent accommodation, and tenancy support through the crisis period which is then maintained. We will:

- put the victim first shifting focus from risk to 'need' and on the impact trauma and their ability to engage with support services
- develop needs led provision, that meets the needs of diverse groups, especially with complex needs and from isolated and marginalised communities with responses tailored according to the stage of change supporting them to safety and independent living
- provide flexible services, a range of options for safe and secure accommodation and outreach support services in their local authority area or outside their area through collaborative cross-boundary working
- ensure joint working and visits between staff from specialist domestic abuse providers and wider support agencies/professionals to facilitate access to victims alongside on-going assessment of risk and need; building trusted, supportive relationships with the victim to support engagement using clear engagement plans which are developed and reviewed as the victim moves through their stages of change.

### Reduce rough sleeping

The Government has announced a national target to reduce rough sleeping by half by 2022 and to eradicate it all together by 2027. Whilst the Rough Sleepers count in Sunderland continuously shows low or negligible numbers, partners believe that there is an increase in the most entrenched individuals who have reported a history of rough sleeping and being vulnerably housed. We will continue to address the issue by:

- ensuring effective outreach services are delivered to identifying those at risk and addressing their issues at an early stage
- exploring new temporary accommodation and support options for individuals who face multiple exclusions
- expand Housing First provision, and embed this model within our strategic approach, as one of a range of options for Rough Sleepers.

## **Design services to support people with multiple complex needs**

Mental ill health is the most common need cited by people presenting as homeless and living within temporary accommodation. Often these needs sit alongside other issues such as substance misuse, disability, involvement with the criminal justice system and a history of anti-social behaviour meaning the housing and support pathway can be challenging. We will

- ensure that there is adequate provision including through social prescribing and ease of access to treatment services
- through the Health Needs Audit understand the use of new substances in the city and their impact on health
- continue to work in partnership through the Making Every Adult Matter (MEAM) approach to work with the most complex individuals
- look at accommodation options for individuals with high support needs and explore how health services can be integrated into these services so that a therapeutical approach to recovery can be adopted
- thread the principle of engaging with individuals in a trauma informed way to achieve personal recovery, into services
- improve awareness and support for individuals to obtain general access to physical health care.

## **Care leavers and young people**

There are a disproportionate number of people who present as homeless in the city who were in care as a child, many of them have been evicted from supported accommodation. Sunderland has a higher than average number of Children In Need cases and Child Protection cases. We need to ensure that strong processes and procedures are in place to support young people through this process in order to achieve positive outcomes.

- further work needs to take place to ensure that a whole picture of demand is jointly understood between Together for Children and Adults Services, particularly in relation to young people who are homeless but are not care leavers or looked after
- review the transition from early years to adult services needs so that a coherent and consistent pathway is in place for homelessness
- Together for Children and Housing Services draw up a written joint protocol which sets clear and practical arrangements to prevent youth homelessness and to ensure 16 or 17 year olds have accommodation which meets their needs. This will be based on the recommendations above and in the light of Government guidance with a target date for completion being March 2019
- the Council's Housing Allocation Scheme is revised and implemented in the light of the HRA and the needs of care leavers are reflected in the revised Scheme
- no young person will be placed in hostel accommodation or bed and breakfast or nightly let accommodation with shared facilities.

## **Veterans**

With a likely increase in the number of veterans returning to the city between 2018-2020, it is important that we plan for the projected increase and ensure that appropriate services are in place to meet the needs of veterans and their families. We will:

- research the efficacy of peer support and social prescribing approaches for veterans, particularly in relation to social isolation

- continue to support the armed forces network and Gateway in the city so that veterans have a trusted pathway for accessing a range of specialised support services
- understand the impact on housing and other services of the projected increase in return of veterans to the city over the next five years.

### **Asylum seekers and refugees**

Improvements need to be made to processes for dispersing asylum seekers into Sunderland and to also support them once they have obtained a decision that they can stay in the country. The speed at which NASS support is withdrawn once a decision has been taken means that asylum seekers who are becoming refugees (and have such have the same rights as British citizens) results in a high level of homelessness until the point when benefits and housing can be secured. We will

- explore where voluntary agencies can support asylum seekers and refugees
- review our approach to the dispersal of asylum seekers in the city
- develop a smoother process for asylum seekers who are granted their leave to remain in the country and are wishing to remain in Sunderland.

### **Individuals being discharged from prison**

When someone is released from prison they need stability and security to get their lives back on track. Too often they are released with nowhere to go. We need to support offenders into accommodation and reduce the risk of individuals reoffending and will do this by:

- developing clear housing pathways for individuals being discharged from prison that include appropriate accommodation and support
- developing move on solutions ensuring that offenders are signposted back to their originating authority once their bail or licence has ended
- exploring the role that the Private Rented Sector can play in supporting ex-prisoners to access permanent rehousing and look at funding opportunities that may support this
- Public Health participating in regional work to improve the medication and prescription pathway for people being released from prison.

### **Safeguarding – human trafficking/modern day slavery**

We know that there are links between modern slavery and homelessness and that victims may also present to services as victims of domestic abuse. We will:

- continue to raise awareness of modern slavery so that providers are able to identify those at risk and continue to promote ways of reporting to partners
- continue to gather and share intelligence between agencies to enable Northumbria Police service to tackle the issue
- secure funding to enable the roll out of awareness raising amongst employers and service providers in the city.





# STRATEGIC PRIORITY 3 (RECOVERY)

## Provide sustainable housing solutions

Housing supply in Sunderland is not a major problem. Supply levels remain healthy and local rent deposit schemes are in place. Where the need identified is solely a housing one then it is usually fairly easy to resolve. However, an overwhelming number of individuals presenting as homeless have multiple and complex needs resulting in exclusion from social rented tenancies and whilst accommodation in the Private Rented Sector (PRS) can be sourced it is difficult to sustain.

Support is limited, meaning that turnover is high (over 50% of presentations from the PRS have lived in their property for less than one year). Potential termination of Assured Shorthold Tenancy (AST) is the second highest reason for presentation in Sunderland (11.36%); If this is combined with loss of non AST which is the 8th highest reason then loss of private rented sector tenancy is by far the highest reason for homelessness in the city.

### Tenancy support – sustainment and prevention

Sustainment challenges are often linked to crisis situations and general lack of skills and understanding around tenancy issues. Around 45% of cases presenting as homeless, recorded mental ill health as a need – often alongside many other needs. Tailored support and advice to these cohorts may reduce the number of households presenting in a crisis. We will:

- consider how social care pathways can be reviewed to be more responsive to individuals with multiple complex needs
- work in partnership with a range of providers to explore the most effective model of floating support to sustain tenancies
- continue to support and evaluate the Housing First model in the city as an option for some of the most chaotic individuals
- through existing outreach and drop-in sessions, identify those who are or may be at risk of rough sleeping and proactively engage with them to develop individual tailored plans that will lead to positive outcomes
- explore how recovery can be built into future specifications for accommodation and support.

### Work with partners including landlords, Registered Housing Providers and developers to increase supply for vulnerable households and those on low incomes

The Core Strategy and Development Plan sets out our long-term plan for development across the city to 2033. It will ensure that the right type of development is focused in the right places to meet the needs for local people and businesses. We will:

- work with registered housing providers to access the Homes England Move on Fund to meet identified gaps in provision
- through policies within the emerging Core Strategy and Development Plan, the council will seek to ensure that the maximum level of affordable housing achievable is secured
- diversify the housing offer to meet identified housing needs

- make the best use of empty homes to bring them back into use and consider how they may be used to support the rehousing of homeless people
- review the current Housing Allocations Scheme in partnership with local housing providers and introduce a new scheme that will benefit our customers by being more accessible and by being focused on a partnership approach.

### **Reduce our reliance on unsupported temporary accommodation**

Unsupported Temporary Accommodation plays a huge role in the city in terms of providing accommodation to some of the most entrenched individuals. Whilst we recognise the role it plays, there are issues with the geographical concentration of the accommodation which is a factor in preventing the drive of regeneration in the Sunnyside area, and the lack of support for individuals living there that need to be addressed. We will:

- look at alternative forms of accommodation that are supported, on a smaller scale and dispersed throughout the city
- continue to raise standards in accommodation through regulation
- continue to work in partnership with accommodation providers to understand the needs of the hostel population
- work with neighbouring authorities to ensure that any cross authority placements are managed appropriately

### **Define the role that the private rented sector will play in reducing homelessness in the city**

The Rough Sleepers Strategy recognises that for many, the private rented sector offers a route out of homelessness and plays a vital part in delivering the homes that the country needs. The Government is also aware that the dysfunction in the private rented sector can exacerbate the risk of homelessness and as such has introduced a wide range of reforms to redress the balance between tenants and landlords. We will:

- develop an accredited landlords scheme so that only the landlords who have demonstrated their responsibilities will be able to support a resettlement programme
- provide tenancy support to prevent illegal evictions and mediation between landlords and tenants
- work collaboratively with regional partners to develop a proposal to access the funding from the Rapid Rehousing Pathway, to help people to access and sustain tenancies in the private rented sector.





# STRATEGIC PRIORITY 4

## Develop and maintain partnership working and strategic direction

A key theme running through this strategy is that homelessness is everybody's business. We recognise that we need to do things differently and reach out widely to work with our partners including statutory bodies, voluntary sector agencies and faith groups, in order to achieve shared goals of homelessness prevention and intervention. There are some key areas for partnership working going forward:

### Minimise street begging

We want to work with our partners in the voluntary sector and business community to gain a better understanding of begging in the city so that the issue can be tackled from all angles. Whilst our initial information may indicate that the largest proportion of individuals who are begging are not homeless, there are growing concerns about community safety and the impact of begging on businesses and we need to make sure that the begging does not impact on what is already a fragile local economy.

- we will explore ways for people to donate in alternative ways and to develop opportunities for beggars to get involved in positive activities
- we will continue to engage with the people begging, to understand their needs, background and to proactively work through issues with them
- partners will communicate to gain a better understanding of the issue and how it can be addressed
- as partners, agree the most appropriate way to take action on street activity such as begging and anti-social practices such as drinking and supply of illegal substances which can act as a draw to the streets

### Develop partnerships to help tackle complex issues

We know that we need to continue to work in partnership with our housing, health and criminal justice partners to proactively identify people who may be at risk of homelessness early in the cycle of events.

- proactively identify people who are engaging with treatment services and may be at risk of homelessness to ensure that they receive timely prevention advice
- re-commissioning of health navigators at Sunderland Royal Hospital to direct individuals towards appropriate primary care services and suitable accommodation as well as proactively engaging with those who are vulnerably housed
- continuation of the partnership beyond strategy development. In particular health, police and probation for the groups who are most difficult to house
- engage with partners to proactively identify those who may be at risk of homelessness and ensure early signposting into relevant services and pathways at the pre-crisis stage
- regular training and interaction between the Housing Options Team and advice/housing providers so that advice and policy development are responsive to current issues
- ensure that information about accessing homeless services is shared with partners and the right level of support is accessible to the public and to agencies.

## Young people and care leavers

Together for Children (TFC) and the council have developed an action plan, guided by the Government's Homeless Advisory Support Team (HAST), which will result in closer working practices between the services and a more seamless service for young people. We will:

- review the current process between TFC and the Housing Options Team to ensure that a flexible approach is taken, resulting in better outcomes for young people
- improve the data and intelligence that is gathered across TFC and Housing Options so that there is a better understanding of demand for homeless services across all age ranges
- explore opportunities for joint commissioning of services to support all homeless young people
- ensure prompt proactive work with care leavers as soon as they present to try and negate escalation of issues
- develop an understanding of how we stop young people slipping through the net before they hit crisis point
- explore incentives for parents to keep young people at home for a little bit longer so that the move can be planned in conjunction with training and employment initiatives
- review the transition protocol between TFC and Adult Social Care.

## Employment opportunities/economic wellbeing

Partners are actively working together in Sunderland to address the support, education and training needs of people who are financially vulnerable or reliant on benefits for their income. Social and economic factors are clear drivers in the high numbers of people who are vulnerably housed in the city or presenting as homeless. We will:

- promote and identify local volunteering opportunities for economically inactive people through the established homelessness networks
- continue to provide work coaches in job centre plus especially for young people and care leavers
- increase the number of people moving off benefits that are related to them being 'out of work' and into employment.

## Regional Working

The North East, and in particular the Tyne and Wear authorities, have a close working relationship where best practice and consistent approaches are shared and developed, often supported by national voluntary and governmental bodies. It is important that we continue to participate in these regional forums to deliver the best outcomes for local people. We will:

- develop protocols for cross authority placements
- continue to share best practice and develop joint approaches
- ensure that opportunities to bid for funding on a regional and sub-regional basis are maximised
- continue to work with partners across the region to ensure that they adhere to the Duty to Refer
- work jointly with local authorities to improve the process for prisoners being released from prison in the region.

## Our commitment to deliver

The strategy will be monitored in partnership, with accountability being assigned to specific leads through the detailed action plan. The Homelessness Working Group will monitor the overall action plan and will be responsible for driving forward delivery.



