



# HOMELESSNESS REVIEW 2023

## Executive Summary

September 2023

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1. This document presents an executive summary of the findings of a review of homelessness carried out by Dartford Borough Council ('the Council'). The review will inform the Council's Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2024-2029.

## **2. PURPOSE OF THE HOMELESSNESS REVIEW**

- 1.1 The Council has a legal duty to provide assistance to people who are threatened with homelessness or who are already homeless in the borough.
- 1.2 The Council also has a legal duty to carry out a homelessness review every five years and to formulate and publish a strategy based on the results of that review. The review looked at homelessness case level data between 2019-2020 and 2022-2023.

## **3. EXTERNAL FACTORS IMPACTING ON HOMELESSNESS**

- 3.1. There are several challenges placed on local housing authority homelessness services, which are driven by a complex range of changes to national legislation and policy, as well as social, economic and other external factors. These challenges have had an impact on current levels of homelessness in Dartford, and will likely impact future levels. They have also mobilised a change in how services are delivered. The review identified that factors include the:
- introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017
  - welfare reforms
  - Covid-19 pandemic
  - Afghanistan and Ukraine refugee response
  - cost of living crisis

## **4. LEVELS AND CAUSES OF HOMELESSNESS**

- 4.1. The number of initial homelessness assessments carried out peaked in 2019-2020 and show a downward trend over the following two years which was in part due to the pandemic, that saw reductions in the number of assessments undertaken nationally. However, in 2022-2023, initial assessments increased from the previous year.
- 4.2. Over half of initial assessments were taken at the prevention stage. This indicates that opportunities for early intervention were present and performance in this area was above the national level.
- 4.3. Ending of an assured shorthold tenancy (AST) and family or friends no longer willing to accommodate were the most common reasons for homelessness for applicants owed a prevention duty.

- 4.4. Family or friends no longer willing to accommodate was the most common reason for homelessness for applicants owed a relief duty. A notable increase can be seen in 2022-2023 in applicants owed a relief duty due to domestic abuse.
- 4.5. Applicants who were accepted the prevention duty were mainly living in the private rented sector or with family at the time of their homelessness application.
- 4.6. At the relief stage, there were applicants living in different forms of insecure housing or were without accommodation or sleeping rough due to the different circumstances and acute housing need of households at this stage.

## **5. CHARACTERISTICS OF HOMELESS HOUSEOLDS**

- 5.1. Overall, single people without dependent children accounted for just under half of all prevention and relief acceptances. The highest proportion of applicants owed a prevention duty were from single female parent households with dependent children, and the highest proportions of applicants owed a relief duty were from single adult male households and single female parent households with dependent children.
- 5.2. The highest proportion of applicants came from the 25-34 age group, followed by the 35-44 and 18-24 age groups.
- 5.3. The highest proportion of main applicants owed a prevention or relief duty were from a White ethnic group, which is broadly representative of the overall Dartford population from a White ethnic group.
- 5.4. Over a third of applicants were registered unemployed.
- 5.5. Homeless applicants can have a wide range of complex support needs. The top five support needs in 2022-2023 were a history of mental health problems, at risk of / has experienced domestic abuse, physical ill health and disability, learning disability, and history of repeat homelessness.

## **6. PREVENTION AND RELIEF OUTCOMES**

- 6.1. While opportunities for early intervention were present, performance is below the national level for preventing homelessness. Therefore, a proportion of prevention cases were becoming homeless and entering into the relief duty stage.
- 6.2. Of those applicants who had secured accommodation at the end of the prevention duty mainly secured self-contained accommodation in the private rented sector.
- 6.3. The main prevention activities carried out to secure accommodation at the end of the prevention duty were delivered via the Council's Housing Solutions team; helping to secure accommodation, found by the applicant with a council funded financial payment.

- 6.4. A proportion of relief cases had secured accommodation for six months or more. Although, the proportion of applicants where 56 days has elapsed in the relief stage, was proportionally higher.
- 6.5. Of those applicants who had secured accommodation at the end of the relief duty mainly secured self-contained private rented or social rented accommodation.
- 6.6. The main relief activities carried out to secure accommodation at the end of the relief duty were delivered via the Housing Solutions team.

## **7. MAIN DUTY DECISION OUTCOMES**

- 7.1. The largest proportion of applicants owed a main duty are in priority need because the household includes dependent children, followed by vulnerability due to mental health problems.

## **8. ACTIVITIES TO PREVENT HOMELESSNESS**

- 8.1. A range of activities are carried out to prevent homelessness. The key activities include:

- Housing Hub (a multi-agency approach to case management)
- Complex Case Panel (for Council tenants at risk of homelessness)
- Working with landlords and excluders (e.g. family or friends) to sustain accommodation
- Carrying out interventions on Section 21 evictions and rent arrears
- Homeless prevention payments
- Providing discretionary payments (Exceptional Hardship Payments and Discretionary Housing Payments)
- Sanctuary Scheme for victims of domestic abuse
- Attending Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARAC) and Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA)
- Implementing various joint working protocols with other organisations in many areas of homeless prevention
- The duty to refer process

## **9. ACTIVITIES TO SECURE ACCOMMODATION**

### **9.1. Temporary accommodation**

- 9.1.1. The demand for temporary accommodation has increased and a proportion of homeless households are having to be placed into temporary accommodation outside of the borough; in part due to the shortages created by London boroughs placing their homeless applicants into Dartford.
- 9.1.2. The Council operates the Dartford Private Leasing Scheme, which provides a much more cost effective alternative to nightly paid shorter term accommodation. The aim is to procure more properties under the scheme to reduce the use of nightly paid accommodation.

## 9.2. **Private rented sector**

- 9.2.1. The Council operates and funds a Deposit Guarantee Scheme which aims to assist applicants to secure suitable private rented accommodation. However, a buoyant rental market and high rent levels against restricted Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates means that securing private rented accommodation within the borough is increasingly difficult and unaffordable for households on low incomes.
- 9.2.2. The Council has an established Landlords' Forum, although this has not met for some time. The Forum is a useful way for landlords to share ideas about working together to improve services for private sector tenants and to respond to landlords' concerns and needs.

## 9.3. **Social rented/affordable housing**

- 9.3.1. There is not enough social rented/affordable housing in the borough to meet demand. This means that households on the housing register can wait for long periods of time before a suitable property becomes available to let.

## 9.4. **Affordable housing development**

- 9.4.1. The consistent stream of new build housing is crucial for increasing the supply of affordable housing, including social rented/affordable housing. The Council works with housing associations and developers to enable affordable housing development. The Council also has its own new build and property acquisition programme to increase its own housing stock.

## **10. ACTIVITIES TO PROVIDE SUPPORT**

- 10.1. A range of activities are carried out to provide support to homeless households. The key activities include:
- Housing Inclusion Service
  - Temporary Accommodation and Dartford Private Leasing Scheme Complex Panel
  - Dartford Domestic Abuse One Stop Shop
  - High Priority Rehousing Reciprocal Scheme
  - Domestic Abuse Reciprocal Scheme
  - Safeguarding referrals
  - Kent Agency Assessment
  - Disabled facilities grants
  - Joint Working Protocol for Young People
  - Housing Pathways for Criminal Service Justice Users
  - Ukraine and Afghan refugee support to settle in the borough
  - Working Households Fund

## 11. **ROUGH SLEEPING**

- 11.1. The levels of rough sleeping fell during the pandemic when additional accommodation was made available through the Government's Everyone In initiative, which ran from March 2020 to March 2022. The Next Steps Accommodation Programme also aimed to assist the 'Everyone In' cohort into medium and longer term accommodation.
- 11.2. The Council's Single Homeless Prevention Service is a partnership between the Council, Porchlight and the Dartford Churches Homeless Project (New Avenues) to help rough sleepers with very complex needs to move successfully from the streets into accommodation. The service provides outreach to rough sleepers and a weekly drop-in (Rough Sleeper Hub) with a focus on ending rough sleeping.
- 11.3. The Council also has a Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP) for Rough Sleepers in place, which sets out the arrangements the Council will put into place to minimise harm or death to anyone who might be sleeping rough in periods of severe weather.
- 11.4. Whilst Dartford has seen a reduction in the numbers of people sleeping rough, there are challenges around engaging with entrenched rough sleepers who may be reluctant to accept support; a lack of longer term supported accommodation; and barriers to assisting rough sleepers who are 'persons from abroad' and have no recourse to public funds.

## 12. **RESOURCES**

- 12.1. The Council is in receipt of Government funding to deliver the homelessness service as follows:

### **Homeless Prevention Grant**

Homelessness Prevention Grant - allocation for 2023-24	Homelessness Prevention Grant - Domestic abuse allocation for 2023-24	Homelessness Prevention Grant - Total allocation for 2023-24	Homelessness Prevention Grant - allocation for 2024-25	Homelessness Prevention Grant - Domestic abuse allocation for 2024-25	Homelessness Prevention Grant - Total allocation for 2024-25
£574,814	£17,259	<b>£592,073</b>	£574,814	£25,008	<b>£599,822</b>

### **Rough Sleeping Initiative funding**

Provisional funding allocation – 2020-21	Funding allocation – 2022-25
<b>£168,301</b>	<b>£830,871</b>

## 13. **PRIORITIES FOR THE HOMELESSNESS AND ROUGH SLEEPING STRATEGY 2024-2029**

- 13.1. From this review, and consultation carried out with partner organisations through the Dartford Homelessness Forum (covered in the full review document), the key strategic priorities identified for the next Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2024-2029 are to focus on:

## **1. Early intervention and homeless prevention**

- To reduce homelessness, and the risk of it, through successful early intervention and prevention
- To reduce the number of homeless prevention cases moving to the homeless relief stage
- To reduce the number of homeless relief cases moving into the main homeless duty decision stage
- To strengthen multi-agency partnership working in the prevention of homelessness

## **2. Accommodation**

- To procure temporary accommodation at a fair price and drive down costs while achieving value for money
- To ensure the provision of temporary accommodation is sufficient to manage demand and to meet homelessness duties
- To ensure temporary accommodation is suitable, compliant with health and safety specifications and in a decent condition
- To reduce the use of nightly paid (including B&B) short term accommodation and increase the portfolio of longer term Dartford Private Leasing Scheme accommodation
- To strengthen partnership working with landlords to ensure private rented housing is a more accessible longer term housing solution
- To empower homeless applicants to find their own accommodation
- To increase the supply and choice of affordable/social rented housing

## **3. Support**

- To provide support to people who are, or may be, at risk of homelessness
- To improve quality of life and resilience to further problems
- To prevent repeat homelessness
- To strengthen partnership working with other organisations in the provision of support to homeless households
- To listen to the voice of our customers

## **4. Rough sleeping**

- To end rough sleeping in Dartford
- To ensure that where rough sleeping cannot be prevented, it should be brief, rare, and non-recurring

## **5. Trauma informed approach**

- To adopt a trauma informed approach to helping people recover from homelessness.

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