



# HOMELESSNESS REVIEW 2023

September 2023

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Dartford Borough Council ('the Council') has long prioritised the importance of combatting homelessness and ending rough sleeping, and over recent years has made significant progress. The key achievements from the previous Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy are highlighted in [Appendix 1](#).

1.2. It is important to update and refresh our strategic approach to tackling homelessness and to end rough sleeping in the borough. This review is the start of the process to create a new Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2024-2029.

## 1.3. **PURPOSE OF THE REVIEW**

1.3.1. The Homelessness Act 2002 requires local housing authorities to carry out a homelessness review every five years and to formulate and publish a strategy based on the results of that review. The homelessness review must take into account:

- a) The levels, and likely future levels, of homelessness in the borough
- b) The activities which are carried out for:
  - i) preventing homelessness
  - ii) securing accommodation for people who are or may become homeless
  - iii) providing support for people who are or may become homeless or who have been homeless and need support to prevent them from becoming homeless again
- c) The resources available in the borough for the above activities.

## 1.4. **EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY**

1.4.1. The Council is committed to welcoming and valuing diversity, promoting equality of opportunity and tackling unlawful discrimination in accordance with the Equality Act 2010. The Council, in carrying out the homelessness review and formulating a strategy, will have regard to the Public Sector Equality Duty and ensure that no individual is discriminated against based on their sex, sexual orientation, marital status, pregnancy and maternity, gender reassignment, race, religion, belief, disability or age.

1.4.2. A [Customer Access Review](#) has been undertaken in conjunction with the homelessness review to assess the equality impact of the Council's approach to prevent homelessness, to secure accommodation and to provide support. The Customer Access Review has identified:

- A need to introduce customer feedback mechanisms to provide valuable insight and learning opportunities into the experiences of homeless households, and to support in identifying potential equality impacts that should be addressed.
- The impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) on some homeless households and the need to take a trauma informed approach to supporting complex individuals.

## 1.5. **HOMELESSNESS AND ADVICE SUPPORT TEAM (HAST) INSPECTION**

- 1.5.1. This review and the strategy development will take into account recommendations from an inspection of the Council's homelessness service carried out in 2022 by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities (DLUHC) Homelessness and Advice Support Team (HAST).
- 1.5.2. The key recommendations from this inspection for the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2024-2029 include:
- The objectives should be more ambitious, for example 'eliminate rough sleeping' instead of 'reduce', and targets should be set for preventing homelessness.
  - Ensure the action plan includes SMART targets with actions and key performance indicators for both partners and the Council.
  - Use the relaunch of the Dartford Homelessness Forum to engage partners as part of the strategy review.

## 1.6. **INTERNAL AUDIT ON THE HOMELESSNESS AND ROUGH SLEEPING STRATEGY**

- 1.6.1. This review and the strategy development process will take into account the findings of an internal audit to identify any potential gaps that the service will need to address when developing a new Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2024-2029. Suggested areas of improvement identified from this audit include:
- Creating a clearer link between this review and the strategy to show how the review has informed the objectives and associated actions.
  - Referencing staffing resources in addition to the funding available to deliver services to prevent and tackle homelessness.
  - Including an action lead in the strategy action plan, which recognises other organisations and agencies that will assist in its delivery.
  - Determining how often to review the strategy, including how it is reviewed with partner agencies, and build this in to the strategy to ensure accountability.
  - Considering incorporating actions to work with registered providers to try to intervene at an early stage to prevent homelessness.
  - Promoting the duty to refer in the strategy.
  - Including an action to improve engagement and collaboration with missing partners.
  - Including actions that target specific groups who are more at risk of homelessness, as identified through the review.

## **2. HOMELESSNESS DUTIES**

### **2.1. DEFINITIONS OF HOMELESS AND ROUGH SLEEPING**

- 2.1.1. A person is 'threatened with homelessness' if it is likely they will become homeless in the next 56 days.
- 2.1.2. A person is 'homeless' if they have no accommodation in the UK or elsewhere which is available for their occupation and which that person has a legal right to occupy. A person is also homeless if they have accommodation but cannot secure entry to it, or the accommodation is a moveable structure, vehicle or vessel designed or adapted for human habitation and there is nowhere it can lawfully be placed in order to provide accommodation. A person who has accommodation is to be treated as homeless where it would not be reasonable for them to continue to occupy that accommodation (Section 175, Housing Act 1996).
- 2.1.3. 'Rough sleepers' are defined for the purpose of rough sleeping counts and estimates as, people sleeping, about to bed down (sitting on/in or standing next to their bedding) or bedded down in the open air (such as on the streets, in tents, doorways, parks, bus shelters or encampments). People in buildings or other places not designed for habitation (such as stairwells, barns, sheds, car parks, cars, derelict boats, stations, or 'bashes' which are makeshift shelters, often comprised of cardboard boxes). The definition does not include people in hostels or shelters, people in campsites or other sites used for recreational purposes or organised protest, squatters or travellers.

### **2.2. RELEVANT LEGISLATION**

- 2.2.1. The duties of local housing authorities to provide assistance to people who are threatened with homelessness or are already homeless, are set out in Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996, as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002 and the Homelessness (Priority Need for Accommodation) (England) Order 2002.
- 2.2.2. The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 significantly reformed England's homelessness legislation by placing duties on local housing authorities to intervene at earlier stages to prevent homelessness in their areas.
- 2.2.3. The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 amends Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996 to strengthen the support available to victims of domestic abuse. The Act extends priority need to all eligible victims of domestic abuse who are homeless as a result of being a victim of domestic abuse (see 2.8.3. for the priority need categories).
- 2.2.4. When exercising its functions under homelessness legislation, the Council has regard to the DLUHC's Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities.

### **2.3. DUTY TO PROVIDE ADVISORY SERVICES**

- 2.3.1. The Council has a duty to provide advice and information about homelessness and the prevention of homelessness and the rights of homeless people or those at risk of homelessness, as well as the help that is available from the Council or others and how to access that help.

## 2.4. **DUTY TO MAKE INQUIRIES**

2.4.1. The Council has a duty to make inquiries if it has a reason to believe that a person may be homeless or threatened with homelessness within 56 days.

## 2.5. **ASSESSMENTS AND PERSONALISED HOUSING PLANS**

2.5.1. The Council has a duty to carry out an assessment in all cases where an eligible applicant is homeless or threatened with homelessness. Following this assessment, on all members of the applicant household, the Council must work with the person to develop a personalised housing plan which will include actions to be taken by the Council and the applicant to try to prevent or relieve homelessness.

## 2.6. **PREVENTION DUTY**

2.6.1. The Council has a duty to take reasonable steps to help prevent any eligible person (regardless of priority need status, intentionality and whether they have a local connection) who is threatened with homelessness from becoming homeless. This means helping them to stay in their accommodation or helping them to find new accommodation before they actually become homeless. The prevention duty continues for 56 days unless it is brought to an end by an event such as accommodation being secured for the person, or by their becoming homeless.

## 2.7. **RELIEF DUTY**

2.7.1. The Council has a duty to take reasonable steps to help an applicant to secure accommodation if they are already homeless. The relief duty lasts for 56 days unless ended in another way. If the Council has reason to believe that the applicant is vulnerable and in priority need, this duty further extends to securing temporary accommodation for the period of the relief duty. The relief duty also extends to any applicant who may be intentionally homeless.

## 2.8. **MAIN DUTY**

2.8.1. The Council has a duty to ensure that accommodation is available to an applicant who is eligible for assistance, in priority need, and unintentionally homeless. This duty is owed by the Council unless the conditions are met to refer the duty to another local authority where the applicant does not have a local connection to Dartford but does have a safe local connection elsewhere.

### 2.8.2. **Eligibility**

Persons from abroad are only entitled to homelessness assistance if they are eligible. Generally, persons subject to immigration control are not eligible for housing assistance unless they come within a class prescribed in regulations made by the Secretary of State.

### 2.8.3. **Priority need**

The categories of applicant who have a priority need for accommodation include:

- a) a pregnant woman or a person with whom she resides or might reasonably be expected to reside;
- b) a person with whom dependent children reside or might reasonably be expected to reside;

- c) a person who is homeless as a result of that person being a victim of domestic abuse;
- d) a person who is vulnerable as a result of old age, mental illness, learning disability or physical disability or other special reason, or with whom such a person resides or might reasonably be expected to reside;
- e) a person aged 16 or 17 who is not a 'relevant child' or a child in need to whom a local authority owes a duty under section 20 of the Children Act 1989;
- f) a person under 21 who was (but is no longer) looked after, accommodated or fostered between the ages of 16 and 18 (except a person who is a 'relevant student');
- g) a person aged 21 or more who is vulnerable as a result of having been looked after, accommodated or fostered (except a person who is a 'relevant student');
- h) a person who is vulnerable as a result of having been a member of His Majesty's regular naval, military or air forces;
- i) a person who is vulnerable as a result of:
  - (i) having served a custodial sentence;
  - (ii) having been committed for contempt of court or any other kindred offence; or,
  - (iii) having been remanded in custody;
- j) a person who is vulnerable as a result of ceasing to occupy accommodation because of violence from another person or threats of violence from another person which are likely to be carried out;
- k) a person who is homeless, or threatened with homelessness, as a result of an emergency such as flood, fire or other disaster.

#### 2.8.4. **Intentionally homeless**

A person becomes homeless intentionally if all of the following apply:

- a) They deliberately do or fail to do anything in consequence of which they cease to occupy accommodation: and,
- b) The accommodation is available for their occupation: and,
- c) It would have been reasonable for them to continue to occupy the accommodation.
- d) A person is not to be considered intentionally homeless if they leave supported exempt accommodation where the applicant leaves the accommodation if the standard of the accommodation or care and support does not meet the National Supported Housing Standards (guidance on the National Supported Housing Standards has not yet been published).

#### 2.9. **DUTY TO REFER**

2.9.1. Specific public authorities have a duty to notify local housing authorities of service users they consider may be homeless or threatened with homelessness. The public authorities subject to the duty to refer include:

- Prisons
- Youth offender institutions
- Secure training centres
- Secure college
- Youth offending teams
- Probation Service
- Jobcentre Plus
- Social service authorities
- Emergency departments
- Urgent treatment centres
- Hospitals in their function of providing inpatient care.

## 2.10. **HOMELESSNESS CASE LEVEL INFORMATION COLLECTION (HCLIC)**

2.10.1. All local housing authorities are required to report data to DLUHC for the purpose of monitoring the impact of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. The Homelessness Case Level Information Collection (HCLIC) data source provides information to inform this review on the levels of homelessness, the activities undertaken by the Council to help prevent or relieve homelessness, and the outcomes of these activities<sup>1</sup>.

2.10.2. From 2023, DLUHC will be making their Homeless Prevention Grant award based on the quality of the data returned in the HCLIC returns, therefore it has become more important than ever to ensure that reporting is robust and indicative of the prevention work that is ongoing.

# 3. PROFILE OF DARTFORD

## 3.1. **AREA**

3.1.1. Dartford is a borough in north-west Kent in the south east of England that adjoins greater London. The major urban centre is Dartford town in the north-west of the borough, and in contrast the south and east is largely semi-rural with a number of historic villages and settlements.

## 3.2. **POPULATION**

3.2.1. The population of Dartford has increased from 97,365 in 2011 to 116,800 in 2021, a 20.0% change. It is the most densely populated borough in Kent and Medway with 1,605 residents per square kilometre. (Source: 2021 Census, Office of National Statistics (ONS)).

3.2.2. Of the 45,697 households in Dartford, they are made up of 67.7% single (one) family households, 25.9% one-person households, and 6.4% other household types (Source: 2021 Census, ONS).

## 3.3. **HOUSING**

3.3.1. As of 31 March 2022, there was a total of 48,461 dwellings in Dartford. (Source: DLUHC).

### 3.3.2. **Housing Tenure**

26.9% of population of Dartford own their home outright; 41.0% own their home with a mortgage or loan or shared ownership; 13.8% are living in social rented housing; and 18.3% are living in private rented housing or live rent free (Source: 2021 Census, ONS).

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<sup>1</sup> Data for 2021-2022 and 2022-2023 presented in this review under sections 5 to 8 originate from the official homelessness statistics published by the Department for Housing, Levelling Up and Communities (DHLUC). Data presented for 2020-2021 and 2019-2020 originate from live data extracted from the HCLIC data system. This is due to incomplete or no data received by DHLUC at the time of data submission to include in the published statistics.



### 3.3.3. **Housing costs**

The average property price in Dartford during 2022 was £395,934. This is 9.4% higher than the average price during 2021 of £362,078. (Source: HM Land Registry Open Data Standard Reports).

The average weekly rent for Dartford Borough Council owned properties during 2021-2022 was £93.41, which is higher than the national average of £89.69. The average weekly rent for Private Registered Provider properties in Dartford during 2022 was £110.79, which is higher than the national average of £98.05. (Source: DLUHC).

The average monthly rent in the private rental sector market for Dartford for the year ending 31 March 2023 was £1,197, which is higher than the national average of £960.00). (Source: Private Rental Market Statistics, ONS).

### 3.3.4. **Mortgage and landlord possessions**

There were 260 mortgage and landlord repossessions in Dartford between 2019 and 2022. Of these, 10 were mortgage repossessions; 74 were accelerated landlord possessions; 97 were private landlord possessions; and 79 were social landlord possessions. Repossessions in 2020 reduced to their lowest levels due to restrictions placed on bailiff enforcement during the pandemic. These restrictions have all been lifted and although numbers for 2021 onwards remain below pre-pandemic levels, they are rising steadily (Source: Mortgage and Landlord Possession Statistics, Ministry of Justice).

## 3.4. **ECONOMY AND EMPLOYMENT**

### 3.4.1. **Earnings**

The average weekly full-time earnings of Dartford residents in 2022 was £732.10, which is above the national average (£642.20) and the south east average (£685.30). Overall earnings of people living in Kent have increased by 62.5% since 2002 equivalent to an increase of £257.50 per week. (Source: Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings, ONS).

### 3.4.2. **Unemployment**

In June 2023, the unemployment rate in Dartford was 3.0%, which is below the national rate of 3.7%. This has increased by 6.4% since the same time the previous year. The youth unemployment rate (18-24) in Dartford is 4.9%. (Source: Claimant Count, ONS).

### 3.4.3. **Benefit claimants**

In November 2021, 26.5% of Dartford's population were claiming at least one DWP benefit. This is lower than the overall England and Wales population (32.6%) and the lowest proportion in Kent. (Source: DWP).

### 3.5. **DEPRIVATION AND POVERTY**

#### 3.5.1. **Indices of Multiple Deprivation 2019**

The average rank for Dartford out of 317 local authorities is 145 and the average score for Dartford is 154 (1 being the most deprived). These are improved lower rankings compared to 2015 (-22 average rank and -14 average score). Out of the twelve districts in Kent (excluding Medway), Dartford is the sixth most deprived borough in Kent. Dartford has one ward within the 10% most deprived in 2019. This has improved since 2015 where there were three wards within the 10% most deprived. (Source: DLUHC).

#### 3.5.2. **Child poverty**

In 2021-2022 11.2% of children under 16 in Dartford were living in absolute low-income families (people living in households with income below 60% of median income in a base year). While this is below the national level of 15.3%, it is higher than the average for the south east region of 10.8%. (Source: DWP).

#### 3.5.3. **Fuel poverty**

7.6% of households in Dartford were estimated to be in fuel poverty in 2021, below the national average of 13.1%. (Source: Department for Business, Energy, and Industrial Strategy (BEIS)).

### 3.6. **HEALTH AND WELLBEING**

#### 3.6.1. **Health**

48.4% of the population of Dartford report that they have very good health, with 34.5% reporting good health, 12.6% fair health, 3.5% bad health, and 1.0% very bad health (Source: 2021 Census, ONS).

#### 3.6.2. **Life expectancy**

In 2021, male life expectancy at birth in Dartford is 78.6 years, whereas for women, life expectancy at birth is 82.2 years. In 2018-2020, life expectancy was 7.0 years lower for men and 5.4 years lower for women in the most deprived areas of Dartford than the least deprived areas. (Source: Public Health Outcomes Framework, Public Health England (PHE)).

## 4. NATIONAL CONTEXT

- 4.1. 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.
- 4.2. **HOMELESSNESS REDUCTION ACT 2017**
- 4.2.1. The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 introduced new duties around preventing and relieving homelessness. This included extending the period within which an applicant is considered to be threatened with homelessness from 28 days to 56 days, and new requirements around the provision of advice. The prevention duty, in particular, is provided regardless of local connection, priority need and homeless intentionality.
- 4.2.2. This is in contrast to previous legislation where it was possible for local housing authorities to turn people away if they did not meet the prescribed legislative criteria, including single homeless people who could be dealing with their situation informally by staying with friends and family, sofa surfing or living in unsuitable housing such as squats or 'beds in sheds' (the 'hidden homeless').
- 4.2.3. Whilst these changes are positive for opening support and assistance to significantly more people facing homelessness, it has increased the demand for homelessness services and temporary accommodation. To mitigate the impact of these changes, the Council's homelessness service was restructured in 2018 and new posts were created to ensure that these demands could be met. A triage process was introduced for all approaches for homeless assistance, and a Housing Hub and a Housing Inclusion Service were set up to support people to sustain their tenancies and prevent homelessness.
- 4.3. **WELFARE REFORMS**
- 4.3.1. Major changes to the benefits system have come into force in the last few years, which are aimed at driving the Government's policy to incentivise households into work. Some of the main changes include the introduction of:
- Universal Credit, which brings together a range of working age benefits into one payment.
  - A benefit cap setting a limit on the total amount of benefit that most people aged 16 to 64 can get.
  - A spare room subsidy (bedroom tax), which reduces the amount of benefit given to those tenants who have more rooms than required.
  - Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates, which are used to calculate Housing Benefit for tenants living in the private rented sector.
- 4.3.2. Welfare reforms have resulted in many households in receipt of means-tested benefits seeing their income fall. In the case of LHA, since 2012 there have been restrictions in the rates meaning that most private renters have a shortfall between what they receive in LHA and their actual rent. Households who are unable to meet their housing costs in the private rented sector may need advice, intervention, and support from the Council.

#### 4.4. **COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

4.4.1. The Covid-19 pandemic significantly affected people's health and wellbeing, employment prospects and income levels. People sleeping rough were unable to self-isolate on the streets or in hostels with shared sleeping arrangements. People who were sofa surfing and living in transient accommodation became more visible as their living situation forced them to access help. There were also bigger increases from people who were experiencing homelessness for the first time, such as those who were newly unemployed. The immediate pressure and demand on homelessness services to assist a new flow of people at risk of losing their homes led to an increase in support from the Government in the early days of the pandemic, including:

- The furlough scheme to support employers to retain and continue to pay staff while businesses were closed.
- Temporary measures to protect tenants at risk of possession proceedings by extending notice periods and a ban on evictions.
- Temporary measures to protect homeowners struggling with mortgage payments through mortgage payment holidays.
- A pause on deductions for benefit overpayments and a temporary top-up of £20 per week for Universal Credit claimants.
- The 'Everyone In' initiative to support local housing authorities to immediately house people sleeping rough and those at risk of rough sleeping to protect their health and stop wider transmission of Covid-19.
- The Next Steps Accommodation Programme to provide the financial resources to local housing authorities and their partners to prevent those accommodated during the pandemic from returning to the streets.

4.4.2. At the same time, as demand on the homelessness service increased, the way the service interacted with homeless applicants had to immediately change to prevent the spread of Covid-19. This meant the service moved to delivering homeless assessments entirely over the telephone with all officers having to learn to work remotely and with homeless applicants having only remote access to the service.

4.4.3. As we enter a period of recovery from the pandemic, most of the Government's temporary measures to protect people from the risk of homelessness have now ended, and the long term health, social and economic impacts of the pandemic are yet to be fully quantified. However, it is anticipated there will be long lasting effects from the pandemic that will affect the country for many years.

#### 4.5. **AFGHANISTAN AND UKRAINE REFUGEE RESPONSE**

4.5.1. The situation in Afghanistan and most recently in Ukraine, has mobilised the Government to set up schemes to support refugees from these countries to settle in the UK. Local authorities across the UK, including the Council, have been supporting the humanitarian efforts to support refugees from housing the families to assisting them access the assistance, education, healthcare and specific support they may need, so that they can settle and become part of their new communities.

4.5.2. This has added pressure on the homelessness service and the longer term impact of these resettlement schemes are yet to be seen, in particular, in terms of when whether some host arrangements break down leading to approaches for assistance to local housing authority homelessness services.

4.5.3. In addition to the existing pressures on the homelessness service, the Council is now also trying to source private rented move on options for those affected by displacement from their home countries.

#### 4.6. **COST OF LIVING CRISIS**

4.6.1. The economic fall-out of the pandemic coupled with the situation in Ukraine has increased the cost of living since early 2021, which is predicted to impact on the level of homelessness and demand for temporary accommodation. Inflation rose by 10.1% in the 12 months to March 2023, down from 10.4% in February (Source: Consumer Price Inflation, UK, ONS). High inflation affects the affordability of goods and services for households. An important driver of inflation is energy prices, with household energy tariffs and petrol costs increasing. A further factor causing rising inflation has been increases in the costs of consumer goods, underpinned by strong demand from consumer and supply chain bottlenecks.

4.6.2. Of particular concern, is the steep increase in energy bills, with fears that households and businesses will not be able to afford to pay bills, resulting in closures of businesses and further increased costs to customers, and households falling into debt and arrears, which ultimately can result in homelessness if housing costs cannot be met. The Council and its partners are already working hard to support households facing difficulties, and will continue to look at ways to mitigate the impact of the economic crisis into the future.

#### 4.7. **GOVERNMENT'S STRATEGY TO END ROUGH SLEEPING FOR GOOD**

4.7.1. The Government's 2018 Rough Sleeping Strategy, committed to halving rough sleeping by 2022 and ending it by 2027. The Government has since brought this target forward to 2024. Their strategy also stated that all homelessness strategies should be reviewed and rebadged by the end of 2019 to include a specific focus on addressing rough sleeping.

4.7.2. The Government's latest strategy, [Ending Rough Sleeping for Good](#) (September 2022), aims to drive forward the Government's manifesto commitment to end rough sleeping for good. The strategy is organised through four key themes – Prevention, Intervention, Recovery and a Transparent and Joined up System. The strategy also sets out for the first time a clear definition of what the Government means by ending rough sleeping, which is that it is prevented wherever possible, and where it does occur it is rare, brief and non-recurrent.

## 5. LEVELS AND CAUSES OF HOMELESSNESS

### 5.1. INITIAL HOMELESSNESS ASSESSMENTS

5.1.1. Table 1 presents the number of initial homelessness assessments carried out by the Council over a four year period (2019-2020 to 2022-2023).

**Table 1: Number of households by initial assessment of homelessness circumstances and needs**

<b>Initial homelessness assessments</b>	<b>2019-20</b>	<b>2020-21</b>	<b>2021-22</b>	<b>2022-23</b>
Total initial assessments	722	550	505	608
Total owed a prevention or relief duty	671	532	494	602
Threatened with homelessness within 56 days – owed a prevention duty	387	328	293	340
Of which: due to service of valid Section 21 Notice	32	29	64	55
Homeless – relief duty owed	284	204	201	262
Not threatened with homelessness within 56 days – no duty owed	51	18	11	6

5.1.2. The number of initial assessments peaked in 2019-2020 and show a downward trend over the following two years, which was in part due to the pandemic, which saw reductions in the number of assessments undertaken nationally. However, in 2022-2023, initial assessments increased 20.4% from the previous year.

5.1.3. In 2022-2023, 340 households were assessed as being threatened with homelessness and therefore owed a prevention duty. This means over half (55.92%) of initial assessments were taken in the prevention stage. 16.17% of prevention cases were due to service of a Section 21 notice in 2022-2023. Lower levels of prevention cases due to service of a Section 21 notice in 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 may partially reflect the restrictions that were in place on private rented sector evictions during the pandemic.

5.1.4. In 2022-2023, 262 households were assessed as homeless and therefore owed a relief duty. This represents 43.09% of initial assessments compared to 39.80% in 2021-2022, 37.09% in 2020-2021, and 39.33% in 2019-2020. The ultimate aim is for the proportion of relief cases to show a downward trajectory. The Council would like to see households approach earlier for help rather than at crisis point, i.e. when actually homeless and past the point of having the opportunity to instigate effective prevention interventions.

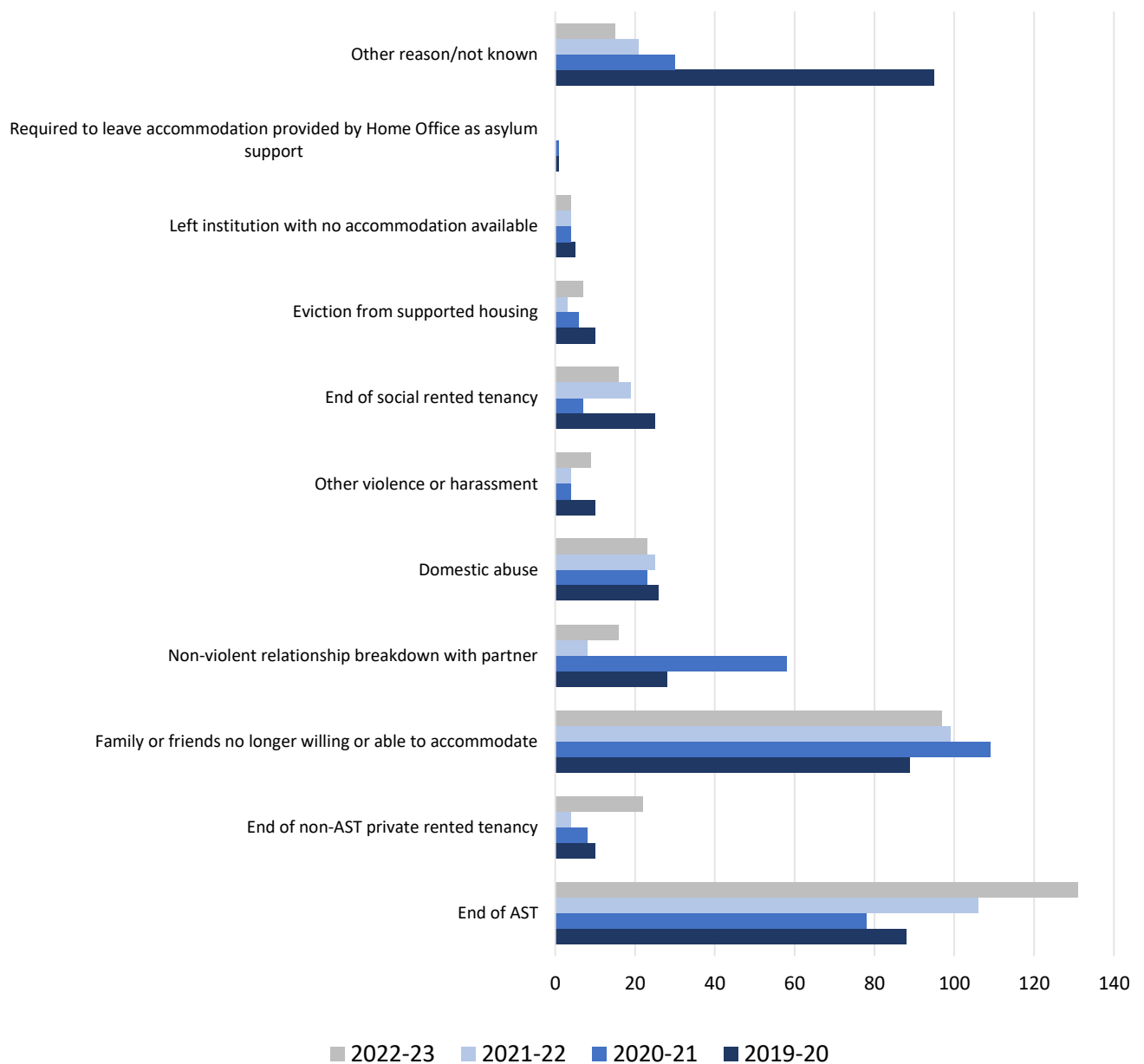
5.1.5. The number of households assessed as not threatened with homelessness within 56 days (no duty owed), has decreased consistently over the last four years.

5.2. **MAIN REASON FOR LOSS, OR THREAT OF LOSS, OF LAST SETTLED HOME**

5.2.1. Chart 1 shows that the ending of an assured shorthold tenancy (AST) and family or friends no longer willing to accommodate are the most common reasons for homelessness for applicants owed a prevention duty over the last four years (2019-2020 to 2022-2023).

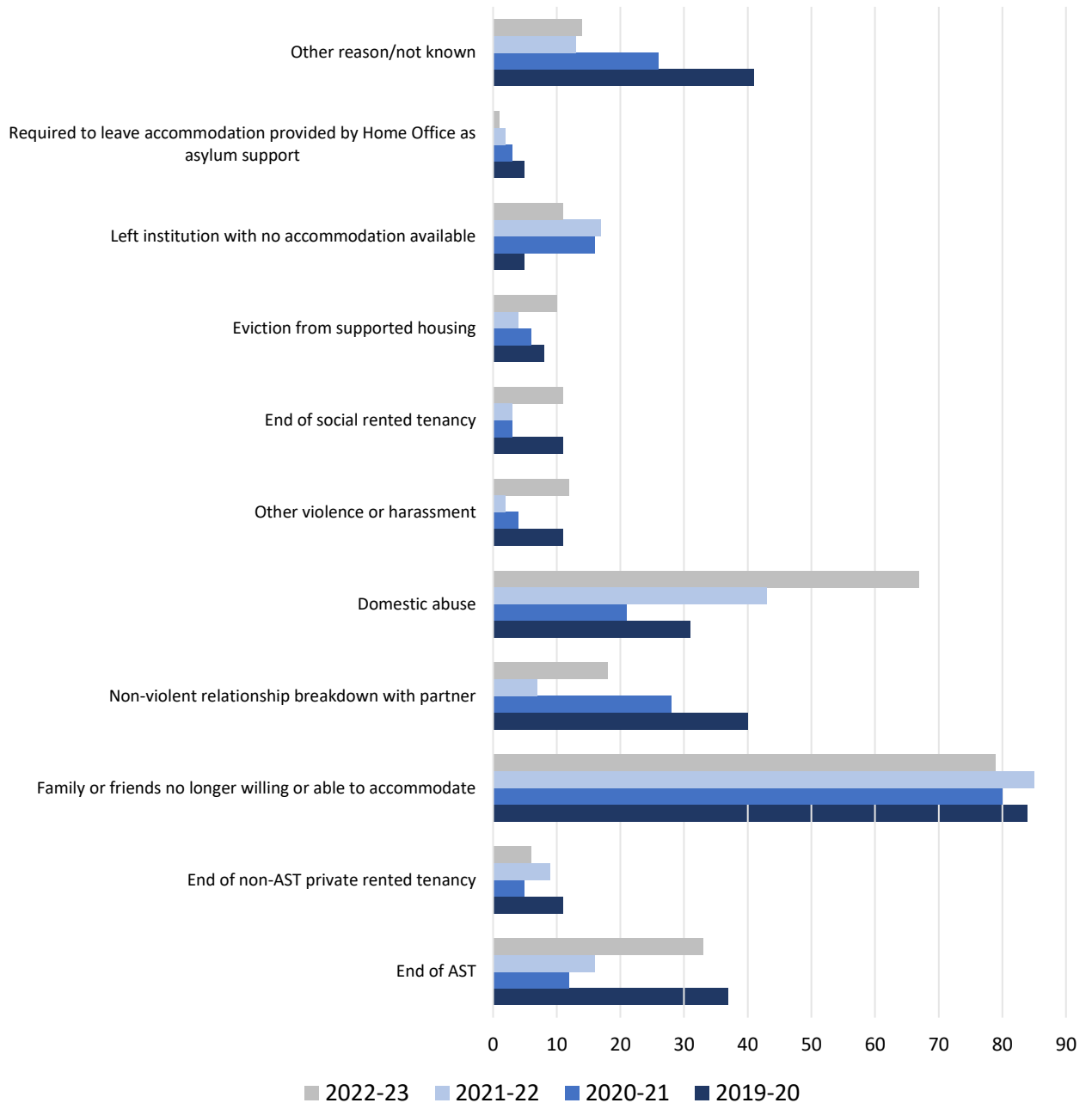
5.2.2. The increase in the ending of an AST reason in 2022-2023 may reflect the removal of restrictions on private rented sector evictions. While the ‘other reasons’ category features strongly in 2019-2020, these numbers declined over the following three years, reflecting improvements in the categorisation of cases.

**Chart 1: Main reason for loss, or threat of loss, of last settled home – prevention duty**



5.2.3. Chart 2 shows that family or friends no longer willing to accommodate is the most common reason for homelessness for applicants owed a relief duty over the last four years (2019-2020 to 2022-2023). Unlike prevention cases, the ending of an AST is much less prevalent in relief cases. A notable increase can be seen in 2022-2023 in applicants owed a relief duty due to domestic abuse.

**Chart 2: Main reason for loss, or threat of loss, of last settled home – relief duty**

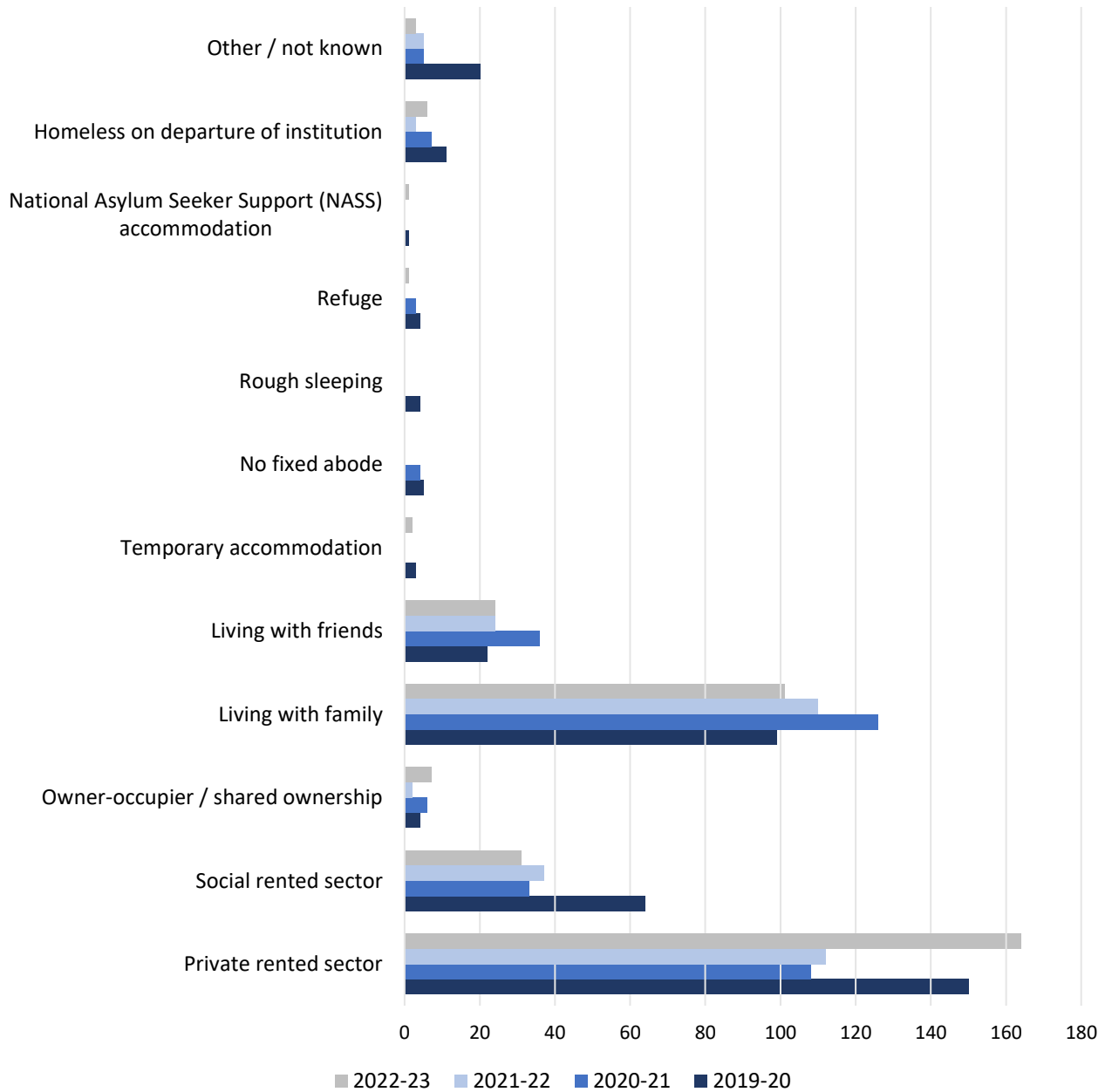




5.3. **ACCOMMODATION AT THE TIME OF A HOMELESS APPLICATION**

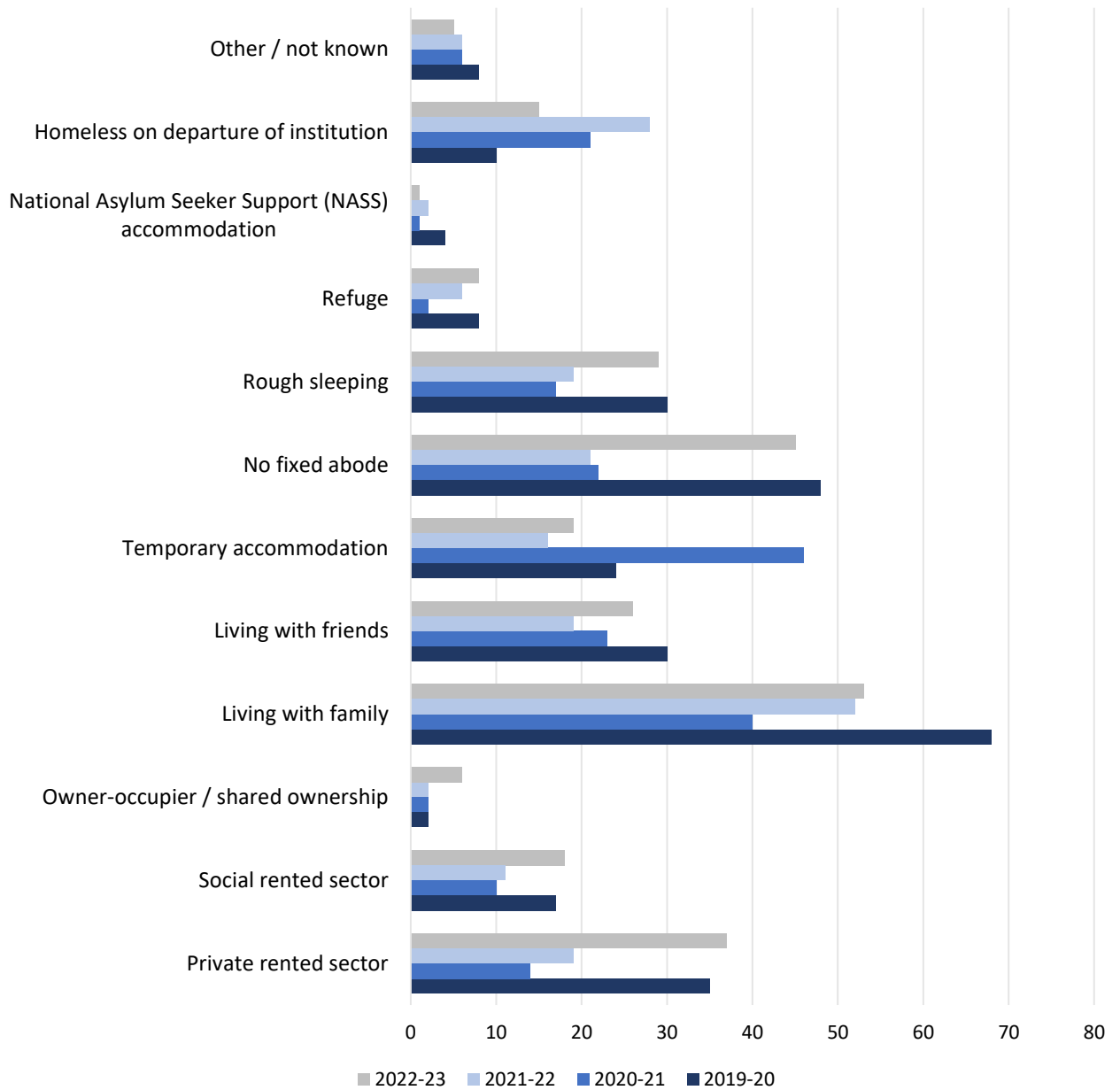
5.3.1. Chart 3 shows that applicants who were accepted a prevention duty were mainly living in the private rented sector or with family at the time of their homeless application. In particular, households living in the private rented sector correlates with the ending of an AST as a main cause of threat of homelessness.

**Chart 3: Households owed a prevention duty by accommodation at time of application**



5.3.2. Chart 4 shows that the living arrangements of households owed a relief duty is different from those owed a prevention duty. This reflects the different circumstances and acute housing need of households at this stage. At the relief stage, there were applicants living in different forms of insecure housing or were without accommodation or sleeping rough.

**Chart 4: Households owed a relief duty by accommodation at time of application**

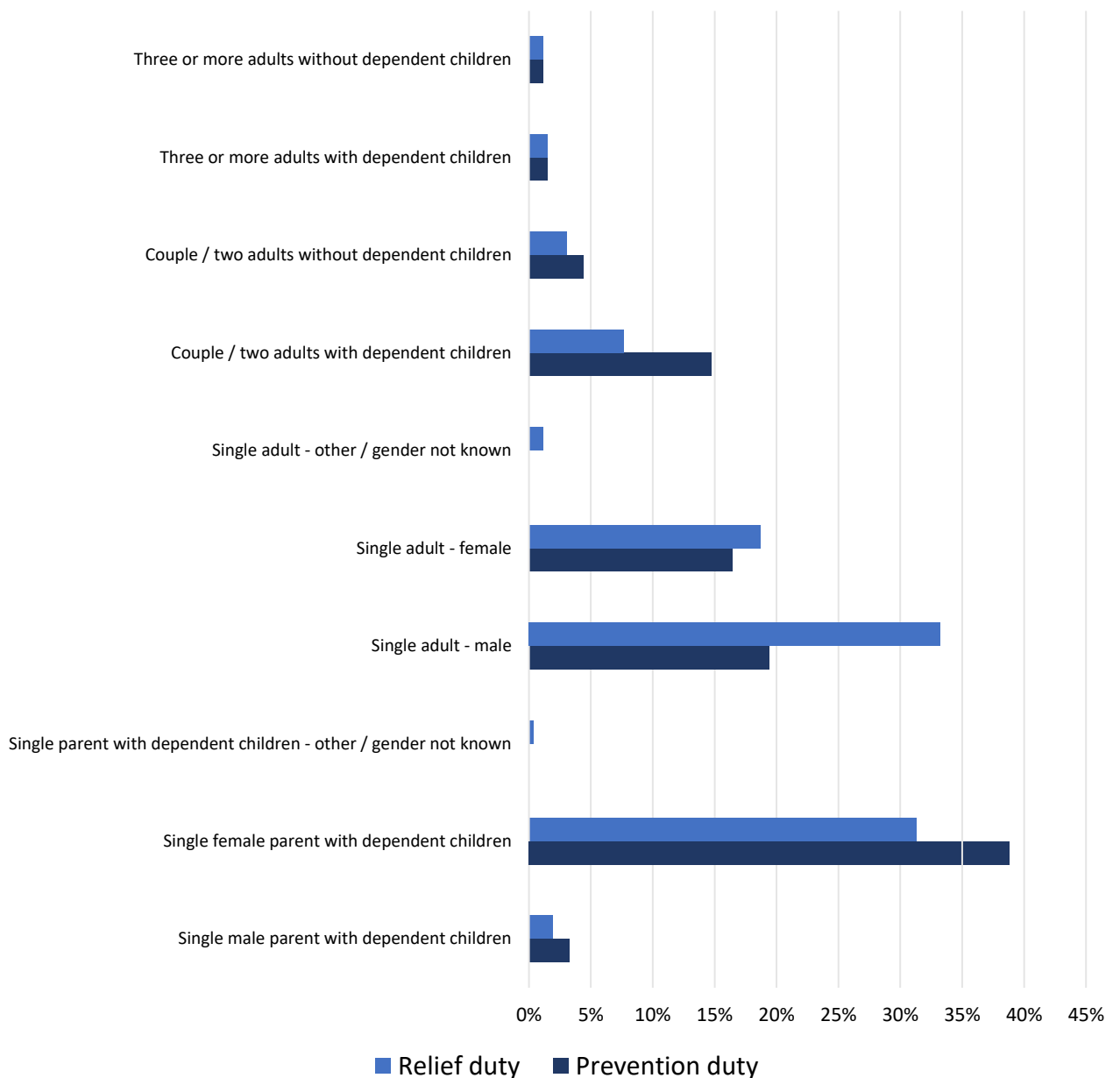


## 6. CHARACTERISTICS OF HOMELESS HOUSEHOLDS

### 6.1. HOUSEHOLD COMPOSITION OF APPLICANTS

6.1.1. Chart 5 shows the household composition of applicants in 2022-2023. Overall, single people without dependent children accounted for 43.52% of all prevention and relief duty acceptances. Single parents with children accounted for 38.37% of all prevention and relief cases. The highest proportion of applications owed a prevention duty were from single female parent households with dependent children (38.82%), and the highest proportions of applications owed a relief duty were from single adult male households (33.20%) and single female parent households with dependent children (31.3%).

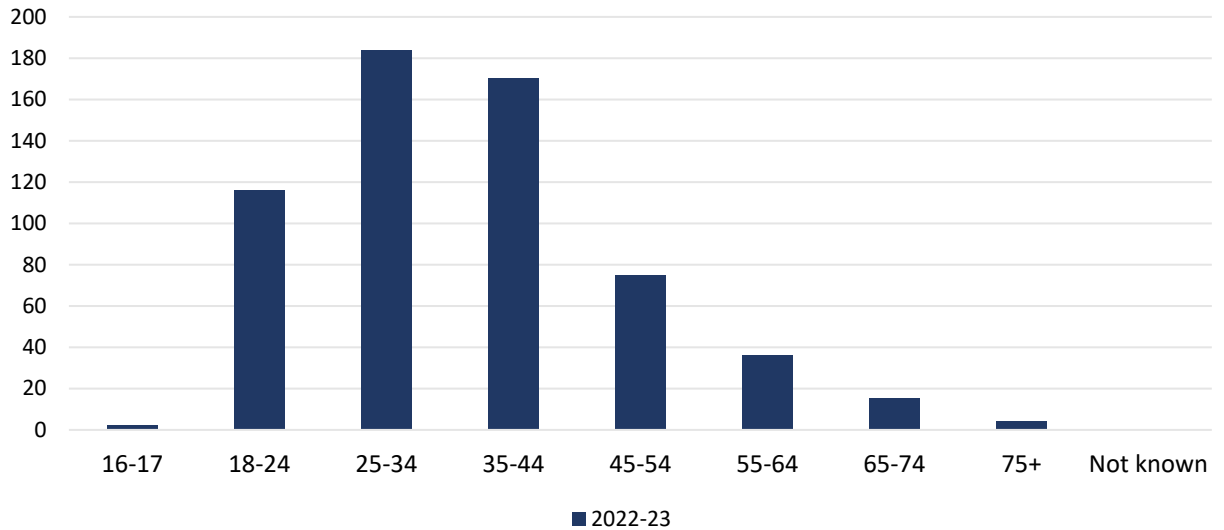
**Chart 5: Household composition**



## 6.2. AGE OF APPLICANTS

6.2.1. Chart 6 shows that the highest proportion of applicants came from the 25-34 age group, followed by the 35-44 and 18-24 age groups. This indicates that homelessness tends to largely affect working age households. This is also to be expected as these age groups are the largest in population by number. Those in older age groups generally have more settled housing patterns.

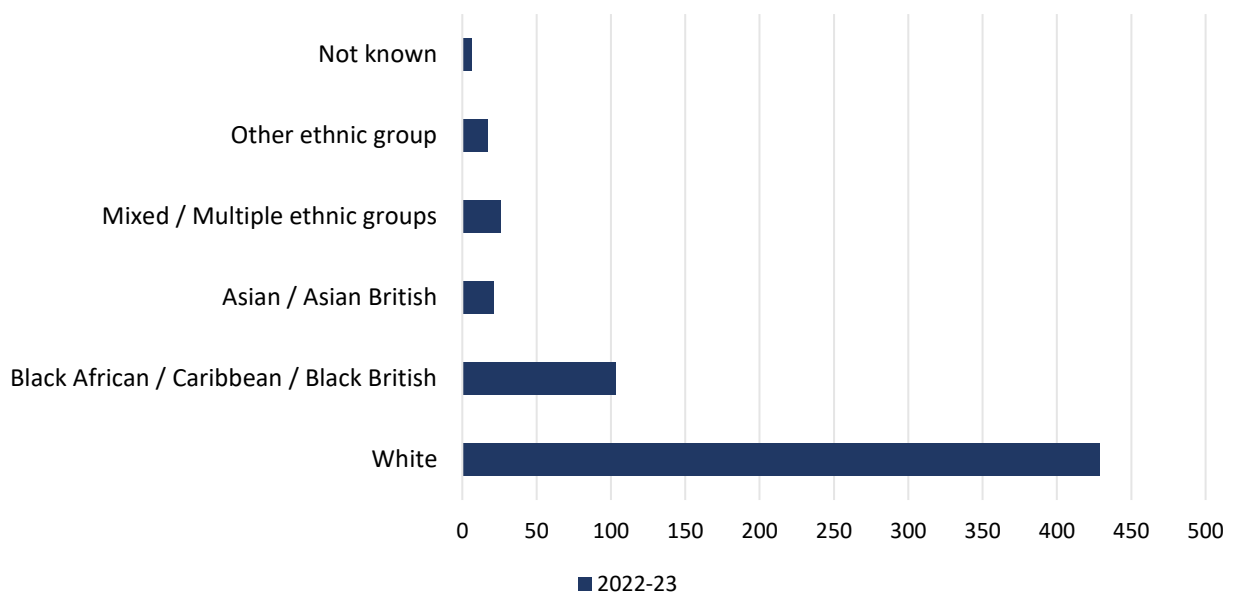
**Chart 6: Age of main applicants assessed as owed a prevention or relief duty**



## 6.3. ETHNICITY OF MAIN APPLICANTS

6.3.1. Chart 7 shows that the highest proportion of main applicants owed a prevention or relief duty were from a White ethnic group (71.26%). The overall Dartford population from a White ethnic group represents 74.50%. 17.11% of acceptances were from applicants from the Black/African/Caribbean group and the overall Dartford population from this group represents 10.50%. In addition, 3.49% of acceptances were from the Asian/Asian British Group and the overall Dartford population from this group is 9.90%.

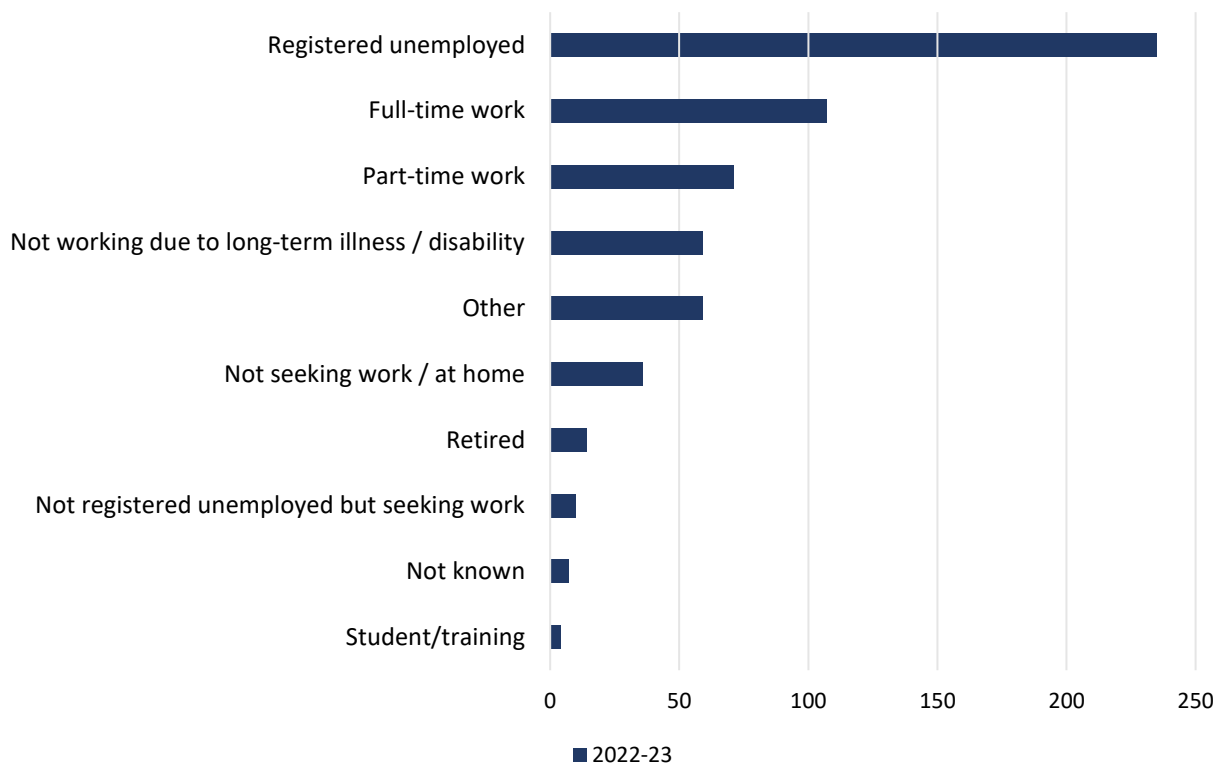
**Chart 7: Ethnicity of main applicants assessed as owed a prevention or relief duty**



## 6.4. **EMPLOYMENT STATUS OF MAIN APPLICANTS**

6.4.1. Chart 8 shows that in 2022-2023, over a third of applicants (39%) were registered unemployed.

**Chart 8: Employment status of main applicants assessed as owed a prevention or relief duty**



## 6.5. **SUPPORT NEEDS OF HOUSEHOLDS**

6.5.1. The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 introduced duties for local housing authorities to assess the support needs of all applicants who are homeless or threatened with homelessness, and agree a personalised housing plan which should include reasonable steps required to meet any support needs identified.

6.5.2. Households with support needs can have 1, 2 or 3+ support needs. Multiple support needs can be reported per household, but each support need only once. Households can therefore be represented across multiple support needs columns. Support needs are not the same as 'priority need' and it is possible that a household with support needs is not in priority need.

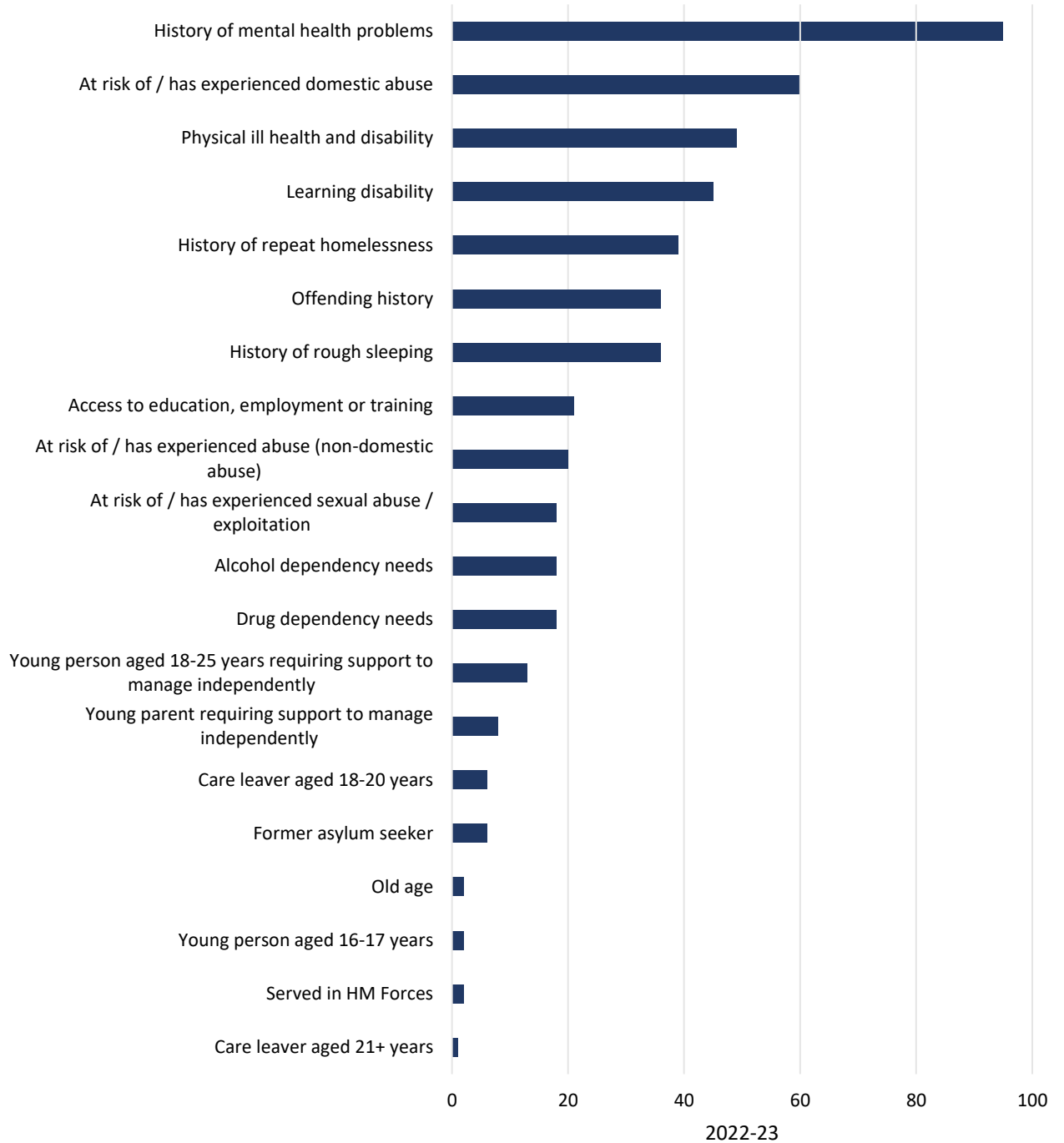
6.5.3. Table 2 shows that in 2022-2023, 180 households owed a prevention and relief duty had at least one support need, which represents 29.90% of applicants. Of these 31% had one support need, 25% had two support needs, and 44% had three or more support needs.

**Table 2: Support needs**

Support needs	Year
	2022-23
No support needs	420
With unknown support needs	2
Total households with support needs	180
Total owed a prevention or relief duty	602

6.5.4. Chart 9 shows a breakdown of support needs. The top five support needs are 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.

**Chart 9: Types of support needs**



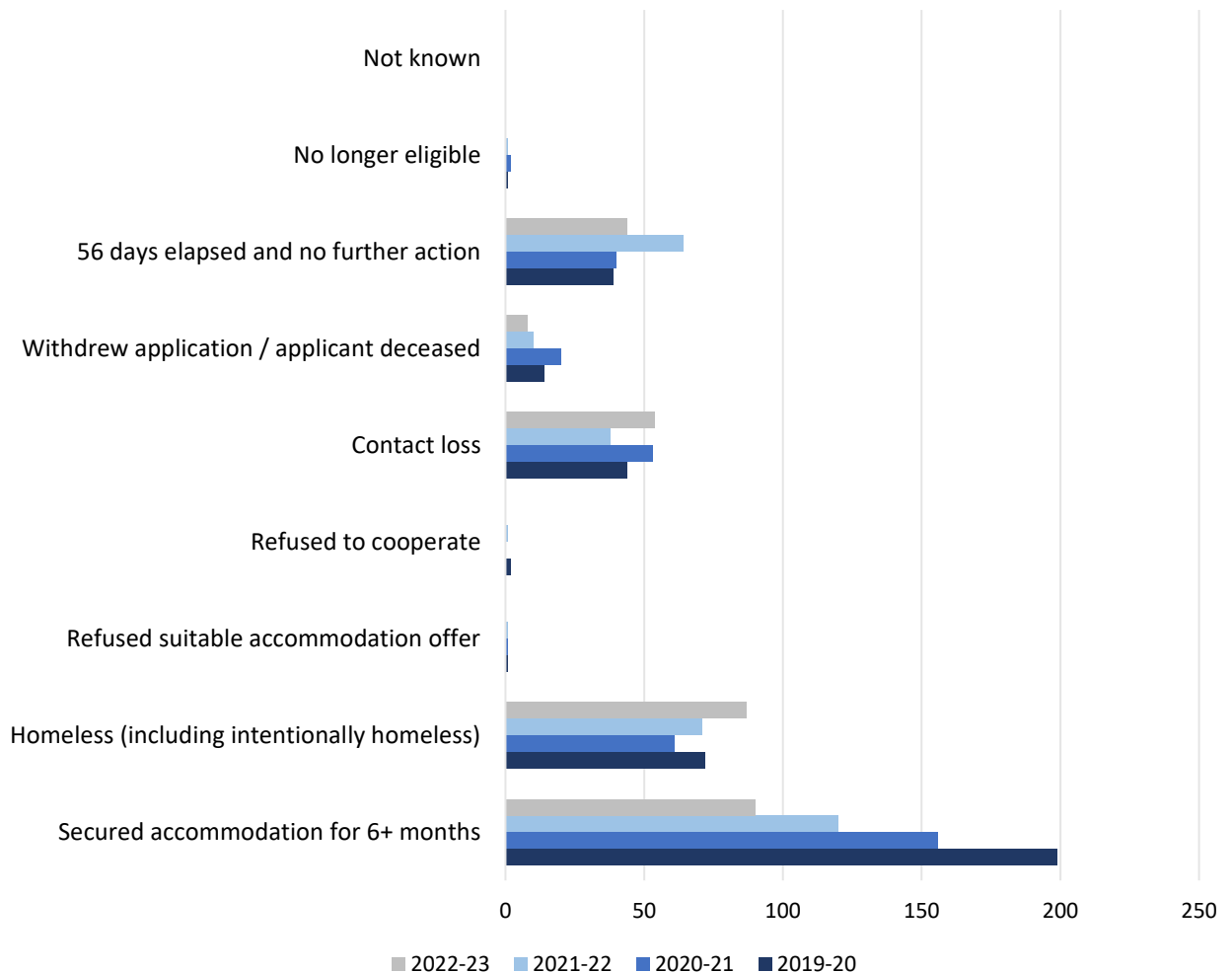
## 7. PREVENTION AND RELIEF CASE OUTCOMES

7.1. The homelessness legislation requires local housing authorities to take reasonable steps to try to prevent and relieve a household's homelessness by helping them to secure accommodation that will be available to them for at least six months. These duties usually last for up to 56 days each, although this may be extended in some circumstances.

### 7.2. REASON FOR END OF PREVENTION DUTY

7.2.1. Chart 10 shows the reasons for the ending of the prevention duty between 2019-2020 and 2022-2023. In 2019-2020, 53.49% of prevention cases were assisted to successfully prevent their homelessness where accommodation was secured for six months or more. This has reduced year-on-year since, where in 2020-2021, this was 46.85% and 39.21% in 2021-2022 and 31.80% in 2022-2023. There is also a proportion of cases where the applicant becomes homeless (including intentionally homeless), and where the prevention duty has ended because 56 days had elapsed and no further action was taken, and where contact was lost. Therefore, a proportion of prevention cases are becoming homeless and entering into the relief duty stage.

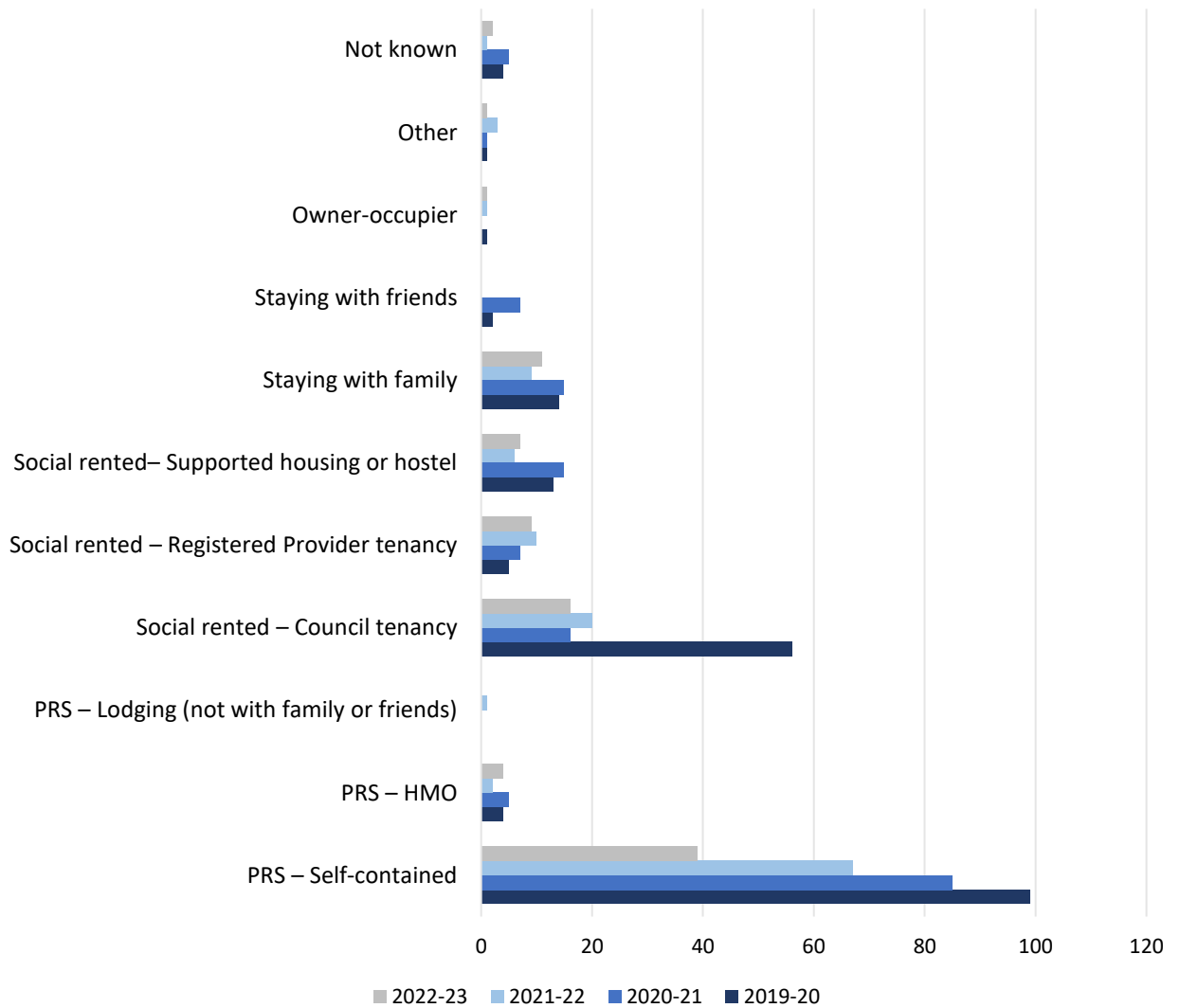
**Chart 10: Reason for end of prevention duty**



7.3. **TYPE OF ACCOMMODATION SECURED FOR HOUSEHOLDS AT END OF PREVENTION DUTY**

7.3.1. Chart 11 shows that of the applicants who secured accommodation for six months or more at the end of the prevention duty, the majority secured self-contained accommodation in the private rented sector. Despite a moderate prevalence of securing social rented council tenancies in 2019-2020, this reduced significantly over the following years.

**Chart 11: Type of accommodation secured for households at end of prevention duty**

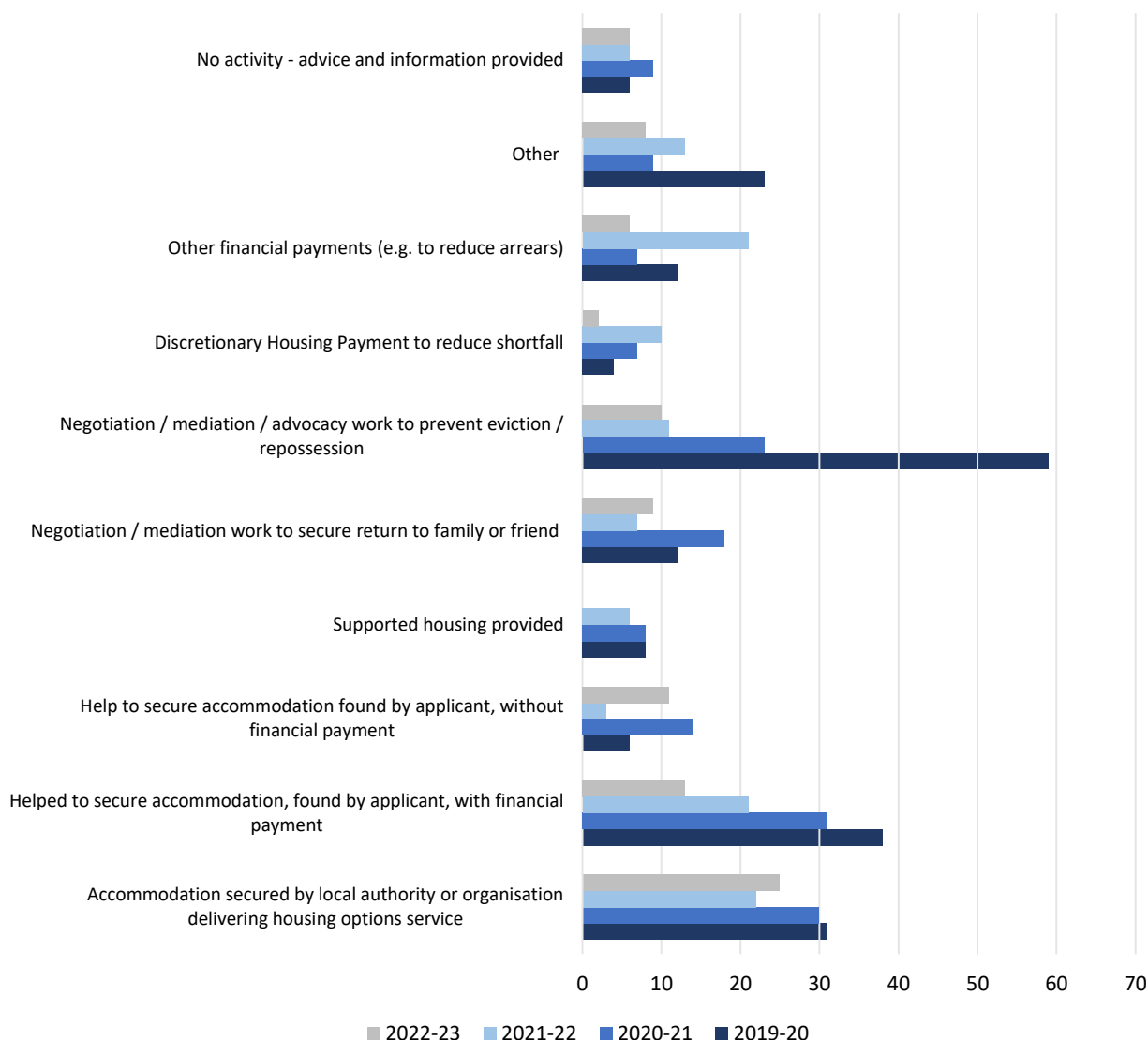




7.4. **MAIN PREVENTION ACTIVITY THAT RESULTED IN ACCOMMODATION SECURED FOR HOUSEHOLDS AT END OF PREVENTION DUTY**

7.4.1. Chart 12 shows the main activity that resulted in accommodation secured for households at the end of the prevention duty. Securing accommodation by delivering a housing options service, and helping to secure accommodation found by the applicant with a financial payment, features as main secure prevention activities over the four years. Of note is a sharp decrease in activity around negotiation, mediation and advocacy work to prevent eviction or repossession since 2019-2020.

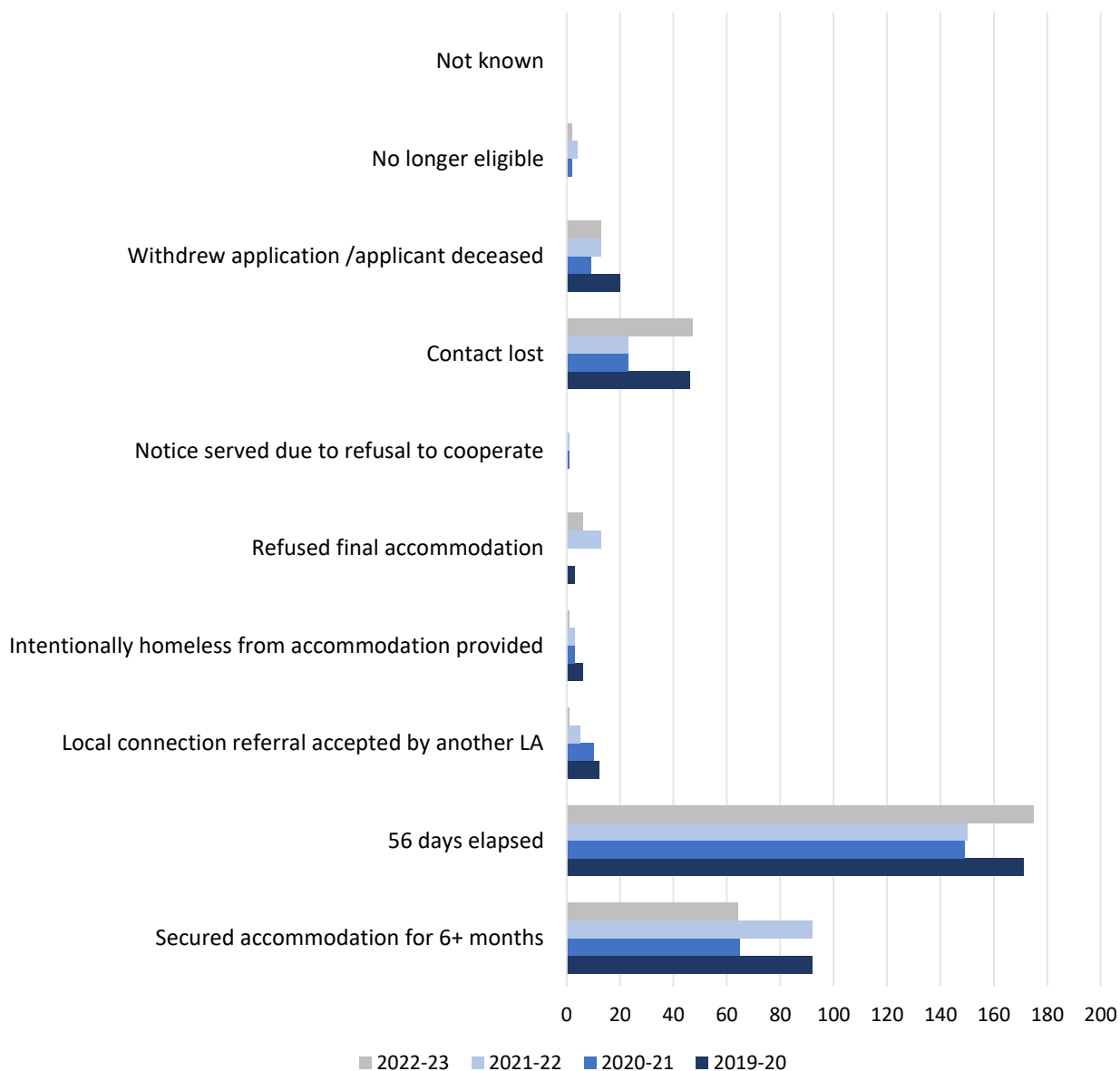
**Chart 12: Main prevention activity that resulted in accommodation secured for households**



7.5. **REASON FOR END OF RELIEF DUTY**

7.5.1. Chart 13 shows the reasons for the ending of the relief duty between 2019-2020 and 2022-2023. In 2019-2020, 26.29% of relief cases secured accommodation for six months or more. The figure was 20.71% in 2022-2023. In 2022-2023, the duty was ended for over half of cases (56.63%) because homelessness had not been relieved within 56 days. Where homelessness has not been relieved, an applicant is still homeless and therefore moves into the main duty decision stage. This means the Council has been unsuccessful in finding a housing solution at the relief stage. As mentioned earlier, the Council aims to work towards a downward trajectory in the level of relief cases with households approaching earlier for help at the prevention stage rather than at crisis point when they are actually homeless.

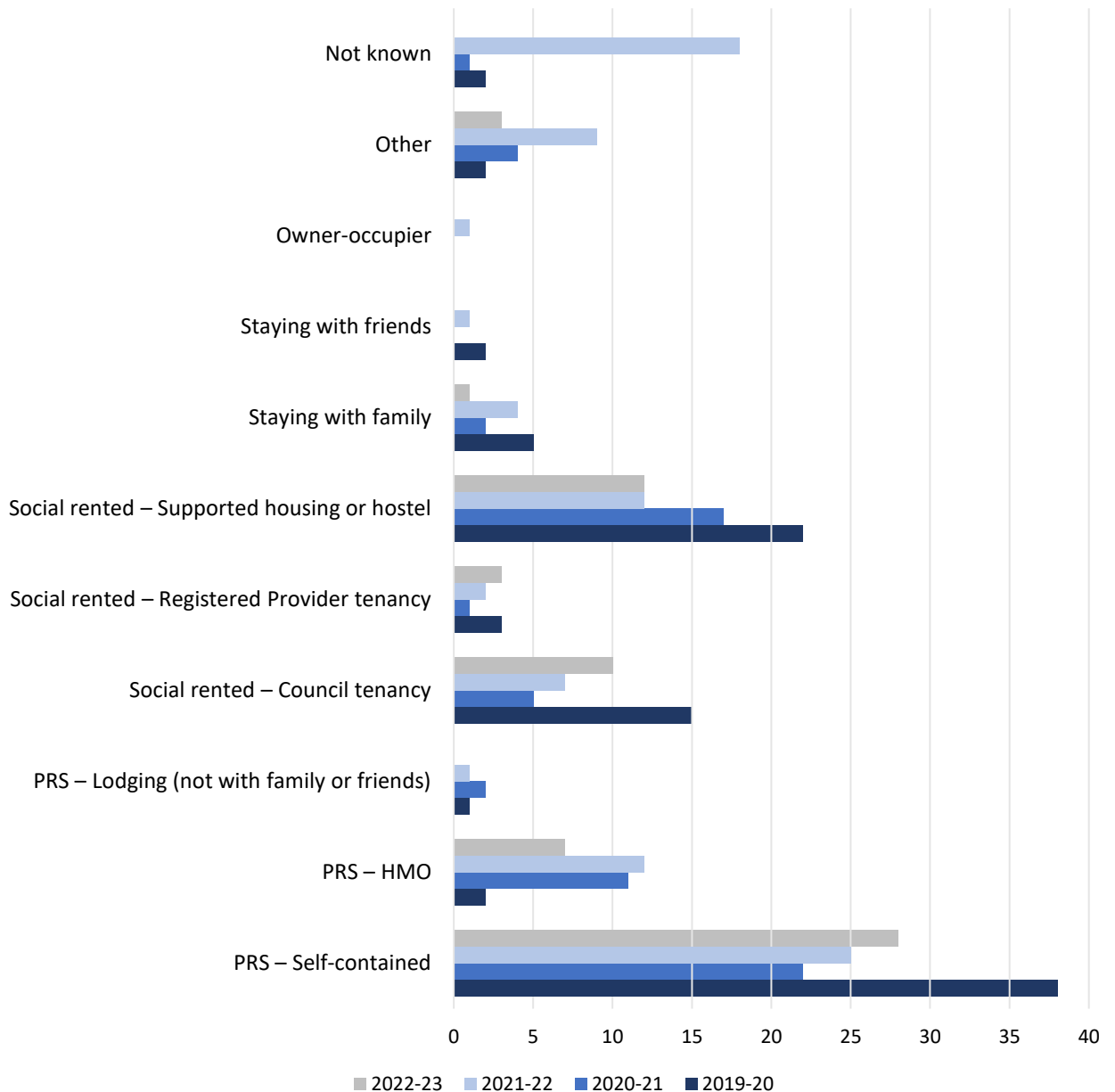
**Chart 13: Reason for end of relief duty**



7.6. **TYPE OF ACCOMMODATION SECURED FOR HOUSEHOLDS AT END OF RELIEF DUTY**

7.6.1. Chart 14 shows that, for applicants who were successful in securing accommodation for six months or more, securing a self-contained private rented tenancy and social rented accommodation features strongly as types of accommodation secured at the end of the relief duty. The 'not known' category increased in 2021-2022, which refers to missing information in the HCLIC data source, however returned a zero figure in 2022-2023.

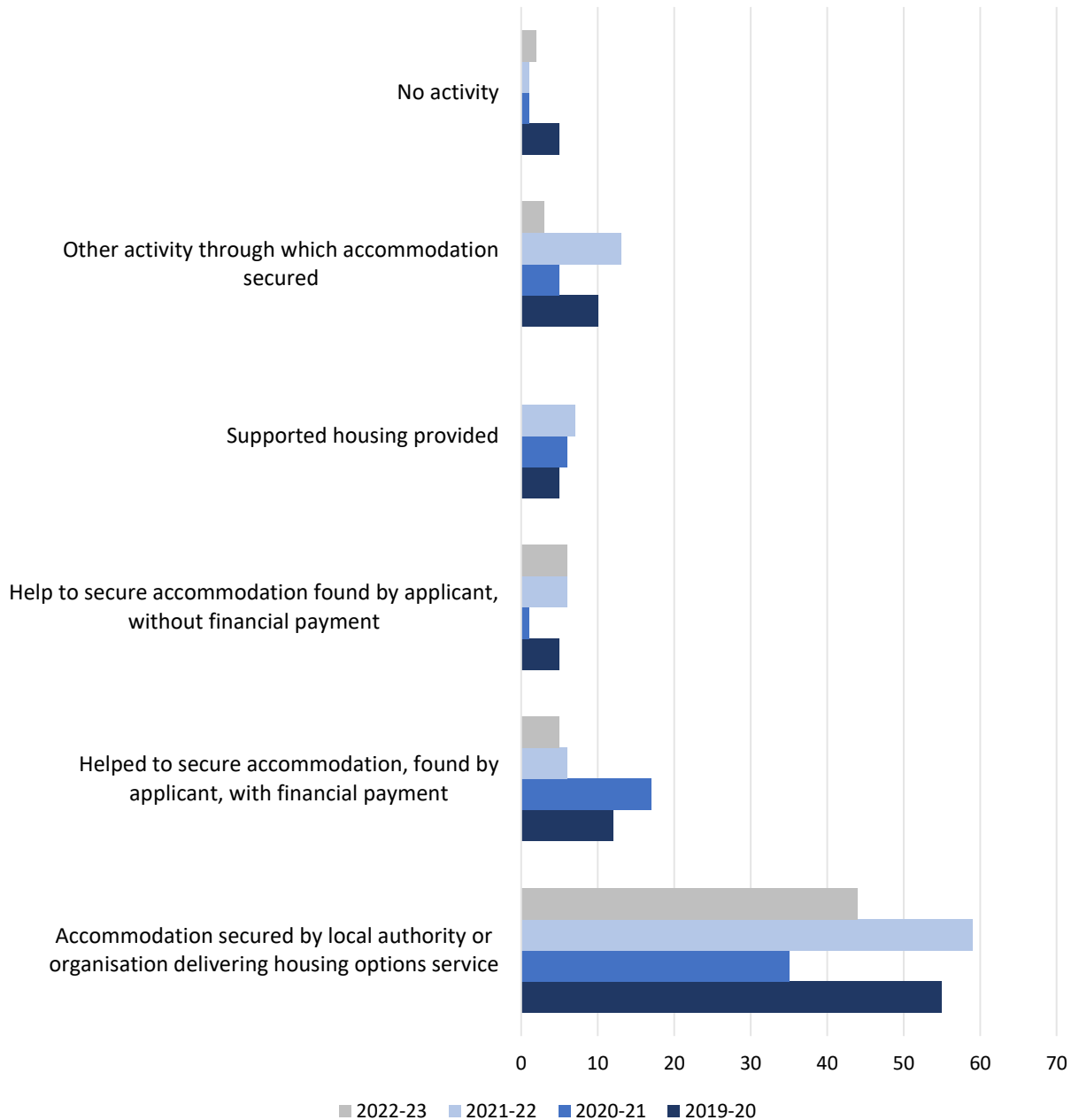
**Chart 14: Type of accommodation secured for households at end of relief duty**



7.7. **MAIN RELIEF ACTIVITY THAT RESULTED IN ACCOMMODATION SECURED FOR HOUSEHOLDS AT END OF RELIEF DUTY**

7.7.1. Chart 15 shows the main activity that resulted in accommodation secured for households at the end of the relief duty. Securing accommodation by delivering a housing options service is the most prevalent relief activity undertaken.

**Chart 15: Main relief activity that resulted in accommodation secured for households**



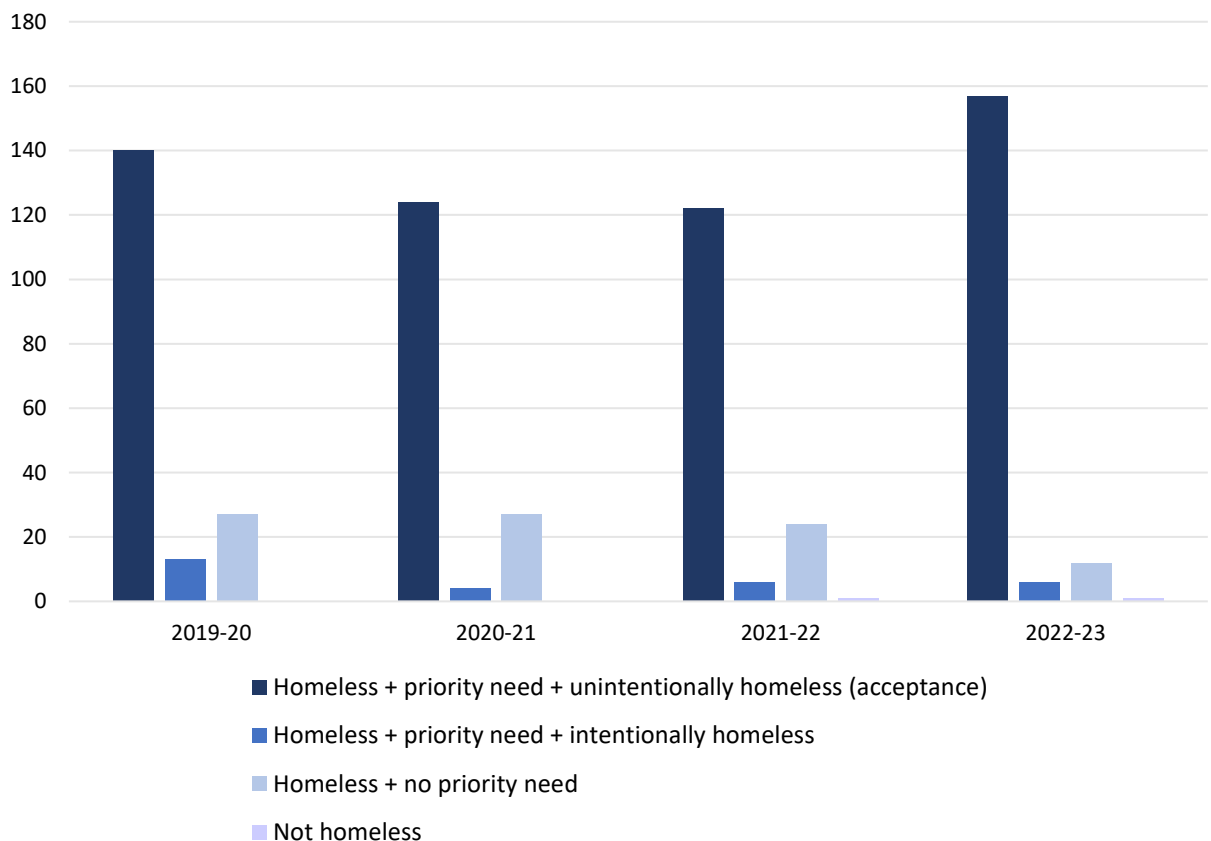
## 8. MAIN DUTY DECISIONS

8.1. If a homeless applicant is still homeless after 56 days of the relief duty, the Council must consider what longer term duties are owed (‘the ‘main duty’). The Council will assess vulnerability, eligibility for assistance, and whether the applicant is in priority need and unintentionally homeless. Where a main duty is owed, the Council will discharge its duty into a private rented sector AST, supported accommodation or social housing. All offers of accommodation must be ‘suitable’ and the Council can end the duty if a suitable offer is refused.

### 8.2. **DECISION ON DUTY AT END OF RELIEF DUTY**

8.2.1. Chart 16 shows the number of decisions at the end of the relief duty between 2019-2020 and 2022-2023. In 2022-2023, 89.20% of decisions found the applicant to be homeless, in priority need and unintentionally homeless (main duty owed), which is above the England figure of 70.50%.

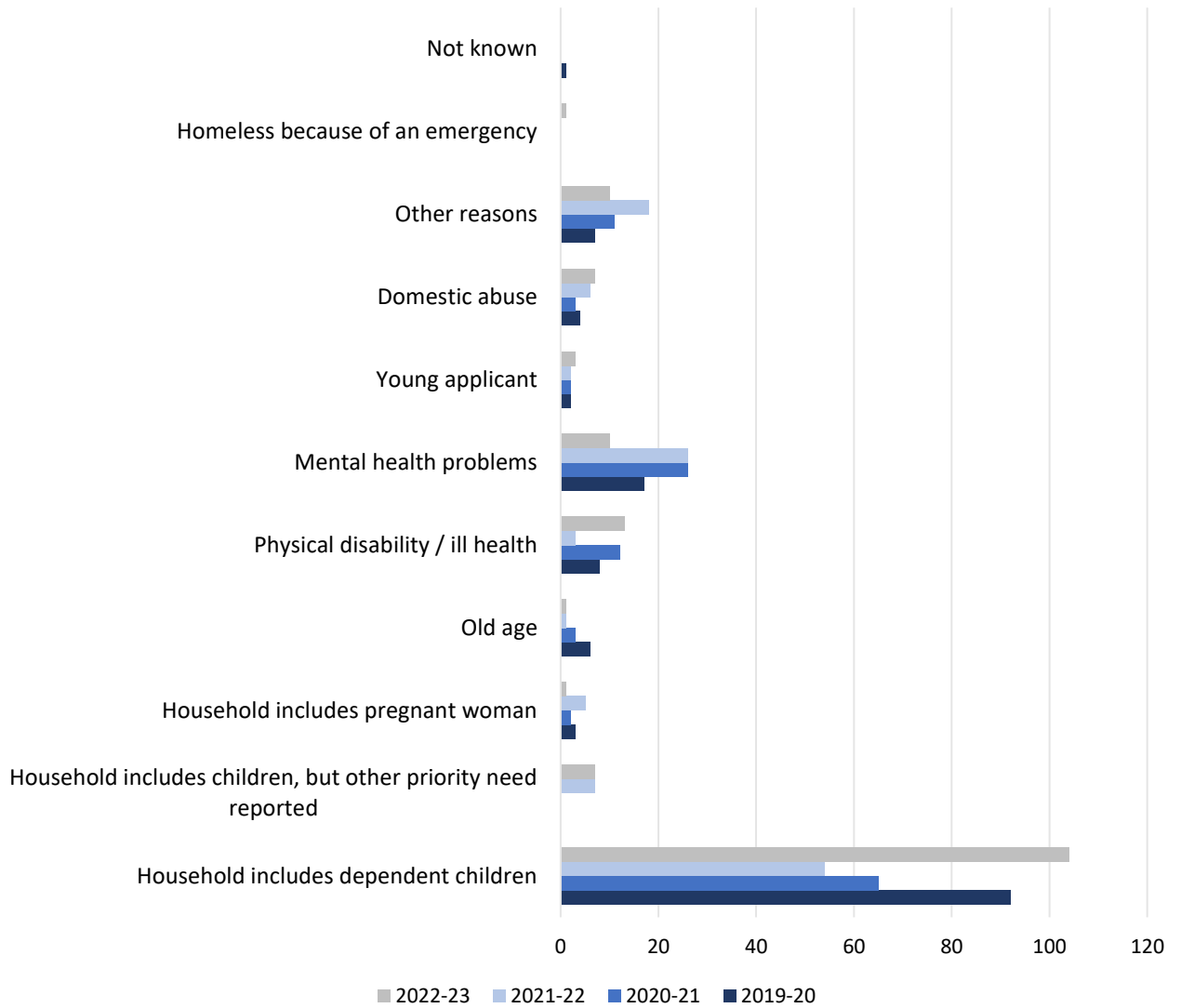
**Chart 16: Decision on duty at end of relief duty**



8.3. **PRIORITY NEED OF HOUSEHOLDS OWED A MAIN DUTY**

8.3.1. Chart 17 shows that between 2019-2020 and 2022-2023, the largest proportion of applicants owed a main duty are in priority need because the household includes dependent children. The second largest priority need category is vulnerability because of mental health problems. Having a history of mental health problems is the highest support need category of all homeless applicants.

**Chart 17: Priority need of households owed a main duty**



## 9. THE HOMELESSNESS SERVICE

### 9.1. **HOUSING SOLUTIONS & PRIVATE SECTOR TEAM**

9.1.1. The Council's Housing Solutions & Private Sector Team is responsible for the delivery of the homelessness service. The team also maintains the housing register, allocates social housing, and works to improve the standard of private rented properties in the borough. The role of the various elements within the team is set out below.

#### 9.1.2. **Homelessness Triage and Assessments**

##### Triage

- First point of contact for all homeless enquiries and applications
- Signposts enquiries to other services
- Administers the process for homeless applications
- Allocates cases to Housing Solutions Officers
- Manages assessment and housing inclusion applications
- Liaises for duty to refer applications
- Provides housing advice

##### Assessments

- Carries out assessments of all household members
- Decides what duties are owed under the homelessness legislation and explains what this means
- Assesses the eligibility of homeless applicants
- Assesses whether the applicant is at risk of homelessness now or in the next 56 days
- Assesses the support needs of every household member
- Creates personalised housing plans
- Supports applicants in finding housing solutions
- Issues decisions in writing to applicants
- Supports applicants in finding alternative accommodation

#### 9.1.3. **Accommodation Service**

- Arranges temporary accommodation (procurement, management, income, welfare support etc.)
- Manages the Dartford Private Leasing Scheme (DPLS) (procurement, management, rents, tenant welfare, support etc.)
- Carries out Part 7 (Housing Act 1996) viewings and key distributions
- Carries out Housing, Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) inspections where required
- Carries out duty to refer prevention work (housing association, Council tenants, private rented sector rent arrears etc.)
- Carries out temporary accommodation and DPLS Complex Panel support work
- Prevents illegal evictions
- Procures private rented sector accommodation (landlord incentives, landlord forums) and forms connections and relationships with landlords in order to help sustain tenancies that have been procured.

#### 9.1.4. **Housing Inclusion Service**

- Helps to maintain tenancies by taking a holistic and practical approach to resolving problems that are putting tenancies at risk, this includes income maximisation, helping people into work with close partnership with the DWP and volunteer organisations.

#### 9.1.5. **Housing Allocations**

- Assesses all housing register applications and changes of circumstances
- Bands applications according to assessed housing need
- Assesses medical forms
- Advertises and allocates Council properties and provides nominations for housing association properties
- Deals with reciprocal lettings, refusals of offers, housing needs assessments and move-on from supported housing
- Refers banding appeals to an appropriate Manager

#### 9.1.6. **Private Sector Housing**

- Investigates and enforces standards in private sector housing (HHSRS)
- Licences Houses in Multiple Occupation and caravan and camping sites
- Provides grant assistance to improve the condition of private properties (e.g. Disabled Facilities Grants)
- Works to return empty properties back into use
- Provides advice and information to private sector landlords
- Provides advice and information for private rented tenants (e.g. on harassment and illegal eviction)

### 9.2. **Review of staffing and service structure**

9.2.1. In order to deliver the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 and focus on a preventative approach, the Council aims to have an appropriate service structure, sufficient staff numbers (with manageable caseloads), and well-trained and supported teams. The Homelessness and Advice Support Team (HAST) inspection identified many positive examples to support this aim, including a clear staffing structure with staff clear on their roles and responsibilities; and a team which is dedicated, positive and knowledgeable. The inspection did however identify areas where improvements could be made to the staffing and service structure, and recommended that consideration is given to reviewing staffing levels and resources.

9.2.2. A review has therefore been carried out and it was agreed to further strengthen the preventative approach, reduce caseloads per officer, shorten waiting times for appointments and have an increased focus on accurate and timely HCLIC submissions. This means the following changes have been made to the Housing Solutions & Private Sector Team:

- An additional Housing Solutions Officer post to focus on homeless prevention and homeless assessments
- The Landlord Relationship Officer post has become a permanent position due to the valuable contribution it makes to working with private landlords to source accommodation for homeless households



- The Triage Assistant roles have become Triage Officer roles, with increased responsibility to focus on early interventions and homeless prevention. Triage Officers will now hold a case load themselves where it has been identified that swift mediation or involvement from the first contact could effectively prevent the case from progressing further.
- A new Administrative Assistant post has been created in the Accommodation Service to assist applicants in temporary accommodation with the basics of setting up their personal charges accounts and to support to officers to focus on moving applicants into settled accommodation.
- An assistant Landlord Relationship Officer has been agreed on a fixed term contract to support the work that the Landlord Relationship Officer has already started, specifically concentrating on sourcing accommodation for those affected by the Ukraine and Afghan displacement crisis.

## 10. ACTIVITIES TO PREVENT HOMELESSNESS

10.1. Preventing homelessness from occurring in the first place is a key priority for the Council. It is essential that the activities carried out to enable prevention are effective and meet the wide-ranging and complex needs of homeless households. Activities carried out to prevent homelessness include those the Council delivers as well as services provided by partner organisations.

### 10.2. **HOUSING HUB**

10.2.1. The Council formed the Housing Hub in April 2018 in response to the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. Situated in the Civic Centre, the Housing Hub is made up of a number of agencies to ensure that homelessness is prevented as far as possible by providing a joined up approach to each homeless situation. The agencies initially involved in the Hub were:

- Department for Works and Pensions
- Revenues and Benefits
- Citizens Advice
- Porchlight
- Mental Health Support
- Specialist Children's Services and Early Help
- Housing Solutions team
- One You

10.2.2. A review of the Hub was carried out in June 2019 and the following agencies agreed to join the Hub:

- Hospital Discharge Team
- YMCA
- LIFE Housing

10.2.3. The impact of the pandemic has meant that the Hub has not been running at full capacity and has changed the way it is working to a more virtual model. Whilst opportunities to bring other agencies on in a virtual capacity is welcomed, it is the Council's belief that being co-located in the Civic Centre fosters strong working relationships and therefore continues to encourage partners to use this as a workspace and be actively involved in case management. As a result, the Council will look to relaunch the Hub and expand membership.

### 10.3. **COMPLEX CASE PANEL**

10.3.1. Established in 2020, the Complex Case Panel is a joint panel between the Council's Housing Solutions & Private Sector Team and the Tenancy Services Team that meets monthly to work together to put in place plans for Council tenants with complex needs who may be at risk of homelessness. Cases that have been referred by the rents team under the 'duty to refer' as well as other complex needs tenants (Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) referrals, Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) cases, hard to engage tenants) are discussed in order to reduce the risk of their cases progressing to court and avoid eviction. The Housing Solutions & Private Sector Manager chairs this meeting in order to directly offer support to colleagues trying to engage complex individuals.

### 10.4. **HOMELESS PREVENTION PAYMENTS**

10.4.1. The Council administers homeless prevention payments to provide a short term solution to homelessness. The payments are commonly used for rent 'top-ups', to cover delays in benefit payments, rent arrear payments and financial incentives to delay evictions.

10.4.2. Once a homeless prevention payment is made in order to prevent homeless, a plan is put in place to support the applicant in reducing the risk of homelessness moving forward.

10.4.3. A timeframe is put in place to continue to check in with the applicant to ensure the situation is still improving.

### 10.5. **DISCRETIONARY PAYMENTS**

10.5.1. The Council's Benefits Service administers discretionary payments for households in serious financial difficulty. The Housing Solutions Team and the Housing Benefit Quality Assurance Team work closely together to make best use of this funding for applicants at risk of homelessness. There are two discretionary payment schemes:

- Exceptional Hardship Payments can help with Council Tax cost for households entitled to Council Tax Reduction or have received Council Tax Reduction within the last 6 weeks
- Discretionary Housing Payments can help with housing costs for households entitled to Housing Benefit or Universal Credit that includes a housing element towards rental liability.

## 10.6. **SANCTUARY SCHEME**

10.6.1. The Council operates a Sanctuary Scheme which works by enabling victims of domestic abuse to remain living in their own homes through the provision of additional security measures to their property or perimeter. The scheme is tenure neutral and is a useful tool for the prevention of homelessness, minimising the use of temporary accommodation and ensuring least disruption for the person subject to the abuse. The scheme is only considered if the perpetrator does not live in the accommodation; it is safe for the victim to remain living there; and, it is the victim's choice to stay. Referrals to the scheme can be made by any person or agency.

10.6.2. Kent County Council is developing a Sanctuary Scheme within their Kent Integrated Domestic Abuse Services (KIDAS) contract which will go live by the end of 2023. However the Council will be continuing its established Sanctuary Scheme alongside the county scheme. As a stock holding local authority, the Council has the advantage of a repairs contractor that can act swiftly if required, so it is keen to continue the sanctuary option unless, after a period of review, it appears there is a 'doubling up' on this provision.

## 10.7. **FINANCIAL EXCLUSION PREDICTIVE ANALYTICS MODEL**

10.7.1. The Council is monitoring the effectiveness of a new financial exclusion predictive analytics model (Xantura) that could support the delivery of the homelessness prevention service. This model provides greater insight into the financial situation of customers, with the aim of supporting the early identification of those who may be starting to struggle financially and could be at risk of presenting as homeless in the future. This system will enable the Council to put early, effective interventions in place before smaller problems escalate to the point of crisis. Colleagues in other local authority areas have indicated that the model is a very effective predictive tool. However, there is a long way to go in terms of Information Governance as the data is extracted from benefits analytics.

## 10.8. **JOINT WORKING PROTOCOLS**

10.8.1. Through the Kent Housing Group (KHG) partnership, a number of Kent-wide joint working protocols have been developed to respond to both national and local demands upon services working to prevent homelessness and support vulnerable groups:

- Joint Protocol to address the needs of intentionally homeless families with children
- Duty to Refer Protocol
- Pre-Eviction Protocol
- Homelessness Local Connection Referral Protocol
- Affordability Protocol
- High Priority Rehousing Reciprocal Scheme
- Domestic Abuse Reciprocal Scheme
- Joint Working Protocol for Young People – split into separate documents for 16/17 year olds and care leavers
- Housing Pathways for Criminal Service Justice Users
- Temporary Accommodation Placing Protocol – exploring standards, cost, and impact on service users

## 10.9. **CITIZENS ADVICE HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION PROJECT**

10.9.1. Since July 2022, Citizens Advice North & West Kent has operated a Homelessness Prevention Project to support people facing actual and threatened homelessness and those at future risk. Working across North and West Kent, the service places a focus on 'upstream' preventative interventions – working in partnership with local authorities, housing associations, Jobcentre Plus, and other organisations to identify those who are struggling. The project:

- Advises and supports people facing homelessness.
- Supports and represents people facing possession proceedings or eviction.
- Liaises and negotiates with landlords, housing associations and mortgage providers.
- Offers support with money management, debt, benefits and income maximisation.
- Helps prevent a situation getting out of control and reaching crisis point.
- Offers support on homelessness applications to local authorities.

## 11. **ACTIVITIES TO SECURE ACCOMMODATION**

11.1. The Council needs to consider that a range of accommodation is likely to be required for people who are, or may become, homeless. This includes temporary, private rented and social rented accommodation. The Council is a social housing landlord and also works to enable the delivery of affordable housing development in the borough.

### 11.2. **TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION**

11.2.1. The Council makes use of various temporary accommodation options for homeless households in the borough and has access to a variety of properties for the provision of temporary accommodation through several providers.

11.2.2. Temporary accommodation takes the form of two types of accommodation; shorter-term and longer-term accommodation.

#### 11.2.3. **Shorter-term temporary accommodation**

Shorter-term accommodation is nightly paid accommodation during the relief or main housing duty stage of homelessness or whilst a household's homelessness application is being assessed. This could be self-contained or shared accommodation (including B&B). As a rule, the Council does not place homeless households into shared accommodation unless it is absolutely necessary.

#### 11.2.4. **Longer-term temporary accommodation – Dartford Private Leasing Scheme (DPLS)**

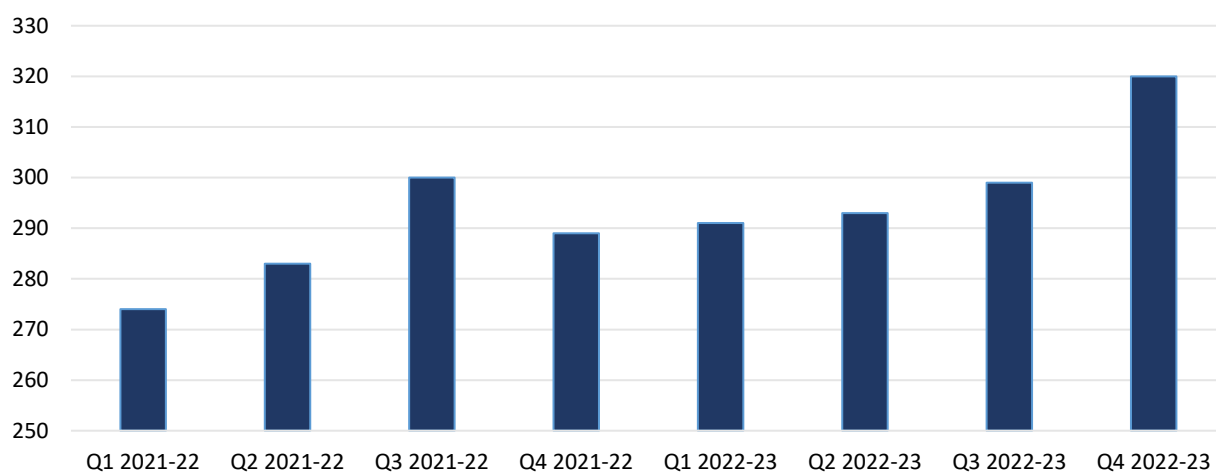
Longer-term accommodation in the Dartford Private Leasing Scheme (DPLS) is used for households where the Council has accepted an ongoing accommodation duty. This accommodation is provided under a license until a suitable offer to discharge that duty can be made by securing accommodation either in social housing or the private rented sector.

DPLS accommodation is provided under leasing arrangements with local landlords. The Council will lease properties for a period of two, three, four or five years, and will undertake to maintain the fixtures and fittings of the property. The rent is guaranteed to be paid quarterly in advance and the Council is responsible for full tenant and rental management. There are currently 163 properties within the Dartford Private Leasing Scheme portfolio.

### 11.2.5. Demand for temporary accommodation

The demand for temporary accommodation between 2021-2022 and 2022-2023 has increased, as can be seen in Chart 18 below.

**Chart 18: Total number of households in temporary accommodation**



(Source: HCLIC, DLUHC)

The level of temporary accommodation used by type between 2021-2022 and 2022-2023 is shown in Table 3 below. The majority of households are placed in 'any other type of temporary accommodation' and also into private sector leased accommodation under the Dartford Private Leasing Scheme.

**Table 3: Temporary accommodation used by type**

	B&B (including shared annexes)	Nightly paid, privately managed, self-contained	Hostels (including reception centres, emergency units and refuges)	Private sector accommodation leased by the Council or leased or managed by a registered provider	Local authority or Housing Association stock	Any other type of TA (including private landlord and not known)
<b>Q1 2021-22</b>	4	32	0	25	0	213
<b>Q2 2021-22</b>	4	33	0	37	3	206
<b>Q3 2021-22</b>	4	31	0	48	10	207
<b>Q4 2021-22</b>	6	36	0	42	10	195
<b>Q1 2022-23</b>	14	82	0	59	2	134
<b>Q2 2022-23</b>	8	89	0	62	2	132
<b>Q3 2022-23</b>	11	84	0	57	2	145
<b>Q4 2022-23</b>	10	85	0	72	3	150

(Source: HCLIC, DLUHC)

The Homelessness Advice and Support Team (HAST) inspection recommended consideration is given to:

- Actively working with households in temporary accommodation (including those in leased accommodation) on an ongoing basis to check suitability, assess needs and encourage private rented solutions as opposed to using the social housing stock.
- Reviewing the Housing Allocations Policy and looking at alternative approaches to assist homeless applicants through, for example, awarding additional priority in certain circumstances.
- Ensuring that the Council is consistently discharging duty and ending temporary accommodation when suitable offers of accommodation are refused in order to support efficient management and move through of temporary accommodation.

The Council has looked at how it makes its social housing stock available to those owed a homelessness duty and are on the housing register, with a new emphasis on advertising some properties specifically for applicants in Band D for the reason of homelessness. Additional priority will be given, for example, if medical or welfare issues are assessed or for applicants that are homeless as a result of fleeing domestic abuse. This is set out in the Allocations Policy.

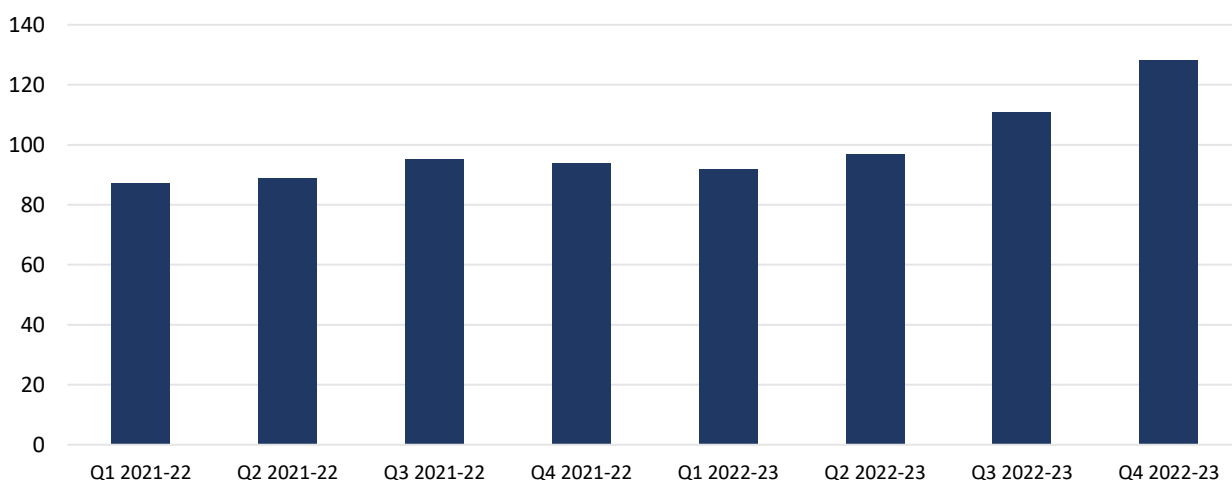
#### 11.2.6. **Out of borough temporary accommodation placements**

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

The number of households placed in temporary accommodation in another local authority district has increased, as shown in Chart 19 below. The numbers accommodated outside of the borough is higher than the England level. For example, in the fourth quarter of 2022-2023, 40% of households in temporary accommodation at the end of the quarter were accommodated outside of the borough whereas the England figure was 28.6%.

Part of the reason for an increase is due to London boroughs placing homeless households into temporary accommodation outside of their areas, including into Dartford. The Council is therefore increasingly placing households into temporary accommodation outside of the borough due to the shortages created by placements into the area by London boroughs who are in a position to offer more financial incentives to landlords. Another factor is landlords selling up and withdrawing from the sector.

**Chart 19: Households placed into temporary accommodation in another local authority district**



(Source: HCLIC, DLUHC)

The Council is working with the Kent Housing Options Sub-group to develop and deliver a new Temporary Accommodation Placing Protocol to ensure that placements out of borough are appropriate and that households are given all the support and guidance to settle in the area and to access the services they need.

#### 11.2.7. **Temporary Accommodation Strategy 2022-2024**

The Council's [Temporary Accommodation Strategy 2022-2024](#) sets out the Council's approach to meeting the temporary accommodation needs of homeless households in the borough, to try and ensure that provision is future proofed. It recognises that the DPLS provides a much more cost effective alternative for nightly paid shorter term accommodation. Under the Strategy, the Council objectives include:

- Strategic objective 1: Accommodation is procured at a fair price; costs are driven down whilst value for money is achieved
- Strategic objective 2: The provision of accommodation is sufficient to manage demand and to meet homelessness duties
- Strategic objective 3: Accommodation is suitable, compliant with health and safety specifications and in a decent condition

#### 11.3. **PRIVATE RENTED SECTOR HOUSING**

11.3.1. The private rented sector plays a vital role in the Council's strategy to prevent and relieve homelessness. Due to the shortage of social rented/affordable housing (see 11.4.), the Council works to encourage private landlords to let their properties to homeless households thereby allowing the Council to discharge its homelessness duty.

11.3.2. However, a buoyant rental market, 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. This is why the affordability of a property is essential in forming part of the suitability assessment undertaken by the Council when making decisions about where to place households.

### 11.3.3. Local Housing Allowance (LHA)

While the demand for private rented housing is high, there is no incentive for landlords to rehouse on LHA rates, work to sustain tenancies or offer longer term lets. Table 4 shows that market rents exceed the LHA in the borough creating a shortfall that the tenant, who is already on a low income, will have to make up.

11.3.4. In addition, most single renters eligible for LHA and aged under 35 are only entitled to the shared accommodation rate, even if they do not live in shared housing. This makes it harder for this age group to rent a whole flat or house in the private rented sector and limits options to bedsits or rooms in a shared house in order to find somewhere affordable.

**Table 4: Private rents compared to LHA rates**

Property size	Mean monthly rent in Dartford*	2022 monthly LHA rate	Shortfall between median rent and LHA
Room	£800	£385.01 (shared accommodation rate)	£414.99
1 bed	£899	£673.14	£225.86
2 bed	£1,163	£847.68	£315.32
3 bed	£1,428	£1,047.10	£380.90
4+ beds	£1,869	£1,296.44	£572.56

\* Rents recorded between 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023  
(Source, Private Rental Market Statistics, ONS, LHA rates, VOA)

### 11.3.5. Section 21 evictions

In 2022-2023, 16.17% of households were accepted the prevention duty due to the serving of a Section 21 notice. A Section 21 notice is served to end an AST, so that the landlord can regain possession without having to establish fault on the part of the tenant, therefore no reason is required for the notice. Hence it is sometimes referred to as the 'no-fault' ground for eviction. This means tenants on ASTs lack security and may be reluctant to exercise their right to secure repairs and/or challenge rent increases due to the ease with which landlords can evict them.

The Government's White Paper (A Fairer Private Rented Sector – June 2022) made a commitment to abolish Section 21 evictions and simplify the tenancy structures, thereby creating greater security for tenants. The Renters (Reform) Bill 2023 will bring forward legislation to deliver this commitment along with other commitments in the White Paper. These include requiring private rented homes to meet the Decent Homes Standard, reforming grounds for possession so that landlords have effective means to gain possession when necessary, only allowing increases to rent once per year, and strengthening tenants' ability to hold their landlord to account and introducing an Ombudsman.

### 11.3.6. Assistance to access private rented accommodation

The Council operates and funds a Deposit Guarantee Scheme, which aims to assist people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness to find suitable private rented accommodation. A deposit guarantee offers a written guarantee between the landlord or agent and the Council. In return for the Council's guarantee, the landlord or agent must agree not to ask for a cash deposit from the household moving into the property.



Although the Council has operated this scheme for many years and it provides much needed support, it is recognised that landlords can also require high initial upfront payments for rent in advance, fees and a guarantor, which means the scheme is not always enough to secure a private rented tenancy for some.

The Council aims to look at ways to encourage private landlords to become more accessible for households requiring accommodation. The Homelessness Advice and Support Team (HAST) inspection recommended consideration is given to:

- Reviewing the offer to landlords to address the inability to procure 12 month plus ASTs
- Establishing a branded 'self-help' rent deposit scheme offer to homeless applicants to empower them to find their own accommodations
- Looking at ways to support applicants to be tenancy ready
- Looking at whether relocation out of the borough through housing mobility schemes can be supported for homeless applicants who are interested.

#### 11.3.7. **Landlords' Forum**

The Landlords' Forum provides an opportunity for landlords to meet on a regular basis with the Council and share ideas about working together to improve services for private sector tenants.

The aim of the Forum is to provide a platform on which landlords can share their experiences of letting accommodation, both with each other and with the Council, to help landlords provide good quality accommodation in Dartford, to increase awareness of changes in legislation, procedures and policies and to respond to landlords' concerns and needs.

Although the Forum has not met for some time, the Council intends to relaunch it in 2024 and ensure there is a regular agenda item on the use of private rented accommodation to discharge the Council's homeless duties and the promotion of the Dartford Private Leasing Scheme and development of other schemes so that further relationships can be built with local landlords. This will also fulfil a recommendation from the Homelessness Advice and Support Team (HAST) inspection.

#### 11.4. **SOCIAL RENTED/AFFORDABLE HOUSING**

- 11.4.1. Social/affordable rented housing is managed by local housing authorities or private registered providers (housing associations). Rents are usually lower than those in the private rented sector, however there is a high demand for this accommodation which means that this type of housing is limited to eligible households with priority need.
- 11.4.2. The social housing dwelling stock in Dartford is made up of 4,236 Council properties and 2,077 Private Registered Provider (e.g. housing association) properties (Source: DLUHC).
- 11.4.3. Social/affordable rented housing is allocated to people in housing need through a choice-based lettings scheme; Kent Homechoice. Applicants are placed into one of four bands (A to D) which determine their level of priority for housing (Band A being the highest priority).

- 11.4.4. In accordance with the [Housing Allocations Policy](#), applicants who are owed a main homelessness duty will be given reasonable preference and placed into Band D. Where properties become available for letting to homeless applicants, they will be advertised specifically for Band D applicants owed a housing duty under homeless legislation. Additional priority will be given, for example, if there are assessed medical or welfare issues or where applicants are homeless as a result of fleeing domestic abuse.
- 11.4.5. Table 5 shows the number of households on Dartford’s housing register from 2019-2020 to 2021-2022, as published by DHLUC from the Local Housing Authority Statistics (LAHS) returns at 31 March each year.

**Table 5: Number of households on the housing register**

2022-23	1,012*
2021-22	1,029
2020-21	962
2019-20	829

(Source: Live Table 600, DHLUC)

\* As at February 2023

- 11.4.6. Unfortunately there is not enough social/affordable rented housing in the borough to meet demand. Latest published data for 2021-2022, shows there were 329 dwellings let (178 local authority lets and 151 housing association lets) (Source: Social Housing Lettings, DLUC). This means that households on the housing register can wait for long periods of time before a suitable property becomes available to let, as illustrated in Table 6.

**Table 6: Housing register average waiting times in months (September 2023)**

Band	Waiting time for 1 bed	Waiting time for 2 bed	Waiting time for 3 bed	Waiting time for 4+ bed	Average waiting time for scheme housing
Band A	7 months	10 months	14 months	17 months	10 months
Band B	21 months	36 months	48 months	72 months	6 months
Band C	72 months	35 months	72 months	-	9 months
Band D	26 months	27 months	20 months	-	12 months

(Source: Data held by the local authority)

## 11.5. **AFFORDABLE HOUSING DEVELOPMENT**

- 11.5.1. Affordable housing development is a very important element of the Council's work to assist households whose needs are not met by the housing market by increasing its supply of homes for people in housing need. It includes social rented, affordable rented and intermediate housing, for example shared ownership.
- 11.5.2. The Council’s current planning policy in urban areas is to seek 30% affordable housing on all new developments of 15 units or more, or where the site is over 1/2 hectare in size. The Council has developed a revised Local Plan which has been submitted to the Planning Inspectorate prior to its adoption and the above is subject to change. Table 7 shows the number of affordable homes delivered in Dartford since 2021-2021 to 2022-2023. Delivery was lower in 2020-2021 due to the impact of the pandemic where housebuilding paused during lockdowns and supply chain issues affected the provision of building materials.

**Table 7: Number of affordable homes delivered in Dartford (including all tenures)**

2022-23	227
2021-22	199
2020-21	95

(Source: Data held by the local authority)

### 11.5.3. **Council new-build programme**

On 25 October 2012, the Council entered into an agreement with the Secretary of State under the terms of which capital receipts from the sale of Council homes were to be retained locally to be invested in the provision of new affordable housing. Since then, the Council has developed seven council owned sites, providing 102 new homes for local people on the Council's housing register. 25 additional units are likely to be delivered during 2024-2026.

### 11.5.4. **Property acquisitions**

Since 2016, the Council has purchased a total of 35 properties on the open market, for allocation to households on the Council's housing register, or allocated directly.

### 11.5.5. **Housing Association properties**

Since 2016, the Council's housing association partners have delivered around 420 new social/affordable rented properties in Dartford.

A consistent stream of new build affordable housing and acquisitions is crucial to being able to assist those who require subsidised housing. The Council will continue its efforts to work with housing associations to increase the supply of affordable housing, including looking for further opportunities under its own new-build and property acquisition programme.

## 11.6. **SUPPORTED HOUSING AND REFUGES**

11.6.1. Considering the range of support needs that many homeless applicants have, some will be most suitably accommodated in supported housing, which can have an enormous positive impact on their quality of life; from their physical and mental health to their engagement with the community.

### 11.6.2. **Supported housing**

The Homelessness Advice and Support Team (HAST) inspection identified that a lack of supported housing is limiting opportunities to prevent and relieve homelessness for single homeless people, and creating a 'revolving door' of homelessness for some people with complex needs. The inspection recommended considering opportunities to invest in supported housing.

### 11.6.3. **Refuges**

In 2022-2023, domestic abuse accounted for 14.95% of prevention and relief cases and 4.46% of applicants accepted the main duty. Victims and survivors of domestic abuse and their children often have to leave their homes for fear of repeated abuse, and may be offered safe accommodation including refuges.

Across Kent there are 107 refuge placements commissioned through Kent County Council which are a mixture of communal and self-contained flats and dispersed accommodation. In 2021, all refuge spaces were for women and two children, although some could accommodate up to four children. Across the county there are also refuge or safe accommodation services that are funded through alternative arrangements. The Kent and Medway Domestic Abuse Strategy 2020-2023 highlights that refuge accommodation for men is a gap in the current service offer in Kent. In addition, securing suitable housing is a barrier to moving on and is identified by providers as contributing to longer lengths of stay in refuge accommodation.

#### 11.7. **EMPTY HOMES**

- 11.7.1. There were a total of 1,307 vacant dwellings in Dartford as of February 2022. This figure includes all tenures, although the majority of empty homes are privately owned. Vacant dwellings account for 2.7% of the total dwelling stock in Dartford based on a current total of 48,385 domestic properties registered within the borough. Of the vacant dwellings, 704 are long-term vacant (empty for 6 months or more) and 165 of those are classed as second homes. (Source: Data held by the local authority).
- 11.7.2. The need to bring empty private sector dwellings back into use is a key Government objective that is part of a wider strategy to tackle housing affordability. It is generally accepted that in a time of housing shortages, empty dwellings represent a wasted resource.
- 11.7.3. The Council brought back into use 102 properties in 2019-2020, 82 properties in 2020-2021, 48 properties in 2021-2022, and 69 properties in 2022-2023.

#### 11.8. **GYPSY, TRAVELLER AND TRAVELLING SHOWPEOPLE ACCOMMODATION**

- 11.8.1. The January 2023 bi-annual count of Traveller caravans, undertaken by local authorities, counted a total of 118 caravans on both authorised and unauthorised sites in Dartford (Source: DLUHC).
- 11.8.2. The Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment identified aggregate needs for 70 pitches for gypsies and travellers (meeting the national definition). Accounting for new provision made and planning permissions, a total of 44 pitches are still required (27 of these are required within the next five years). Sites with delivery totalling 12 new pitches are identified in [draft new Local Plan] policy M12. There is therefore an outstanding net need for 15 further deliverable pitches, plus longer-term need for an additional 17 pitches. There is no outstanding need to identify further accommodation for travelling showpeople plots meeting the national definition.

## 12. ACTIVITIES TO PROVIDE SUPPORT

- 12.1. Homelessness cannot be tackled solely through the provision of accommodation. Some households will require a range of support services, provided by the Council and its partners, to help prevent homelessness from occurring in the first place; or to help sustain accommodation in order to prevent homelessness from recurring; or help to access other services to improve their quality of life and resilience to further problems.

## 12.2. **HOUSING INCLUSION SERVICE**

12.2.1. The Council's Housing Inclusion Service takes a holistic and practical approach to resolving problems, sustain tenancies and prevent homelessness by improving outcomes in a range of areas, including: managing money, maximising income, claiming benefits, dealing with debt including rent arrears, tenancy training, registering with a GP, accessing education, training or work opportunities, onward referrals to other support agencies, and maintaining external partnership contacts.

12.2.2. This service is imperative for working alongside housing colleagues and partner agencies to provide support for households struggling to maintain their housing. Considering a high proportion of homeless applicants are unemployed and the challenges households face, there is a need to grow the service. Examples of how the role of inclusion could be expanded include:

- Having oversight of relaunching the Housing Hub (as covered in 10.2.)
- Organising the Homelessness Forum (a forum for local stakeholder representatives from the statutory and voluntary sectors to engage in the homelessness review, the strategy development process and implementation of the strategy)
- Increasing the Council's resource, via the Rough Sleeper Initiative, to include a tenancy sustainment worker
- Increasing partnership working with employment and education

12.2.3. The services is also working towards producing and rolling out a pre-tenancy video. The video will provide housing applicants with all the information they need to prepare for moving into a tenancy and maintaining the tenancy well.

## 12.3. **TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION SUPPORT**

12.3.1. As well as sourcing and procuring temporary accommodation, the Council's Accommodation Service will provide support to households moving into temporary accommodation. This can range from assisting with furniture and removals in emergency cases, providing storage for those in need, emergency welfare and property checks, and ad hoc works in private rented sector properties, such as clearances and cleaning.

12.3.2. The Accommodation Service established a Temporary Accommodation and DPLS Complex Needs Panel in 2022 to ensure contact is maintained with households with complex needs who are living in temporary accommodation. The panel meets to discuss and put in place plans for any unmet support and welfare needs, ensuring that households continue to receive the support they need throughout their stay in temporary accommodation and to also ensure momentum is kept up on move on plans in place for these households. Households that meet this criteria are MARAC cases, MAPPA cases, households with social services involvement, complex needs rough sleepers, and households at risk of the homeless duty being discharged whilst still in temporary accommodation due to rents arrears and anti-social behaviour.

## 12.4. **DOMESTIC ABUSE SUPPORT**

12.4.1. A person can be in priority need as a result of being a victim of domestic abuse. Domestic abuse is one of the main causes of homelessness in 2022-2023, and requires a multi-agency response to keep victims safe and to provide support.

### 12.4.2. **Dartford Domestic Abuse One Stop Shop**

Established in 2008, the Dartford Domestic Abuse One Stop Shop offers free advice, information and support from a range of agencies under one roof at Dartford Borough Council, Civic Centre, Home Gardens DA1 1DR every Tuesday morning between 9.30am and 12 noon. The service provides access to the Council's Housing Solutions & Private Sector Team, legal representation, Police support and the domestic abuse specialist support provider Clarion. Last year the Council led on moving the One Stop Shop into the Civic Centre in order to centralise the service, making it easily accessible for all services users.

### 12.4.3. **Domestic Abuse Support Services in Kent & Medway**

Domestic Abuse Support Services is an online resource covering Kent and Medway providing advice and information on services available for victims, friends and families, and perpetrators of domestic abuse. It provides information on the service available in each local authority area of Kent. Services covered in Dartford include the Kent Integrated Domestic Abuse Services (KIDAS) to which Clarion delivers the services in Dartford.

### 12.4.4. **Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC)**

The Council's Housing Service is represented at Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARAC). MARAC is a regular meeting where agencies discuss high risk domestic abuse cases, and together develop a safety plan for the victim and his or her children. Alongside the Council's Housing Service, agencies taking part can include the Police, Independent Domestic Violence Advisors (IDVAs), Children's Social Services, Health Visitors and GPs, amongst others.

### 12.4.5. **High Priority Rehousing Reciprocal Scheme**

The High Priority Rehousing Reciprocal Scheme, developed by the Kent Housing Group, provides guidance and procedure for voluntary reciprocal arrangements between the Kent district and borough local authorities. The scheme is intended for applicants in all types of tenure who have become homeless or are threatened with homelessness, who are at risk of domestic abuse, violence or serious harm.

### 12.4.6. **Kent Domestic Abuse Reciprocal Scheme**

The Kent Domestic Abuse Reciprocal Scheme, developed by the Kent Housing Group, enables individuals and families at risk of domestic abuse and who have a social tenancy, to move to a safe area in Kent and Medway whilst retaining their social housing tenancy. This scheme is a formal collaboration between social housing landlords which will be coordinated by an independent agency (Kent County Council, Domestic Abuse Coordinator). It also links and supports the wider Kent & Medway Domestic Abuse Strategy. The Council was an early signatory on this agreement and continues to work with other local authorities to encourage sign up.

#### 12.4.7. **Domestic Abuse Champions**

In 2022, staff within the Council's Housing Service received domestic abuse awareness training delivered by Clarion through the KIDAS Training, Education and Awareness Service. The Council has further developed its expertise and awareness of domestic abuse issues by creating domestic abuse champions whose role is to lead on continuing to cascade further awareness and providing support and advice to staff on domestic abuse issues. The Council has also received White Ribbon accreditation.

#### 12.4.8. **Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA) Accreditation**

In partnership with Kent County Council, the Council has signed up to start the journey to become a member of the Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA) and to start working towards full accreditation within two years.

#### 12.4.9. **Housing Allocations Policy**

The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 imposes duties on local authorities to ensure all victims and their children can access the right support in safe accommodation. The Council works in partnership with Kent County Council to ensure the availability of specialist domestic abuse support services which includes the provision of safe accommodation in refuge. Under the [Housing Allocations Policy](#), to support move on into stable accommodation, the Council will give additional priority to homeless applicants that are homeless as a result of fleeing domestic abuse.

#### 12.4.10. **Domestic Abuse Housing Strategy**

The Council is currently developing a Domestic Abuse Housing Strategy which is likely to be available in early 2024.

### 12.5. **PHYSICAL ILL HEALTH AND DISABILITY SUPPORT**

12.5.1. A person can be in priority need for housing under homelessness legislation if they are vulnerable as a result of physical disability. Physical ill health and disability is the third highest support need of homeless applicants.

#### 12.5.2. **Kent Agency Assessment**

The Council uses the Kent Agency Assessment Procedure (Joint Stock referrals). This assessment procedure is for people who need to move home due to a health or support related need that cannot be met, or is being impaired by, their current accommodation. For example, the person has a critical need to move due to extreme health and support needs that can only be relieved or improved by a move to alternative accommodation; where adaptations are required to enable a person to live independently and their current accommodation is not suitable for those adaptations; or where a person with severe mental health problems is receiving treatment and support from mental health services but is deemed to be at risk of harm in their current accommodation.

#### 12.5.3. **Disabled facilities grants**

The Council administers disabled facilities grants (DFGs) to meet the costs of adapting a property for the needs of a disabled person. The Council also provides discretionary assistance schemes which help people meet their needs without going through the full DFG process. Their aim of this support is to ensure that people can manage their own health and wellbeing, and live independently in their communities for as long as possible.

## 12.6. **MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT**

12.6.1. A person can be in priority need if they are vulnerable as a result of mental illness. Effective support for people with mental health problems is provided through a range of services, including the Community Mental Health Team, Porchlight and Live Well Kent. Support can also be provided through the Kent Agency Assessment Procedure (as outlined in 12.5.2.). With mental health being the highest support need of households accepted as homeless in 2022-2023, it is essential that good relationships exist and opportunities are there to involve mental health services in the formulation and delivery of the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2024-2029. The Homelessness Advice and Support Team (HAST) inspection suggested consideration is given to strengthening partnership working with mental health services.

## 12.7. **SUBSTANCE MISUSE SUPPORT**

12.7.1. People with substance misuse issues approaching the Council for homelessness advice and assistance often have complex needs, which can include mental health problems (dual diagnosis). Services such as Change, Grow, Live (West Kent) provides practical support to people who are struggling with drug and alcohol misuse. As with mental health services, it is important to engage and strengthen partnership working with substance misuse services in the formulation and delivery of the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2024-2029.

12.7.2. In 2023, Kent County Council commissioned a new tenancy sustainment worker through Change, Grow, Live to support local housing authorities to take a trauma informed and supportive approach to help individuals with substance dependencies issues. The aim is to help sustain tenancies and contribute to overall work to reduce homelessness for this cohort. This commissioning includes extending training to Council housing options staff working with this client group.

## 12.8. **YOUNG PERSONS SUPPORT**

12.8.1. A person can be in priority need if they are aged 16 or 17 and not a 'relevant child' or a child in need; or care leavers aged under 21.

### 12.8.2. **Crash pad at the YMCA**

The Council has an established partnership arrangement with the YMCA that has, for many years, successfully supported vulnerable young homeless people, including funding the use of a crash pad at the YMCA to support young people who are homeless in an emergency. This intervention is in place to ensure the Council has an option available for any 16 or 17 year old that is homeless and has nowhere safe to stay. Bed & breakfast accommodation is not considered safe for this vulnerable group and should never be used.

### 12.8.3. **Joint Working Protocol for Young People**

This is a joint protocol between district councils and Kent County Council. The protocol guides each relevant organisation on the approach to supporting young people aged 16 and 17 and care leavers (18+) in an agreed and transparent way, this includes promoting the responsibility of all professionals to ensure that the young people who are being assisted can have access to inclusive independent advice, that will enable them to make informed decisions and choices across all elements of their life.



The Council is working with the Kent Housing Options Sub-group to develop and deliver a new protocol for 16/17 year olds and a new protocol care leavers aged 18+. A training package for all new staff will be delivered to support awareness raising and implementation of the protocols.

**12.8.4. Local offer for care leavers**

12.8.5. The Council is in the process of developing a local offer for care leavers, which will provide information about all the services and support that is available to care leavers from the local authority.

**12.9. SOCIAL SERVICES SUPPORT**

12.9.1. A person can be in priority need as a result of being vulnerable due to old age, learning disability or a vulnerable young person, as well as where the person has dependent children or is pregnant.

12.9.2. A proportion of people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness will be vulnerable adults or have children in the care of the social services authority. The Council will make referrals to the social services authority (Kent County Council) if there is a need identified for care and support services for vulnerable adults to help them live independently. In accordance with the Council's Safeguarding Policy, referrals will be made for adult and child protection where safeguarding concerns are identified.

12.9.3. Section 1(2) of the Homelessness Act 2002 requires the social services authority to give the local housing authority such assistance as may be reasonably required in carrying out a homelessness review and formulating and publishing a homelessness strategy. The Homelessness Advice and Support Team (HAST) inspection suggested consideration is given to strengthening partnership working with the social services authority, particularly with Adult Social Care.

**12.10. ADVERSE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES (ACEs) CHAMPIONS AND TRAINING**

12.10.1. Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) incorporate a wide range of stressful events that children can be exposed to whilst growing up. While the types of adversities may vary, typically they include harms that affect children directly, such as neglect and physical, emotional and sexual abuse; and harms that affect the environment in which the child lives, including exposure to domestic abuse, parental separation or divorce, or living in a home with someone affected by mental health conditions, substance abuse or there are adults in the household who have spent time in prison.

12.10.2. The long term impacts of ACEs can be poorer physical, mental health, health harming behaviours and poorer social outcomes in adulthood. The strongest associations are seen between violence perpetration and victimisation, mental ill-health and substance misuse.

12.10.3. Some homeless applicants can experience a wide range of complex and multiple needs as a result of trauma in their lives. As identified in the Customer Access Review on the homelessness service, the Council's Housing Service recognises that being trauma informed can assist to understand a person's experiences better so that support can be tailored to help improve health and social outcomes. The Council's Housing Service will work towards training staff to be trauma informed and creating an ACE Champion role to support staff in this approach.

## 12.11. **ARMED FORCES SUPPORT**

- 12.11.1. 2.6% of Dartford's population has previously served in the UK Armed Forces. This is lower than the overall England and Wales proportion of 3.8% and the South East proportion of 3.8%. (Source: 2021 Census, ONS).
- 12.11.2. A person can be in priority need if they are vulnerable as a result of having been a member of His Majesty's regular naval, military or air forces. While approaches for homelessness assistance from ex-armed forces personnel is generally low in the borough, the Council will pay due regard to the Armed Forces Covenant Duty in respect of relevant housing functions, including homelessness. Statutory Guidance on the Armed Forces Covenant Duty highlights that a potential disadvantage the armed forces community might experience is lacking knowledge about the civilian housing sector, welfare system and budgeting, leading to difficulty gaining or maintaining a tenancy, or they might possess a general sense of disconnection from civilian society and need supported housing.
- 12.11.3. In 2016, as part of the Dartford Armed Forces Community Covenant pledge, a set of web pages with information for armed forces personnel were made available on the Council's website, specifically to provide information to the armed forces community on a range of services available to them, including, employment, education and skills; health and wellbeing; leisure; money management; and housing. The dedicated housing page provides information and links regarding priority to access social rented/affordable housing, private rented housing options, affordable home ownership and advice on homelessness. There is also an armed forces housing advice leaflet published on the housing section of the website.
- 12.11.4. In addition to the above, Dartford's Housing Allocations Policy gives additional priority to Armed Forces personnel, including bereaved and divorced spouses, civil partners and members of the Reserved Forces who meet certain qualifying criteria.

## 12.12. **FORMER OFFENDER SUPPORT**

- 12.12.1. A person can be in priority need if they are vulnerable as a result of having served a custodial sentence; having been committed for contempt of court or any other kindred offence; or having been remanded in custody.
- 12.12.2. Settled housing and productive use of time are two of the most important protective factors against re-offending and risk of serious harm. Everyone leaving prison should have somewhere safe and secure to live; accommodation provides a foundation to aid in rehabilitation and enables offenders to hold down a job, access healthcare, and reduces the likelihood of them reoffending. Evidence shows that there is a connection between homelessness and reoffending, with prison leavers released without stable accommodation being almost 50% more likely to reoffend (HMIP 2020).
- 12.12.3. The Council's Housing Service is represented on the Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPP) panel. MAPP is a set of arrangements which provides a common framework for the identification, assessment and management of certain offenders in the community. Cases are dealt with through a partnership approach and on the whole, partnerships and associated services for this group are well matured and well developed.

12.12.4. The Housing Pathways for Criminal Service Justice Users is a pathway, developed by the Kent Housing Group (KHG), which aims to improve information about housing and housing options available to offenders, and to improve communication between the partner agencies.

#### 12.13. **AFGHANISTAN, UKRAINE AND OTHER REFUGEE SUPPORT**

12.13.1. Councils support humanitarian efforts to protect and support refugees and have delivered a wide range of support across different government schemes over many years. The Ukraine Family Scheme allows applicants to join family members already living in the UK, and the Homes for Ukraine Scheme allows people living in the UK to sponsor a named Ukrainian national or family to come to live in the UK with them, providing they have suitable accommodation to offer.

12.13.2. While Kent County Council has administered the Homes for Ukraine Scheme in Kent, the Council's Housing Solutions & Private Sector Team has been responsible for carrying out safety checks on host properties.

12.13.3. The Council has worked to help new and existing Ukrainian citizens by providing advice to host families and information on the website and a Welcome Pack designed to help ease people into their new homes. Café Ukraine was also launched to be a safe space for the Ukrainian community and Homes for Ukraine hosts to meet, chat and seek assistance with any specific issues they may have. In terms of supporting Afghan refugees settle in the borough, the Council has provided some DPLS accommodation to assist.

12.13.4. The Housing Solutions Team continues to work with landlords to source accommodation for this client group and the Council expects to see an increase in this cohort coming forward for accommodation when the Home Office starts to end its accommodation provision towards the end of 2023.

#### 12.14. **COST OF LIVING SUPPORT**

12.14.1. Whilst action to mitigate the impact of the cost of living crisis is already happening through the schemes listed below, it is anticipated that providing continued and increased support to households will be needed for some time.

##### 12.14.2. **Food emergencies**

There are a range of local foodbanks operating in the borough to help people who are having difficulty buying enough food. If a resident is in need of urgent food support, they can contact the Council's Emergency Hub during normal office hours or Kent Together (see 12.14.3.).

##### 12.14.3. **Kent Together**

Kent Together is a Kent County Council initiative to help residents find support by directing to services that can help on a range of issues, including income support and benefits, home energy and bills, clothes, food and furniture, housing support, education and childcare costs, finding a job, and transport costs.

#### 12.14.4. **Working Households Fund**

The Council's Community Fund has previously funded summer holiday food vouchers for children entitled to free school meals and grants to voluntary groups to help support families. The Council has also distributed £100 grants to hundreds of pensioners in receipt of qualifying benefits to help offset the rise in energy prices.

In December 2022, the Council introduced the Working Household Fund to support Dartford working households who are just above the benefit thresholds and who are struggling with the increased costs of living. A grant of £100 is awarded to qualifying households.

#### 12.14.5. **Household Support Fund**

The Household Support Fund scheme is administered by Kent County Council and supports vulnerable Kent households in need of help with significantly rising living costs by providing support until the end of March 2023.

Kent County Council is using £2.6 million funding to provide eligible households with support in the form of £100 Post Office cash-out vouchers, to be used to pay for energy costs within the household.

#### 12.14.6. **Kent Support and Assistance Service**

The Kent Support and Assistance Service is administered by Kent County Council and offers support to people having serious difficulties managing their income or facing exceptional pressures because of an emergency or crisis. They can provide essential home items (for example, groceries, baby food, furniture, essential electric appliances, clothing) and help with utilities (prepayment gas and electric, for up to 7 days) and emergency travel arrangements via public transport (for example, to flee a crisis).

## 13. **ROUGH SLEEPING**

13.1. Rough sleeping is the most extreme and visible form of homelessness and a highly complex issue. There are lots of different reasons why someone may end up living on the streets. This could be due to a lack of affordable housing, poverty and unemployment, having nowhere to go after leaving prison, care or the Armed Forces, life events such as a relationship breaking down, mental or physical health problems, or substance misuse.

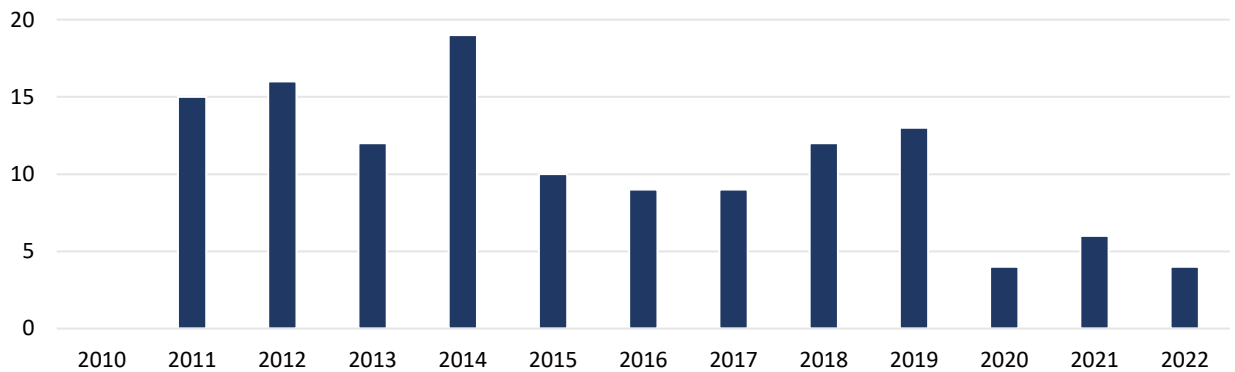
13.2. A person experiencing prolonged periods of rough sleeping is more likely to develop additional mental and physical health needs, substance misuse issues and have contact with the criminal justice system. The more complex needs someone has, the more help they will need to move on from homelessness and rebuild their lives.

### 13.3. **ROUGH SLEEPING IN DARTFORD**

13.3.1. The annual rough sleeping street counts and estimates are single night snapshots of the number of people sleeping rough in local authority areas between 1 October and 30 November.

- 13.3.2. Chart 20 shows that in Dartford, the annual rough sleeping snapshot estimated a total of 4 rough sleepers in 2022. This is down by a third from the 2021 figure of 6. It is estimated that of those sleeping rough, 100% were males, 25% were UK nationals, 50% were EU nationals and 25% were non UK nationals. 100% were over the age of 26.

**Chart 20: Total number of people sleeping rough in Dartford**



(Source: Rough Sleeping Snapshot, DLUHC)

#### 13.4. **ACTIVITIES TO END ROUGH SLEEPING IN DARTFORD**

- 13.4.1. In May 2019, the Council was successful in a joint bid to Government, with Gravesham Borough Council and Swale Borough Council, for Rapid Rehousing Pathway funding to assist in combatting rough sleeping in North Kent. The funding was awarded to jointly deliver a project that would reduce overall numbers across the three local authorities. The funding bid was made in conjunction with Look Ahead and Porchlight who specialise in supporting single homeless people.
- 13.4.2. The funding was used to help rough sleepers access intensive accommodation over the winter months, and beyond, to assist in supporting them into permanent accommodation and to put in place a support system to help them maintain a tenancy.
- 13.4.3. Since then, the Council has been in receipt of Rough Sleeper Initiative funding for Dartford from Government. The funding builds on the work started by the Rapid Rehousing Programme to support people off the streets and to develop their wellbeing and stability; helping to reduce the number of people sleeping rough both in the short and longer term (see 13.4.5. and 13.4.6).
- 13.4.4. It is also important to note that the Everyone In initiative in the early days of the Covid-19 pandemic, was a monumental effort to accommodate all rough sleepers and protect them from the risk of infection, with the Next Steps Accommodation Programme assisting the 'Everyone In' cohort into medium and longer term accommodation.

#### 13.4.5. **Single Homeless Prevention Service**

The 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 (Single Person Homelessness Hub) with a focus on preventing and ending rough sleeping.

The Council's partners, working to end rough sleeping, delivers much valued support in the borough. Porchlight's Rough Sleeper Service team provides outreach to find people who are living on the streets. They help them into suitable accommodation and find them support for any problems they are facing. In addition, the Dartford Churches Homeless Project's works closely with the Council and other agencies to seek out homeless and rough sleepers in Dartford to help them on from homelessness.

#### 13.4.6. **Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP) for Rough Sleepers**

The Council developed and implemented the Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP) for Rough Sleepers in 2010, which sets out the arrangements the Council will put into place to minimise harm or death to anyone who might be sleeping rough during periods of severe weather. When the protocol is triggered, emergency accommodation will be provided for any person sleeping rough in the borough for the duration of the severe weather regardless of eligibility for assistance under homelessness legislation.

Between 2017-2018 and 2019-2020 the Protocol was activated 9 times and assisted 6 rough sleepers into emergency accommodation. In 2020-2021, the Protocol was activated 4 times and assisted 4 rough sleepers. In 2021-2022, the Protocol was activated 2 times and assisted 2 rough sleepers. And, in 2022-2023 the Protocol was activated 4 times and accommodated 2 rough sleepers. The figures over the last two years has reduced as the numbers of people sleeping rough has reduced where the service is getting to a position of being able to support people at risk of rough sleeping much earlier.

A review of the Protocol was undertaken in 2022 to ensure it remains up to date and to adjust to changes in criteria and operational working practices. The Protocol now recognises that increasingly severe weather events occur throughout the seasons (including the impact of rain, snow, wind and heat) and are not confined to extreme cold weather in the winter.

### 13.5. **CHALLENGES FOR ENDING ROUGH SLEEPING**

13.5.1. Whilst Dartford has seen a reduction in the numbers of people sleeping rough, there is still work to do to end rough sleeping for good; particularly in circumstances where an entrenched rough sleeper may be reluctant to engage and refuses to accept support. Meaningful engagement with long-term rough sleepers is challenging as staying focused on the long-term goals of housing can be difficult when an individual is often living with multiple and complex issues in their daily lives. Where assistance is accepted, there is not an adequate supply of accommodation to help those rough sleepers in interim accommodation to move-on to a long term secure home with tailored support.

13.5.2. There are also challenges assisting rough sleepers who are 'persons from abroad' and have no recourse to public funds. Whilst partner support services provide much valued support to rough sleepers to work to resolve their immigration status, the Council's remit to assist in providing long-term housing options is restricted where an individual is ineligible under homelessness legislation.

## 14. RESOURCES

14.1. The Government funds local housing authorities to support them in delivering services to prevent and tackle homelessness. The following sets out the funding allocated to Dartford.

### 14.2. HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION GRANT

14.2.1. The Homelessness Prevention Grant is provided to all local housing authorities. The grant gives them control and flexibility in managing homelessness pressures and supporting those who are at risk of homelessness. The allocation for Dartford is set out below:

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>

### 14.3. ROUGH SLEEPING INITIATIVE

14.3.1. The Rough Sleeping Initiative funding allocated to local housing authorities assists to provide specialist services to help the most vulnerable people off the streets and into secure accommodation.

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

## 15. CONSULTATION OUTCOMES

15.1. The consultation activity that forms part of this review aims to ensure that partner organisations have an impact on the formulation of the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2024-2029. Listening to our partners' experiences and hearing their voices is central to understanding how the Council can respond to and reflect their views and needs as part of a strong partnership working approach.

### 15.2. PARTNER AGENCIES – HOMELESSNESS FORUM

15.2.1. The Council first started involving partner agencies in the homelessness review process at the Dartford Homelessness Forum meeting in December 2022. A live poll engaged participants to capture their initial thoughts on what is working well; what can be done better; and what they would like to see prioritised in the new strategy. At the meeting in March 2023, focus group work explored these areas more in-depth. The outcomes of this engagement work is set out, as follows:

**15.2.2. Good practice – what examples of good practice in the prevention of homelessness does Dartford perform well at?**

- The homelessness service is proactive – e.g. it is solutions focused, it ‘thinks outside of the box’, it finds ways to avoid intentionally homeless decisions, it finds fast and early solutions for clients, and it streamlines and provides effective support.
- The service is accessible – e.g. it does not gate keep, it is transparent, it shares information, it gives advice to pass on to clients.
- There is a focus on prevention – e.g. working with landlords and excluders (e.g. family or friends), interventions on Section 21 evictions and rent arrears to prevent people losing their homes.
- Communication and engagement is effective – e.g. staff are approachable, knowledgeable and honest, responsive to queries, willing to give advice, and communication is kept open.
- There is a strong team culture – e.g. staff are willing to ‘go the extra mile’, staff share common goals and aims.
- There is an appetite for partnership working – e.g. through the Homelessness Forum, the Housing Inclusion Officer and Landlord Relationship Officer roles, working in partnership with the food bank.
- The Single Persons Homelessness Hub is working well.

**15.2.3. Challenges – what are the key challenges facing households at risk of homelessness in Dartford?**

- Life events and social causes put people under considerable strain and increased risk of homelessness – e.g. debt and money management, cost of living increase, addiction and substance misuse, domestic abuse, disability, high private sector rents vs low Local Housing Allowance rates, county lines, challenging behaviours.
- Sustaining tenancies – e.g. households with complex needs dealing with multiple issues can face difficulty maintaining their tenancy.
- Insecure housing – e.g. vulnerability to Section 21 evictions (so called ‘no fault’ evictions).
- Lack of housing – e.g. in the local area, availability of larger properties/implications of the benefit cap, opportunities for move on from temporary accommodation, refuge and other short-term supported accommodation.
- Awareness of the homeless prevention service and the Council’s duties – e.g. households may not know where to go for help for early intervention and risk approaching for help when at crisis point.
- That expectations are managed – e.g. people still want and expect social housing but there is not enough social housing for everyone.
- Service pressures – e.g. due to the complexities and number of clients, this places pressure on the service and can impact on customer care.

**15.2.4. Improvements – what are the gaps in service provision/areas for improvement that could be made in the prevention of homelessness in Dartford?**

- Improve awareness of the homelessness service to all communities – e.g. educate the public about what help is out there and where to go, and encourage approaching for help at an earlier stage.
- Strengthen earlier intervention and prevention.



- Increase advice services – e.g. create a public hub/drop-in service, create a direct line for emergencies.
- Increase resources – e.g. more funding for staff so they can focus on prevention, more Housing Inclusion Officers, increase access for clients and agencies.
- Focus on gaps in service provision for those approaching for assistance with complex needs – e.g. mental health, substance misuse, dual diagnosis, and domestic abuse.
- Procure more private rented accommodation and a variety of options in this sector.
- Improve relationships with private landlords – e.g. educate landlords about their legal duties towards tenants, break down discrimination.
- Strengthen partnership working – e.g. have more agencies represented at the Housing Hub, cross-agency meetings.
- Be more trauma aware.
- Better communication.
- Share best practice and learning from feedback – e.g. regularly look for solutions, feedback regularly, review performance, monitor achievements.

15.2.5. **Working together – how best can we work together to tackle homelessness in Dartford?**

- Continue with existing partnership working opportunities – e.g. networks, regular meetings, Homelessness Forum to review the strategy on a regular basis, Housing Hub.
- Work together on early intervention and prevention – e.g. share the load.
- Encourage joint agency working in personalised housing plans.
- Introduce MARAC type multi-agency panel meetings for complex cases and more support for families e.g. MASH (multi-agency safeguarding hub).
- More information sharing amongst partners.
- Equipping partners with knowledge about the homelessness service in order to signpost and help manage expectations – e.g. develop newsletters, arrange coffee mornings.
- See challenges as a way to get better.

15.2.6. The Council would like to express thanks to its partners for their views and contributions to this Homelessness Review.

## 16. PRIORITIES FOR A HOMELESSNESS AND ROUGH SLEEPING STRATEGY 2024-2029

### 16.1. **PRIORITIES**

16.1.1. This homelessness review has highlighted that the Council and its partners already do a great deal to prevent homelessness and tackle rough sleeping in Dartford. However, it has also identified key challenges and areas to focus on continuous improvement in the way homelessness and rough sleeping is responded to.

16.1.2. From this review, 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 DPLS 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 help people recover from homelessness

16.2. **NEXT STEPS**

- 16.2.1. This review will be made available on the Council's website for all stakeholders and the wider public to view at <https://www.dartford.gov.uk/housing-policy/housing-strategy-policy-documents>. Paper copies can also be obtained upon request by contacting the Housing Policy Team at [HousingPolicy@dartford.gov.uk](mailto:HousingPolicy@dartford.gov.uk), or writing to Housing Policy Team, Dartford Borough Council, Civic Centre, Home Gardens, Dartford, Kent, DA1 1DR.
- 16.2.2. The Council will develop its Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2024-2029 based on the findings of this review and will consult members of the public, internal and external stakeholders and partners on the draft strategy.
- 16.2.3. The strategy will then be updated based on the feedback received, and then finalised and approved and implemented together with an action plan.

## APPENDIX 1

# DELIVERY OF THE PREVIOUS HOMELESSNESS & ROUGH SLEEPING STRATEGY

The previous Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2018-2023 recognised that the Council's approach to tackling homelessness would require specific tailored actions to prepare for and meet the requirements of the new Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.

The Strategy was then refreshed in 2019 to have regard to the Government's Rough Sleeping Strategy 2018, which required homelessness strategies to be reviewed and relaunched by the end of 2019 to include a specific focus on addressing rough sleeping.

The key achievements from the previous Strategy include:

- Introduction of a homelessness triage process that manages demand on the service and ensures that applications are proactively responded to in order to maximise prevention opportunities.
- Introduction of an innovative Housing Hub sited at the Council offices and made up of a number of agencies. The Hub aims to ensure that homelessness is prevented as far as possible by providing a joined-up approach to different homeless situations.
- Funding an emergency crash pad in a supported accommodation setting for young people experiencing homelessness, including 16/17 year olds so there can be a holistic response to the risk of homelessness and to avoid use of unsuitable bed & breakfast type accommodation for this vulnerable group.
- Introducing the Single Homeless Prevention Service in partnership with Porchlight and Dartford Churches Homeless Project (New Avenues), which assists single homeless people, including rough sleepers into accommodation through outreach and a weekly drop-in service. This incorporates the Council's commitment to working with the Winter Shelter and ensuring all rough sleepers' accommodation needs are assessed.
- Reviewing and updating the information available on the Council's website about housing options and homelessness assistance; and, introduced information leaflets for specific client groups at risk of homelessness, in line with the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.
- Implementing new IT systems and reviewing all outgoing correspondence and the Housing Allocations' Policy to meet the requirements of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.
- Developing a referral mechanism to ensure relevant partners and agencies can refer customers that may be at risk of homelessness.
- Facilitating regular meetings with the Dartford Revenues & Benefits Team to make use of the Discretionary Housing Payment pot.
- Ensuring that pre- eviction protocols are being utilised by the Tenancy Services Team and partner housing associations.

- Developing an accessible internet based referrals portal for partner organisations to refer homeless clients under the duty to refer, brought in by the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. Whilst there are specified public bodies with a statutory duty to refer, the Council encourages referrals from any agency concerned about a client.
- Recruiting a Landlord Relationship Officer to secure additional accommodation in the private rented sector. This post was initially funded by the Private Sector Access Funding received externally, however, it has now been funded via a growth bid and become established in the Housing Solutions Service as a permanent post.
- Funding from the Private Sector Access Fund was utilised to create 70 insurance policies for landlords which helped to secure accommodation. The original aim was to purchase 200 of the insurances, however the scheme was halted in 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic and the underwriters pulling out from the scheme. The scheme is still used but to a lesser degree due to rising costs of this particular provider. The Council continues to explore alternative landlord insurance products that protect both the landlord and the tenant.
- A full service review of the Housing Solutions Team has been completed with a fresh emphasis on preventing homelessness and keeping clients in their existing homes wherever possible.
- The Dartford Private Leasing Scheme (DPLS) continues to be reviewed on an annual basis in order to maximise its potential and have oversight of its value for money. The service now has a full time Maintenance Officer, overseeing the voids process to speed it up and ensure best value in costs of voids. It was decided that the Council would not progress with the plan to convert a number of DPLS licences into assured shorthold tenancies with the landlord taking back management of the property. It is the Council's aim to build on and increase the DPLS scheme that provides a more settled and stable form of medium term temporary accommodation.
- Throughout the period of the previous strategy the Council worked closely with the Kent Homeless Connect contract provider for the service commissioned by Kent County Council. This contract has ended in 2023. Some supported accommodation was provided in North Kent (not located in Dartford), with some positive outcomes. The Council is now looking for new ways to continue providing the units for single homeless people with complex needs.
- During the course of the strategy, the Council has seen a change in the way DHLUC has provided funding opportunities. This has changed from a Rapid Rehousing Pathway to Rough Sleeper Initiative funding with some supported accommodation provisions attached, which the Council has always successfully bid for and implemented.
- The Landlord Relationship Officer has actively secured over 280 private rented sector properties since 2019, establishing good connections and fostering new relationships with potential landlords all the time.
- Securing more housing for nightly paid accommodation has been challenging but the Council continues to focus on the DPLS scheme to provide a better quality and more cost effective provision of medium term temporary accommodation.
- The Council jointly led on the Domestic Abuse One Stop Shop through the pandemic, supporting the KIDAS provider, Clarion, to deliver a virtual offer. Once this was returned to a face to face setting, the Civic Centre was made available to more centralise the One Stop Shop delivery for

Dartford residents. Quarterly reviews of the Kent wide One Stop Shop service is attended by the Housing Solutions & Private Sector Manager and monthly operation meetings held with Clarion to monitor the service.

- MARAC is consistently attended by Housing Solutions and the Housing Solutions & Private Sector Manager is trained as a MARAC chair, ensuring commitment from the Council to support this vulnerable group.
- The North Kent Domestic Abuse Forum is jointly chaired, since 2019, by the Housing Solutions & Private Sector Manager, ensuring continued strong partnership in this sector, creating a survivor centred action plan for reducing violence against women and girls in the area.
- All MAPPA meeting and MAPPA Housing Panels are attended by a senior officer of the Council regardless of whether the subject is known to the service. This ensures the interests of Dartford residents are protected and opportunities to assist vulnerable and complex individuals are dealt with at the earliest point where needed.
- Partnership working across the county continues with attendance at Kent Housing Options Group, Kent Housing Group, the Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Board, Strategic MAPPA Board
- National and local policy changes are monitored by receiving weekly updates from DLUHC, subscription to the Local Government Association and Homeless Link which ensures early notification of changes to government policy, consultations on new legislation and proposed funding opportunities.

**If you or anybody you know requires this or any other council information in another language, please contact us and we will do our best to provide this for you. Braille, Audio tape and large print versions of this document are available upon request.**



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