

Stoke-on-Trent City Council



City of **Stoke-on-Trent**

Directorate of Housing, Development & Growth

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Strategic Review

Homelessness & Rough Sleeping

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Executive Summary:

The Homelessness Act 2002 requires all local housing authorities to carry out a review of homelessness every 5 years and to use the findings to publish a Strategy setting out how the authority will prevent and reduce homelessness and provide support to those affected by it.

The impact of homelessness and rough sleeping is felt across public and voluntary sectors and within local communities alike. The last five years has seen several national policy and socio-economic developments, including the embedding of the Homelessness Reduction Act (2017), the Covid Pandemic of 2020 and the cost of living crisis, each of which have had a significant impact on homelessness and rough sleeping. Despite significant financial investment and strategic pledges from Government over recent years, homelessness is still increasing at both a local and national level.

During the lifetime of the previous Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy (2020-2025), Stoke-on-Trent City Council has achieved many positive outcomes, including; the launch of a new Homelessness Hub, the creation of 74 new bed spaces through various rough sleeping programmes, the implementation of the Changing Futures programme for people with complex needs, a range of new measures to improve access to the private rented sector, the introduction of a Pre-Eviction Protocol within supported housing providers, the commission of the new Homeless Healthcare Service, the recruitment of several new specialist members of staff and the award of around £20m of funding between 2020 and 2025 for new rough sleeping initiatives.

These successes are characterised by strong partnership work across statutory, voluntary and charitable sectors in the City underpinned by a new Homelessness Pledge and drawn together through Homelessness Reduction Board

i) The Profile of Homelessness in Stoke-on-Trent:

There are several key demographic factors, which have an impact on homelessness in different localities across the country. Stoke-on-Trent still suffers today from the significant post-industrial decline of the pottery industry and whilst it is not unique in this position, other poor economic and social structures (as identified in the Indices of Deprivation) combine to exacerbate problems locally.

The 2021 Census and more recent data from the Annual Population Survey 2022, reveal that the adult population of Stoke-on-Trent is significantly more likely to be classified within a “low socio-economic” group, which includes people who are in routine, unskilled occupations and those who have never worked and are long-term unemployed. Crisis research from 2022 indicated that families already on the breadline are facing an average £372 deficit between their Local Housing Allowance and the cost of the cheapest rents in

their area. In Stoke-on-Trent this gap is substantially less, but still represents a significant shortfall, with an average weekly shortfall of £107.07 for a 3-bedroom property, £71.53 for a 2-bedroom property and £58.19 for a single-bedroom property.

Short-term supported housing services are commonly, although not exclusively, the primary route out of rough sleeping and is a valuable accommodation option for vulnerable households. Local supported housing providers report a growing number of people with more complex support needs across the city, which in turn is leading to the need for more flexible approach to housing. In general, households are reported to be staying longer in supported housing environments simply because there is no suitable move on option available to them. A localised move-on audit was carried out to assess the extent of the situation, which revealed that there are 211 people currently ready to move on from supported housing services, with only 26 of those having a suitable option identified. This deficit of affordable, suitable move on properties across all sectors is expected to increase over the next 12 months.

According to the most recent Housing Needs Assessment (2020), there is an estimated overall shortfall of 139 affordable homes every year in Stoke-on-Trent, which is heavily oriented towards single bedroom properties. The housing stock in the city comprises large numbers of terraced properties and post-war local authority housing estates although, following almost 40 years of the “Right to Buy” scheme, the Council’s housing portfolio has reduced substantially. As social housing becomes more difficult to access, with higher demand for fewer properties, the private rented sector is becoming the only option for many households with the associated challenges of higher rents, short term tenancies and poor-quality housing at the lower end of the market. The local authority’s Private Sector Housing Team is utilising various Government schemes and incentives to improve the standard of provision in the sector to help increase the portfolio of good quality, secure accommodation.

The image most people conjure up in their minds when presented with the concept of homelessness is people sleeping rough on the streets. Rough sleeping is obviously one of the most visible forms of homelessness, but the reality is that it is only the ‘tip of the iceberg’.

3,898 people sleeping rough across England on a single night in 2023

44 individuals on the rough sleeper caseload in Stoke-on-Trent in 2024, of which **30 (68%)** were entrenched / long term

Estimates of **300,000** people hidden from statistics in temporary shelters, sofa surfing or unsuitable accommodation around the UK

98.9% of households approaching Stoke-on-Trent are owed a legal duty. Majority owed a Relief Duty

Most people approaching Housing Solutions for homeless assistance are aged between **25-44**

The numbers of young people (18-24) needing homeless assistance has increased over the last two years

88% of applicants are British Citizens. But there is an increasing number of non-uk / EEA citizens granted Refugee status and limited / indefinite leave to remain

Significant increase over the last 3 years in the number of single adults owed a homeless duty

Women's homelessness is often under-reported and commonly linked to abuse

The prevalence of female rough sleepers has doubled in Stoke-on-Trent in last 5 years. Now amounting to **29.5%** of the rough sleeper caseload

Support needs of people approaching as homeless are often high levels of mental and physical ill-health, domestic abuse and substance dependencies

Support needs within housing related support services vary according to age

In general, people within HRS services have poor mental health and substance dependency issues

Under 25's need more support to stay safe, build confidence and relationships and over 25's need help with overall health, offending and substance misuse

In Stoke-on-Trent, the most common reasons for losing settled accommodation are families and friends no longer willing to accommodate and the loss of a private rented tenancy

Substantial increase in number of people being evicted from supported housing in 2023/24

ii) Wider factors of Homelessness and Rough Sleeping:

Statutory homeless figures and performance data provide a useful indicator as to the reasons why people are losing their accommodation, in reality they simply highlight the event immediately prior to a period of homelessness, rather than give any insight into the root cause.

Crisis asserts, through its research, that people are pushed into homelessness as a result of general systemic inequality, poverty and income levels that fail to keep up with the cost of living. It is these structural factors, in combination with individual factors such as life events, trauma affecting families and relationships, mental and/or physical health problems or substance misuse, which combine to put people under considerable strain, which can often lead to the loss of a home.

Supported Housing provides a crucial safety net for some of the most vulnerable people in society.

It can also ease pressure on NHS and Care services. Estimates suggest that collectively, it saves the public purse around £940 per resident per year.

Revenue funding reductions over the last decade has unsurprisingly reduced the supply of supported housing.

Young People with experiences of homelessness are one of the most vulnerable groups of people and continue to make up approximately half of the people accessing homeless services across the country. In Stoke-on-Trent, a total of 1494 people accessed housing related support services (including the Rough Sleeper Service), of which 24% were under 25.

Children in homeless households are more likely to be in significantly poorer health than those who have a stable and secure home.

Research has shown that nationally, over 60% of Children in Care are there due to neglect or abuse. In Stoke-on-Trent, that figure was 67% in 2023/24 and rose to 80% during the Covid pandemic.

Overall, there has been a 47% increase in the number of children coming into Care in Stoke-on-Trent over the last decade.

Multiple Exclusion Homelessness is a severe form of disadvantage involving not only homelessness, but also substance misuse, mental ill-health and involvement with the criminal justice system.

It is reported that multiple complexities often stem from adverse childhood experiences and, without the right care and support at a young age, can develop into self-medicating substance misuse and either consequent or contributory mental health problems and significant social exclusion.

The most recent figures suggest that there are around 2,155 people in Stoke-on-Trent with overlapping problems of homelessness, mental ill-health, substance misuse and offending behaviour.

Immigration: The protection provided by a country to someone who is fleeing persecution in their own country is called Asylum. Support for Migrants can be both complex and confusing, requiring a specialist understanding of the associated legal and Home Office systems. Without this specialist support, Migrants can often face severe hardship, homelessness and destitution.

Crisis research into the scale, causes and impact of homelessness amongst EEA citizens reveals that EU citizens and other non-UK nationals living in the UK are almost twice as likely than the general population to experience homelessness and almost three times as likely to end up sleeping rough.

The causes of homelessness within this cohort are largely similar to the rest of the population, but they are compounded by restrictions that limit the support they can receive. This means that when they are faced with some of the structural or individual factors which can lead anyone into homelessness, this cohort are often left without a robust safety net.

Homelessness and **Health** are intrinsically linked. It is widely reported that people who experience long-term homelessness die on average 30 years before those who have never been homeless.

Around a third of homeless deaths are from treatable medical conditions, which are often not picked up until they become more serious, with the prevalence of infectious diseases like Tuberculosis, Hepatitis C and HIV being significantly higher than in the general population. People who are dependent on alcohol also struggle to benefit from detoxification programmes on account of insecure accommodation.

Offending: Street activity, such as begging, is a concern both nationally and in Stoke-on-Trent. Begging is an indicator of poverty and so, whilst some street beggars will have access to accommodation, it does not necessarily follow that they are adequately provisioned.

Staffordshire Police reports a significant increase in levels of Anti-Social Behaviour recorded under the category of Begging or Vagrancy over the last 12 months. Figures from the first 6 months of 2023 compared with the first 6 months of 2024 reveal a 47% increase in the number of recorded incidents, with the most noticeable increase seen around high footfall stores and food outlets both within and outside of town centres.

iii) Homelessness Prevention:

The Homelessness Reduction Act (HRA17) came into force in April 2018, putting an important focus on the prevention of homelessness. The availability of effective prevention measures can be a far more cost-effective option than a reactive response to a crisis situation.

Homelessness can often be predicted and in those cases, should never be inevitable. There have been a number of studies over the years attempting to calculate the 'true' financial cost of homelessness, with a number of methodological limitations. The most recent Governmental Evidence Review of 2012, asserts that if 40,000 people were prevented from becoming homeless in one year in England, it would save the public purse around £370m. The report claims that the financial burden of the issue is likely to be between £24,000 and £30,000 (gross) per person per year.

In addition to the financial cost, there is also the undoubted human cost of homelessness. The distress of losing a home can cause or intensify social isolation, create barriers to education, training and paid work and can seriously impact a person's mental and physical health.

iv) The Future of Homelessness and Rough Sleeping:

Homelessness in Great Britain is forecast to continue to increase over the coming decade. Research has identified some immediate pressures, such as the cost of living crisis and general housing shortages, which are likely to lead to further increases in homelessness and destitution across the country. Those risks, although projected at a national level, will also have an impact locally, as vulnerable people within Stoke-on-Trent continue to face the barriers presented by having low household incomes and the difficulties of accessing affordable and secure accommodation in the city.

There are some key challenges facing Stoke-on-Trent over the coming few years, which if addressed, will help to make a considerable improvement to the situation locally:

Challenge 1: Raising the priority of prevention services

One of the key messages emerging from both national research and from preliminary discussions with colleagues and partners is that the prevention of homelessness should be central to decision making. Effective homelessness prevention measures however, often require heavier investment in the short-term in order to achieve significant savings in the longer-term.

With this in mind, the challenge, for the local authority, is to find the right balance between the requirement to make immediate savings and the need to commit to and invest in upstream prevention services, to address the root causes of homelessness in order to achieve longer-term savings and significantly reduce the scale of the problem.

Challenge 2: Improve affordability and supply of suitable accommodation

Although Stoke-on-Trent remains one of the more affordable areas in the country, the cost of housing, including rising rent levels and household bills, is arguably one of the biggest pressures facing people on low wages, people in receipt of welfare support and those who are "economically inactive", which combined makes up a significant proportion of the city's population.

There is an imbalance between demand for housing and the availability of suitable, affordable housing options in Stoke-on-Trent, an issue which has been recognised within the current Housing Strategy (2022-27). The Housing Strategy pledges to drive growth and enhance the housing offer across the city. The pledge also includes the commitment to work

closely with local Registered Providers to encourage increasing their supply of supported accommodation within the city.

The challenge for the local authority is how best to take a unified and collaborative approach to achieving the recommendations set out within its Housing Strategy and to focus on driving forward realistic and achievable measures to improve the affordability and supply of suitable accommodation for the most vulnerable residents of the city.

Challenge 3: Focusing the agenda on specific vulnerable groups of people

There are some groups of people who, it could be argued, need a particular focus when it comes to provision of homeless services, which goes well beyond simply the provision of accommodation. The challenge for the local authority is how to prioritise the most vulnerable residents in the community through a multi-agency, trauma informed and dynamic way, whilst keeping oversight of everyone who experiences homelessness and rough sleeping.

This Review highlights that Women, Young people and Care Leavers are particularly vulnerable to homelessness and rough sleeping and that people who are entrenched in the homeless pathway also need specialist assistance when looking at the future of homelessness. This is of particular relevance with Stoke-on-Trent experiencing some of the highest levels of children in care in the country. Clear pathways are required to ensure homelessness is prevented as they leave the care system.

v) Conclusion:

Homelessness and rough sleeping have increased both nationally and locally since the completion of the last review in 2020, despite significant investment by the previous Government and ongoing investment by the Council, although some notable and positive outcomes have been delivered in the last 5 years.

This Review highlights just some of the many complexities associated with homelessness, including the vast array of factors which can lead to homelessness in the first place, the impact on people's physical and mental health when they experience any form of homelessness, the challenging housing situation, with shortages of appropriate, affordable accommodation and insufficient levels of local housing allowance and the economic crisis which exists currently. Each of these issues combines to make it increasingly difficult for individual local authorities to find useful resolutions to the problem.

Stoke-on-Trent has been recognised as having an extremely strong multi-agency approach to tackling homelessness and rough sleeping and the next strategy will need to build on this and continue to develop innovative approaches to preventing and relieving homelessness that focuses on prevention and support for those at risk of experiencing the most harmful outcomes.

1. Introduction:

The Homelessness Act 2002 mandates all local housing authorities to carry out a review of homelessness at least every 5 years and to use the findings of that review to publish a Homelessness Strategy in consultation with local partners and stakeholders. The Strategy must set out how the authority will prevent and reduce homelessness and provide support to those affected by it.

This Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Review demonstrates how the impact of all forms of homelessness can be felt within both the public and voluntary sectors, as well as within local communities. The human cost of homelessness remains a significant and sombre issue, with studies showing that people who sleep rough over a sustained period of time are more likely to die young¹ and often find themselves the victims of violence, theft and other crime. We also know that people who are homeless or who have slept rough commonly acquire a complex combination of support needs, coming into contact with several public and voluntary sector support services.

Despite high profile strategic pledges and financial investment from Central Government over recent years, it is widely recognised that homelessness is increasing both locally and across the country. For many people, chronic and unresolved systemic issues are embedded at its core. It is therefore beyond the scope of this local Review document to find definitive resolutions to the problem; however, it is paramount that spending decisions in Stoke-on-Trent are based on robust evidence of need and demand and that resources are apportioned effectively, so that all services are cost effective and deliver quality outcomes, which meet the priorities and aspirations for people in the city.

1.1 Developments since the last Strategy:

There have been several significant legislative, environmental and economic developments since the last Homelessness Review was carried out, each of which has had a profound influence on levels of homelessness and the associated support services.

The first of these key contextual developments has been the embedding of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 (HRA17) following its enactment in April 2018. The Act brought with it the most extensive changes to homelessness law in 40 years. The legislation

¹ Thomas, B (2011) 'Homelessness: A silent killer – A research briefing on mortality amongst homeless people' - Crisis.

Available at: <https://www.crisis.org.uk/ending-homelessness/homelessness-knowledge-hub/health-and-wellbeing/homelessness-a-silent-killer-2011/>

was referenced within the previous Homelessness Review, but there was little data available at that time regarding how the new practices would impact.

The provisions within the Act have fundamentally improved the rights of people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. They have extended the legal duties of the Local Authority, binding them to prevent homelessness within 56 days and to take all reasonable steps to relieve homelessness for all eligible applicants, removing the exclusivity of those deemed to have a priority need under the Housing Act 1996, Part 7.

The extent to which this legislation has impacted levels of homelessness will be investigated in greater depth throughout this review.

The emergence of COVID-19 in 2020 and the subsequent global pandemic was a momentous socio-economic event, which would go on to impact homelessness and support services on an unprecedented scale. The initial impact of vast numbers of fatalities and ill-health implications for so many people caused widespread anxiety and increased mental distress on a global scale.

The longer-term ripple effects of the pandemic are still being realised in many areas, but whilst the consequences of such a prevalent and enduring pandemic are clearly predominantly negative, there were also some positive developments borne out of the response. Of most relevance to homelessness was the incredible emergency response from support providers, volunteers, communities and local authorities alike, who demonstrated the true power of partnership working to help and support those who needed it most within our communities. This response, in line with the Government's "Everyone In" initiative during the height of the pandemic, led to an overall 37% reduction in rough sleeping across the country. However, in the years since the pandemic, statutory homelessness figures are now suggesting that the number of households who are homeless and living in temporary accommodation is the highest it has been since records began.

The Kerslake Commission on Homelessness and Rough Sleeping was established in 2021 to examine the lessons from the "Everyone In" response to the Covid pandemic. The subsequent report "Turning the Tide", published in September 2023², warns that whilst the spirit of partnership working to achieve the best outcomes for people has largely continued, upstream prevention and in particular, the availability of adequate housing has become "sorely neglected". The message within that report is stark and clear, that there simply are

² [2023 Report | Turning the Tide – The Kerslake Commission \(commissiononroughsleeping.org\)](https://commissiononroughsleeping.org/2023-report-turning-the-tide-the-kerslake-commission)

not enough homes which are affordable and available to people on low incomes and which also have the correct support in place.

2022 was a year marked by a “cost of living crisis”, the third of the critical developments to have had an impact on homelessness. Poverty has always been one of the biggest drivers of homelessness, at the root of which is not having enough money to make choices or do things which are needed for healthy and fulfilled lives, which can then also lead to social isolation.

The “cost of living crisis” has increased pressure on all of us in recent years, but the impact has been disproportionately felt by people at risk of homelessness and those who were already struggling to make ends meet. Crisis research, published in March 2022³, reports that unaffordable housing and increasing living costs, such as food and energy prices, are leading to more and more people losing their homes and also, that it is becoming harder for people to break out of the homeless cycle.

However, despite the challenges and many uncertainties faced by the local authority and its partner agencies over the last few years, the following headline achievements have been achieved within Stoke-on-Trent during the lifetime of the current Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy:

<p>“Hanley Connects” Homelessness Hub launched – over 1000 customers supported in its first 6 months</p>	<p>4,150 homelessness applications taken with 78% ending in successful outcomes (5th best in England)</p>	<p>1,014 people supported out of rough sleeping via the Rough Sleeper Outreach Service, commissioned in 2020, and the specialist Rough Sleeper Coordinator role</p>
<p>74 new bed spaces created for people sleeping rough through Rough Sleeper Accommodation Program, Accommodation for Ex-Offenders and Single Homeless Accommodation Program schemes.</p>	<p>£20M funding secured 2020 to 2025, which pays for multiple Rough Sleeping initiatives⁴</p>	<p>1,927 individuals moved into housing related support with 85% making a planned departure from the service</p>

³ [experiences-of-homelessness-during-a-cost-of-living-crisis_full-report.pdf](#)

⁴ Further information on the RSI Programme currently in place can be found in [section 7.2](#) of this Review

<p>Changing Futures Programme launched in September 2022 – partnership working with the most vulnerable people and focused training available through the Expert Citizens’ “Insight Academy”</p>	<p>Several new roles created within Housing Solutions Team to help provide focus around rough sleeping, hospital discharge, prison release and move on from supported housing.</p>	<p>Range of measures to improve access to Private Rented Sector including: Local Lettings Scheme (17 properties) Landlord Incentives, helping 35 people since 2022 Rent Guarantor Scheme Bond Scheme – 180 bonds in place over 4-year period</p>
<p>Pre-eviction Protocol has been developed to a multi-agency response to homelessness prevention. Launched November 2023</p>	<p>New supported housing contracts commissioned, focusing on single homeless people (Destination: Home) and people escaping Domestic Abuse (DA Sanctuary and Safe Accommodation Service).</p>	<p>Homeless Healthcare Service commissioned by Stoke & Staffs ICB, Stoke-on-Trent City Council & Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council – in excess of 300 consultations a month for around 120 individuals</p>
<p>Mental Health Senior Support Worker provides assertive outreach for up to 12 rough sleepers at a time</p>	<p>Rough Sleeper specific Drug & Alcohol support service, funded through OHID.</p>	<p>Additional support for SWEP provision through the Move on & Prevention initiatives, securing 16 Night Shelter beds through winter periods.</p>
<p>Production of the Homelessness Charter, which organisations across the city have signed up to</p>	<p>Supported Housing Improvement Programme (SHIP) implemented including a needs assessment of supported accommodation in the City</p>	

1.2 Review Process:

The key aims of this Homelessness Review are;

- To understand the current and likely future state of homelessness within Stoke-on-Trent;

- To map out the existing and likely future structure around homelessness prevention, including the availability of accommodation and support for those people who may become homeless;
- To outline the resources available to the local housing authority, other public bodies and voluntary organisations to enable the most effective delivery of homelessness prevention services in the area and;
- To inform commissioning and prevention initiatives based on intelligence and better understanding of evidence

1.2.1 Consultation:

Partner agencies across the city, colleagues from other Council departments and Expert Citizens have all fed into the production of this Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Review to ensure that the information contained within it is both accurate and sufficient to provide a rounded picture of homelessness in the city.

The first stage of the consultation process was to hold a Homelessness Summit in March 2024 led by the Expert Citizens, which asked the first important questions about the current state of homelessness in the city. 100 people attended the summit, with representation from supported housing services, drug and alcohol services, young people's support services, housing providers, commissioning, health services and people with lived experience of homelessness and the group was asked to feedback on where they felt the gaps still were in provision, what the anticipated solutions were to bridge those gaps and what people felt the priorities to address homelessness should be over the coming 5-year period. Attendees of the summit shed light on some of the critical issues still surrounding homelessness and the challenges people face in accessing appropriate accommodation and support services. The discussions from the event formed the foundation of this Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Review document and have paved the way for the wider consultation around its findings.

The second stage of the Review process will be to present the information and findings from this Review document to the public. As part of this process, Expert Citizens will facilitate several online and in-person consultation sessions over a 4-week period, reaching out to support agencies, members of the public and service users across the city. People will be asked for their overall perspective on the findings of the Review together with their opinions on where the local authority should focus its priorities in this field over the coming 5-year period.

The findings from this Review, combined with feedback gained during the initial consultation process, will then inform the production of the Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy 2025-2030. Once the Strategy has been drafted, there will follow a further and final period of public consultation, which will seek to ascertain whether the local authority has reflected

the evidence base available and has listened to the public voice when determining future priorities for the city.

1.2.2 Statistical information:

The Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Review analyses homelessness statistics and their context both at a national and local level. The findings from the Review will help to inform the development of future support services and initiatives, which are needed by people facing and experiencing homelessness. The recommendations from the Review will form proposals for the key priorities to be addressed within the Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy 2025 – 2030.

The statistical and contextual information presented throughout this Review has been extracted and summarised from a wide range of sources including Government official reports and tables, relevant research pieces from organisations such as Crisis, the Kerslake Foundation and Homeless Link, as well as data from local authority departments including Commissioning, Housing, Council Tax, Revenues and Benefits, Children’s Social Care, Adult Social Care, Public Health and the Research and Intelligence Team.

Whilst statistics play a crucial role in profiling homelessness locally and highlighting some of the key trends within the city, this Review often complements those figures with a relevant narrative from local and national research around homelessness and its associated complexities, in order to provide a more comprehensive assessment.

People with experience of homelessness are not a homogenous group, with their needs and life experiences rarely following the same path. Within this Review, the term “homeless” includes people who are sleeping rough, people who are at risk of losing their accommodation, people who have been illegally evicted from their accommodation, people who are living in hostels and temporary or insecure supported accommodation, statutorily homeless households seeking assistance with their housing from the local authority and those who might be considered as ‘hidden homeless’, such as those who are ‘sofa-surfing’ at friends or relatives houses.

2. Strategic Context:

The UK Government is responsible for making decisions about homelessness law and strategy for England and the former Department for Levelling up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC), now Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), is responsible for leading on policy and programme delivery.

Since 2010, the previous Conservative Government’s continuing overarching priority had been to reduce the country’s budget deficit through a range of measures, including substantial reductions in public spending. Competing priorities such as protecting investment into the health and education departments, has meant that reductions in

spending for other governmental departments, such as local government, have often been more concentrated.

Despite overall investment in local authorities being reduced substantially over recent years, the Government has allocated close to £1 billion through various funding streams over the last 5 years to around 300 local authorities in England specifically to tackle homelessness.

2.1 Homelessness Legislation and Policy:

Homelessness legislation is embedded within Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996 and provides the statutory framework for local housing authorities to provide assistance to people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness.

The Housing Act 1996 was amended by the Homelessness Act 2002 and the Homelessness (Priority Need for Accommodation) (England) Order 2002. These modifications to the legislation extended the groups of people to which local authorities owed a legal duty of assistance, including homeless 16- and 17-year olds, Care Leavers aged 18-20, people who are vulnerable as a result of being in Care, the armed forces and those released from prison and people who were vulnerable because they had fled their home due to violence.

More recently, the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, as already indicated, significantly reformed homelessness legislation to improve the support and assistance people were entitled to when facing the loss of their home.

All local authorities have a legal duty to ensure advice and information is available, free of charge, to any household about the prevention of homelessness, finding a home, their rights when homeless and what help is available locally. The legal definition of a person who is homeless is now a person (and everyone who is usually resident with that individual) who:

- Will be homeless within 56 days and / or;
- Has no accommodation available in the UK or abroad and / or;
- Has no legal right to occupy any accommodation and / or;
- Has a split household and accommodation is not available for the whole household and / or;
- It is unreasonable to continue to occupy their accommodation and / or;
- Is at risk of violence from any person and / or;
- Is unable to secure entry to their accommodation and / or;
- Lives in a moveable structure but has nowhere to put it

A household who usually lives in the UK and has a right to enter and remain in the country without any restrictions, is normally eligible for assistance.

Local authorities must carry out the following duties to any eligible household:

- Complete an assessment of housing and support needs and formulate a personal plan to meet those needs.
- Arrange temporary accommodation for anyone the local authority believes to have a “priority need”⁵ for accommodation
- Try to prevent homelessness if they are likely to become homeless within 56 days of them making their application for assistance
- Try to relieve homelessness for up to 56 days if they are already homeless when making an application for assistance
- Arrange short-term accommodation when the local authority deems the household has made themselves intentionally homeless, but they have a “priority need”
- Obtain permanent accommodation where a household is considered to be unintentionally homeless and has a priority need.

2.2 Care Act 2014:

The Care Act represents the most significant reform of care and support in more than 60 years, putting vulnerable people in control of their care and support. One of the core principles of Act is the promotion of wellbeing. The Act aims to actively promote well-being and independence, supporting the delivery of person-centred services, which enable people to retain their independence as long as possible. Even though a decade has passed since its enactment, it is important to recognise the ongoing significance of the Care Act 2014 in relation to homelessness, particularly, an assurance that everyone is entitled to an assessment under the Act, regardless of their level of need for care and support.

The Act stipulates that local authorities have a duty to meet service user needs rather than having a duty to provide services. As everyone has individual needs, local authorities are not

⁵ A person is considered to have a priority need for accommodation if they are pregnant, have dependent children reside with them, they are vulnerable as a result of old age, mental illness or mental handicap or physical disability, or other special reasons. Also if they are homeless or threatened with homelessness as a result of an emergency such as a flood, fire, or other disaster, they are a child aged 16 or 17, they are a young person under 21 who has been looked after, accommodated, or fostered, they are a person over 21 who is vulnerable as a result of having been looked after, accommodated, or fostered, they are vulnerable as a result of having served in the armed forces or having been imprisoned or they are a victim of domestic abuse

able to comply with the Act by providing a ‘one size fits all’ type of service. Instead they need to put the person at the centre of their care and/or support.

The Care Act recognises the importance of housing in determining health and well-being, independence and interaction with the wider community. It states: “Housing plays a critical role in enabling people to live independently and in helping care givers to support others more effectively. Poor or inappropriate housing can put the health and well-being of people at risk, whereas a suitable home can reduce the needs for care and support, and contribute to preventing or delaying the development of such needs”. The local authority does not have a statutory duty to provide Housing Related Support services and the Care Act Statutory Guidance (October 2014) 15.61 states that a local authority must provide or arrange for the provision of services that contribute towards preventing, reducing or delaying the needs for care and support.

2.3 Supported Housing (Regulatory Oversight) Act 2023:

Supported housing describes a range of housing types, such as hostels, refuges and shared housing, where residents receive support to help them live independently.

Exempt accommodation is a type of supported housing for which some Housing Benefit provisions, which limit claimants’ entitlement to pre-defined local levels, do not apply. This means Housing Benefit may be higher in order to cover the full amount of rent charged by providers to deliver support. It is defined as:

- a resettlement place; or
- accommodation provided by a county council, housing association, registered charity or voluntary organisation where that body or person acting on their behalf provides the claimant with care, support or supervision.

According to a Crisis policy briefing⁶ around exempt accommodation in 2021, there were concerns that the sector is under-regulated. The report states that investors were looking to maximise returns using the higher rents permitted by the exempt Housing Benefit provisions. It was argued that some providers would put profit before the needs of the residents, thus creating poor housing conditions and ineffective care.

The Supported Housing (Regulatory Oversight) Act became law in August 2023 and aims to introduce new regulations to tackle poor quality supported exempt accommodation. The Act introduces National Supported Housing Standards, which will provide minimum standards for both the property and the support provided in supported accommodation. In

⁶ [Crisis Policy Briefing: Exempt Accommodation | Crisis | Together we will end homelessness](#)

addition, the Act will require local authorities to create local supported accommodation licencing schemes and it will also introduce a strategic planning duty on local authorities.

Local authorities will also be required to carry out a review of supported exempt accommodation in the area, with a view to publishing a Supported Housing Strategy. This work is already underway within Stoke-on-Trent, following the award of funding from the Government's Supported Housing Improvement Programme (SHIP), with plans to have the initial review completed by the end of March 2025.

2.4 Renters (Reform) Bill 2022 / Renters Rights Bill 2024:

The Renters Reform Bill was a piece of legislation introduced by DLUHC to deliver on the previous Conservative Government's 2019 manifesto pledge to reform the private rented sector (PRS). The Bill aimed to improve the system for both the 11 million private renters and 2.3 million landlords in England and the proposed reforms were developed in consultation with landlord and tenant groups over the past five years⁷. However, the Bill did not pass through Parliament before it was dissolved in the weeks leading up to the General Election in May 2024.

The new Labour Government has introduced its own version of the Renters (Reform) Bill called the Renters Rights Bill, which was announced during the Kings Speech (July 2024). The new Bill is in its draft phase, with no set timeframe for becoming law at the time of writing this Review. Despite the early stages, it is anticipated that the new Bill will have a similar focus to the Renters (Reform) Bill:

- **Abolish section 21 evictions** and move to a tenancy structure where all assured tenancies are periodic - providing more security for tenants and empowering them to challenge poor practice and unfair rent increases without fear of eviction;
- **Introduce more comprehensive possession grounds** so landlords can still recover their property (including where they wish to sell their property or move in close family) and to make it easier to repossess properties where tenants are at fault, for example in cases of anti-social behaviour and repeat rent arrears;
- **Provide stronger protections against backdoor eviction.** Labour has pledged to "challenge rent increases designed to force [tenants] out" as well as end "rental bidding wars by landlords and letting agents"

⁷ [Guide to the Renters \(Reform\) Bill - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guides/renters-reform-bill)

- **Introduce a new Private Rented Sector Landlord Ombudsman** that private landlords must join, which will provide fair, impartial, and binding resolution to many issues and prove quicker, cheaper, and less confrontational than the court system;
- **Give tenants the right to request a pet in the property**, which the landlord must consider and cannot unreasonably refuse. To support this, landlords will be able to require pet insurance to cover any damage to their property.
- **Integrating the Decent Homes Standard and Awaab's Law⁸ into the private rented sector** to give renters safer, better value homes and remove the blight of poor-quality homes in local communities.
- **Make it illegal for landlords and agents to have blanket bans on renting to tenants in receipt of benefits or with children** - ensuring no one is unjustly discriminated against when looking for a place to live; and
- **Strengthen local councils' enforcement powers.** Introduce new investigatory powers to make it easier for councils to identify and fine unscrupulous landlords.
- **Create a digital private rented sector database** to bring together key information for landlords, tenants, and councils. Tenants will be able to access information to inform choices when entering new tenancies. Landlords will be able to quickly understand their obligations and demonstrate compliance, providing certainty for tenants and landlords alike. Councils will be able to use the database to target enforcement where it is needed most.

2.5 Rough Sleeper Programme and Policy:

See section [7.2](#) of this Review report for further information on Government policy and initiatives regarding rough sleeping.

3. Factors which influence Homelessness & Rough Sleeping:

This section of the Review looks at key demographic factors likely to affect future housing need and wider factors such as economic growth, employment and household income. The common perception of Stoke-on-Trent as a poor-quality, post-industrial environment is exacerbated by the abundance of traditional terraced properties and large post-war industrial estates in comparison to the rest of the country. Furthermore, there are in excess

⁸ Awaab's Law, which was introduced in the landmark Social Housing Regulation Act 2023, requires landlords to investigate and fix reported health hazards within specified timeframes.

of 3,300 empty homes across the city, with just under 1,900 of these empty for more than 6 months⁹ together with a large number of derelict industrial premises.

Historically, the pottery industry employed as many as 70,000 people either side of World War II, with more than 46,000 people engaged directly in the manufacture and decoration of bricks, pottery, tiles or glass. Current estimates suggest that there are now between 6,500 and 7,000 people in the industry. In 1931 more than 17,500 residents were engaged in mining and quarrying and some 6,500 in metal production (Shelton Bar Steelworks). However, by 1991 these figures had declined to 2,100 and 600 respectively and by 2001 both of these industries had disappeared from the city's landscape altogether¹⁰.

Whilst Stoke-on-Trent is not unique in its experience of significant post-industrial decline, other poor economic and social structures, as identified in the Indices of Deprivation, combine to exacerbate problems locally.

3.1 Demography:

The population of Stoke-on-Trent peaked in the years either side of World War II, with the 1931 and 1951 census returns recording populations of 276,639 and 275,115 respectively. During the subsequent 50-year period up to 2001, and in line with significant industrial decline in the city, the population in Stoke-on-Trent fell by almost 35,000 people.

Official population mid-year estimates from 2022 indicate that the overall number of residents has risen by around 8.1% since 2001, with around 259,965 people currently living in the city. Furthermore, future projections indicate that the population will continue to increase, reaching c.272,500 by the year 2043. Growth is anticipated to be concentrated in the over 65 age group (11,100 person increase), whilst the population aged 0-15 is expected to decrease by 1,300 persons. The number of over 65's in the city is currently estimated to be in the region of 45,100 people, equating to an approximate 15.6% increase since the 2011 Census.

There is a documented tendency for families and adults aged over 25 to move out of Stoke-on-Trent into neighbouring localities and younger adults are generally attracted to the city; most likely drawn in by the two universities and the availability of affordable housing stock. However, whilst the age profile of Stoke-on-Trent now largely reflects the regional and national picture, there is evidence to suggest that the population locally is ageing at a much slower rate than initially projected, in line with many other large urban and metropolitan districts.

⁹ Stoke-on-Trent Council Tax records (2023)

¹⁰ Stoke-on-Trent City Council (2023/34)

The 2021 Census revealed that 87% of Stoke-on-Trent residents at that time were born in the UK. The number of non-UK born residents in the city more than doubled during the decade following the 2011 Census, rising from 8% of the total population in 2011 to around 13% by 2021. The city has some well-established minority ethnic (ME) communities and according to the 2021 Census data, almost 60% of the city's more prevalent Pakistani and Bangladeshi populations were born in the UK.

There is no single accurate measure of international migration into or out of the city. However, there are data sources available, which can be used to draw the high-level conclusion that international migration into the city has remained at historically high levels over the last 20 years following successive waves of EU Accession and International conflict in the Middle-East and Sub-Saharan Africa.

Stoke on Trent has been a major recipient of Asylum Seekers for many years due to its historic involvement in the national dispersal scheme. Upon entering the UK, Asylum Seekers are primarily housed in 'Initial Accommodation'. Following this preliminary placement, they are then moved across the country into accommodation sourced by providers under contracts from the Home Office. until a decision is made regarding their application. Dispersal should be in line with agreed cluster limits of 1:200 of the population for each local authority area. Corresponding to the 2021 Census data, the cluster limit for Stoke-on-Trent is 1,245. In March 2022, it was reported that there were 844 asylum seekers in Stoke-on-Trent, placing the city at around three-quarters of its cluster limit.

Recent representations by the Council, in partnership with other local authorities in the region, forced the Government into mandating all local authorities to participate in the dispersal scheme with the aim of achieving a more equitable distribution, however, progress in this area has been disappointingly slow.

More recently, a combination of high numbers of people arriving in the UK seeking asylum, delays in processing applications and a cessation on moving people out of dispersed accommodation following decisions during the Covid-19 Pandemic, has led to a considerable shortfall in dispersed accommodation. This has subsequently resulted in the Home Office identifying a large number of hotels as "interim accommodation" across the country. In Stoke on Trent there were initially 2 hotels identified for this purpose, housing around 420 individuals at full capacity, mainly families with children. This has now reduced to only 1 hotel accommodating around 160 individuals.

The City has also continued to support national refugee schemes for specific groups including those from Syria, Afghanistan and Ukraine.

3.2 Economy:

The 2021 Census and more recent data from the Annual Population Survey 2023 reveal that the adult population in the city is significantly more likely to be engaged in occupations classified in 'low socio-economic' groups compared to the national average. This includes people in routine and unskilled occupations; and those who have never worked and are long-term unemployed.

Over one in six working age households (over 14,900 households – 18.3%) in Stoke-on-Trent contains no-one in work, compared with one in seven (13.9%) nationally. Currently 6.0% of the working-age population (9,720 persons) in the city is classified as 'unemployed' (actively seeking work – or required to find additional work) compared with 4.0% nationally. 37,622 persons (23.2% of the working -age population) are now in-receipt of Universal Credit) compared with 16.5% nationally.

Of the people in receipt of Universal Credit, over 7,656 are also in receipt of legacy benefits – and a further 18,100 (11.2% of the working age population) are in receipt of legacy benefits only (Incapacity Benefits, Personal Independence Payments, Employment and Support Allowance and Carer's Allowance).

There are 34,500 working-age people within the city who are classed as 'economically inactive' (not in employment or actively seeking work); This includes students, people looking after their family or their home, people who are long-term sick and those who are retired; collectively equating to around 13% of the total population of the city. However, the 'economically inactive' still make a significant contribution to the local economy (including volunteering, caring and the provision of child-care) and are arguably less likely than the more affluent population to export their spending into other areas.

The socio-economic classifications published in the 2021 Census and subsequent data from the Annual Population Survey 2023 has revealed an under-representation of people employed in managerial, professional and technical occupations resident in the city, this goes some way to explaining low average wages in the area. The average full-time worker's weekly wage in Stoke-on-Trent is estimated to be approximately 14% below the national average.

It is true to say that no single factor leads to financial hardship although it is well documented that many social, economic and health problems are rooted in early life experiences. In 2023, there are very few families living in 'absolute poverty'¹¹ in the UK

¹¹ 'Absolute poverty' refers to a condition where a person does not have the minimum amount of income required to meet the minimum requirements for one or more basic living needs, such as food, clothing, shelter etc.

compared to previous decades, however over the last 30 years, the income divide in the country has grown significantly, leading to an increase in ‘relative poverty’¹².

Almost one-quarter of all city households (24.7%) were classed as being in Fuel Poverty – the highest rate in England (of 296 districts) and significantly above the national rate of 13.1%. (2021)

More than one-third of all children (36.1%) in the city lived in relative low-income households – the 9th highest rate in England (of 309 districts) and significantly above the national rate of 19.9%. (2021/22). Both of these metrics pre-date the ongoing financial situation (Cost of Living Crisis) – and the consequent rises in inflation and mortgage rates.

A clear indicator of financial hardship in an area is the increasing use of food banks. Over the last few years, food banks have become a more established feature across the city and the processes surrounding them has become more structured. All referrals into food banks now come through trained frontline professionals, who are registered as Stoke-on-Trent Food Bank Referral Agents. Vouchers for food banks are issued only as a last resort during a time of crisis and referral agencies are expected to offer a standard of wraparound support to help alleviate that person’s crisis. In addition, everyone accessing food banks can now also access financial advice via Money Matters, which is present in the foodbank centres, as well as access to mental health support via North Staffs Mind. Some of the centres across the city also have resident social prescribers present. In early 2024, a three-voucher limit was introduced in order to prevent long term use and reliance on the food banks, however, in exceptional circumstances there can be further support. Due to the nature of the referral process and the additional support provided, the Food Banks report very low numbers of people needing to use the service more than once. Data collected by the food banks for 2023/24 shows that:

<p>19,643 people supported through the food banks, including 11,997 adults and 7,646 children</p>	<p>8161 vouchers issued over the year. Most vouchers were issued to people with no fixed abode</p>	<p>Most common reasons for needing food bank support:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Rising cost of essentials - Physical or mental health - Debt - Benefit delay
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¹² ‘Relative poverty’ refers to a condition where a person does not have the minimum amount of income required to maintain the average standard of living in the society where they live – it is the difference between rich and poor

The main message from the Food Banks in Stoke-on-Trent is that one food parcel is still too many and their aim is to end the need for Food Banks altogether. However, it is reported that the stark reality is that even with support, there are still people who struggle to afford the essentials.

On a more positive note, there is a total of 121,100 city residents in employment and perhaps contrary to expectation, the city's local economy has continued to grow from both the economic recession in 2009 and the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020-22. Figures indicate that Stoke-on-Trent's economy grew significantly faster than the UK rate between 2010 and 2022, ranking it 23rd out of 133 economic areas during that period.

3.3 Housing Supply:

3.3.1 Social affordable housing:

The Council's stock has been reducing as a result of tenants exercising their "Right to Buy" (RTB) and without the provision of new homes the supply will be further reduced. The most recent Housing needs Assessment¹³ revealed that Stoke-on-Trent has an estimated shortfall of 139 affordable homes every year. This need is heavily oriented towards one-bedroom properties, with a potential surplus of two-bedroom homes identified and a lesser, but still significant, need for larger family homes with at least three bedrooms.

The social housing stock within the city generally comprises large numbers of traditional terraced properties and post-war local authority estates. During the 1980's, there were almost 33,000 council owned properties in the area; however, following almost 40 years of RTB sales and stock transfers to Housing Associations, there are now 17,668 council owned properties and 8,457 properties owned by local Registered Providers¹⁴ within Stoke-on-Trent.

There are currently around 3,048 live applications on the Housing Register¹⁵, of which approximately 1,297 (43%) of households are waiting for a one-bedroom home and

¹³[Housing Needs Assessment Newcastle under Lyme and Stoke on Trent June 2020.pdf](#)

¹⁴ Figures extracted from 2023 [Live Data Tables: www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk) – (Data correct at 1st April 2024)

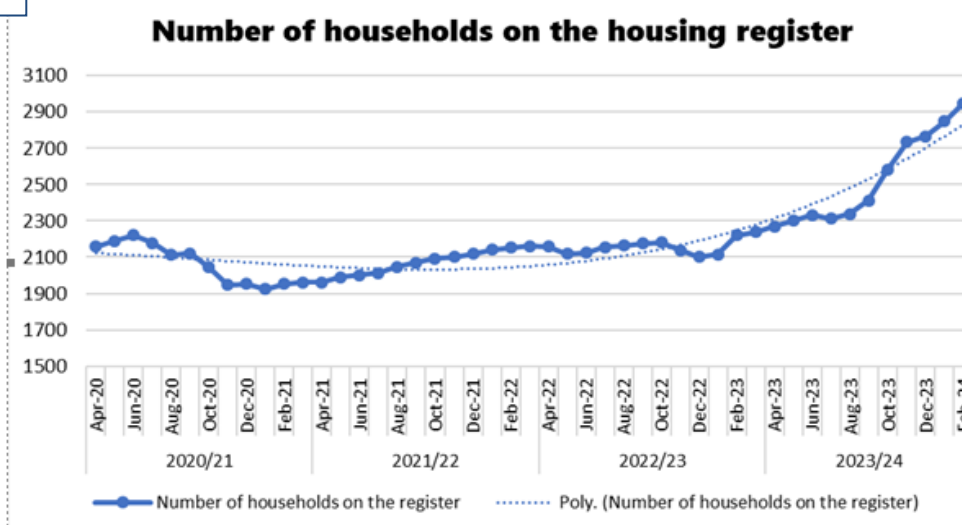
¹⁵ Data cited from the "Delivering Housing Growth in Stoke-on-Trent" briefing (2019). The Housing Register provides a single point of access into council owned properties and properties allocated to the council through Nomination Agreements with Registered Providers.

approximately 60% of these are considered to be in greatest housing need (bands 1 and 2 of the Housing Register).

People with a history of rough sleeping can often struggle to access social housing due to issues around rent arrears or anti-social behaviour that may be restricting them from joining the Housing Register. In Stoke-on-Trent, there is a local-lettings plan in place currently to help support existing or former rough sleepers to access appropriate city council accommodation, where they may otherwise have been excluded. The plan stipulates that the ‘unacceptable behaviour’ criteria within the Allocations Policy could be waived as long as a clear package of support is in place for the individual and options within the private rented and supported housing sector have been explored.

Historically, Registered Providers have delivered a significant proportion of the affordable housing offer in the city but in recent years this has reduced, with many Registered Providers indicating that they will not be embarking on any large-scale development programs in the city in the near future. This issue, coupled with the fact that the city council loses on average 150 properties every year through RTB supports the Housing Needs Assessment finding of a shortage of affordable homes in the city.

Chart 1



3.3.2 New housing:

The current Housing Strategy (2022-27) recognises the imbalance between demand for housing and the availability of suitable, affordable housing options and seeks to drive growth and enhance the housing offer in Stoke-on-Trent. There are many commitments pledged throughout the Strategy, including the provision of more new, single-bedroomed

accommodation¹⁶. To strengthen this principle, there is a focus on providing affordable move-on accommodation options with appropriate support through both replenishing Council stock and introducing new stock through Registered Providers. The Strategy asserts that the Council will review its supported housing offer and work with Registered Providers, who provide supported housing, to increase their supply within the city. It is intended that this review will help a range of vulnerable groups alongside older people.

The work around the review of supported housing has already begun in the city. Through the new Supported Housing (Oversight) Act, DLUHC is resourcing local authorities to carry out a strategic need assessment of the need for supported housing in their area. In Stoke-on-Trent, this piece of work is being carried out by Homeless Link with the first findings scheduled for publication around March 2025.

In October 2018, the Government lifted the cap on local authority Housing Revenue Account borrowing. The cap was lifted to enable local authorities to make a meaningful contribution towards solving the national housing crisis. At that time, Stoke-on-Trent City Council already had development plans underway to build approximately 800 new homes but following the lifting of the cap, there was a proposed six-year plan to either directly deliver or facilitate delivery of almost 4,700 new homes in the City by the end of 2024/25, of which around 1,300 will be deemed affordable, including affordable home ownership options.

A review of the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan in 2021 included the development or acquisition of around 1,241 new homes over a 10-year period. It is envisaged that those properties will replace some of the homes lost through RTB.

3.3.3 Private rented sector:

The housing profile within Stoke-on-Trent comprises around 113,000 properties, around 90,258 (79%) of which are within the private sector and of those, 83,203 (92%) are occupied. The Private Sector Stock Condition Survey (2018) indicates that of the 83,203 occupied private sector properties, 62,706 (75%) are owner occupied and 20,317 (25%) are within the private rented sector. The overall standard of accommodation varies depending on the age, type and location of the property but generally speaking the poorest quality housing exists within the private sector, particularly prevalent in the city's older, pre-1919 terraced stock, which dominates the inner urban core¹⁷.

¹⁶ Which is also highlighted as a gap within [section 3.3.5](#) of this Review document

¹⁷ Figures extracted from the Private Sector Stock Condition Survey 2018

Issues such as high levels of deprivation, low economic investment and low-income levels have had a major impact on the housing market. Low household incomes have also led to limited investment in homes leading to high levels of disrepair across the private sector. However, interventions from the city council's Private Sector Housing Team in 2023/24 identified and eradicated over 800 serious hazards in properties which did not meet the Government's minimum standard for housing within the private rented sector. The private sector housing team received 707 complaints about property disrepair last financial year- a 16% increase on the previous year. These complaints have been related to damp and mould and excess cold issues, with people particularly impacted by the cost of living and the ability to heat their home effectively and the ability of landlords to fund property repairs.

As social housing becomes more difficult to access, with higher demand and fewer properties available, the private rented sector is becoming the only option for many households despite its reputation as expensive and insecure. The council employs a Tenancy Relations Officer, who provides support and manages the relationships between landlords and tenants to reduce the risk of tenancy breakdown, illegal eviction and harassment. During 2023/24, the Tenancy Relations Officer has dealt with 343 requests for service relating to illegal evictions, harassment and unlawful section 21s, rent increases and deposit protection issues.

As part of the Government's Rough Sleeper Initiatives Programme for 2019, the city council has been awarded funding to deliver a social lettings agency and a supported lettings scheme. These schemes include further support for landlords as well as tenancy sustainment support for tenants to alleviate repeat homelessness, as well as providing more intensive housing related support for those with more complex needs and to broker access to accommodation across all tenures. In addition, the schemes will aim to increase the portfolio of good quality and stable private rented accommodation available to rough sleepers.

3.3.4 Empty homes:

According to the latest Council Tax Base data returns submitted to central Government in October 2023, the total number of empty dwellings in the city was 3392, of which 1898 (56%) were classed as long-term empty properties, as they have been empty for more than 6 months. The vast majority of these are in the private sector, with only 142 (less than 1%) of the Council's lettable stock lying empty and undergoing void works prior to allocation.

These properties are the primary focus of the city council's Empty Homes Team, which undertakes investigations to trace and contact owners of long-term empty homes and to apply various initiatives and incentives to help bring problematic long-term empty properties back into use. 102 empty properties were brought back into use in 2023/24, with more than £1.9m of private sector capital invested into the city's private sector housing stock.

3.3.5 Availability of “move-on” accommodation:

Short-term supported housing services are commonly, although not exclusively, the primary route out of homelessness and rough sleeping and they provide a valuable option for vulnerable people needing housing related support to enable them to live independently.

Historically, move on pathways have been relatively linear, with people tending to progress from being street homeless into hostels, then into a second stage supported housing environment and then ultimately into independent living in their own tenancy. Whilst this system will still work for some people, blockages can easily occur along the way for example if suitable accommodation at the next stage is not available or is in short supply.

According to local supported housing providers, there are a growing number of people, who have increasingly complex support requirements and are in turn requiring a much more flexible approach to meet their housing needs. However, many people are reported to be staying longer in support services simply because there is no suitable provision for them to move in to following completion of a package of support.

In order to assess the extent of the problem, a move on audit was carried out locally in April 2024 with providers of housing related support across the city. Providers were asked to summarise the needs and situations of everyone currently in their services and also to make educated predictions about those anticipated to come through their services over the next 12 months. A full and detailed report on the conclusions from this audit is being produced, but the research revealed the following key points:

<p>211 people currently ready and waiting for move on from supported housing, but only 26 of whom have a suitable property lined up. Current deficit of 185 properties.</p>	<p>295 people currently in supported housing who are not ready for move on, but who are expected to be ready over next 12 months.</p>	<p>1789 people on waiting lists for supported accommodation across the city</p>
<p>2305 people expected to need supported housing services in the next 12 months</p>	<p>339 people expected to be ready for move on in next 12 months</p>	

The research also asked providers for some narrative around what the common barriers are to successful move on from the supported housing sector and what is missing from the sector. The responses to these questions were wide-ranging but some of the key messages from the research are:

Barriers:

General lack of affordable and secure properties in the private sector	Large waiting lists and restrictive allocations policies for social rented properties	Excessive time spent in services when no longer needed can lead to “missed opportunities” and relapses in achievements / progression
Lack of accommodation for single people	Often, excessive checks and up-front financial investment limits access to the private rented sector	Frequent difficulties housing people with an offending history
Lack of furnishings or funds for furnishing a property when ready to move on	Lack of general floating support in the city around tenancy management and sustainment	Housing providers can develop aversions to accepting referrals from some support providers

What is needed:

More social rented accommodation – particularly 1-bedroom accommodation	Generic floating support services focusing on tenancy management and sustainment	Funding specifically for white goods and furniture
Accommodation based support for people with complex needs	Effective pathways for customers to be rehoused within 6 months of accessing support services	Improved access to adult social care services
A programme which provides a “Housing Reference”. Tenancy training programme including addressing of ASB, budgeting and other issues	Moving away from outdated hostels completely	Attract more developers to the area to build smaller properties

The journey through supported housing into independence needs to be both flexible and efficient to ensure that people do not become stuck in services and to enable those who need support to access it when they need to.

3.4 Welfare:

Due to fluctuating economic circumstances and government policy over the years, the welfare system has evolved quite significantly from the original intentions of the 1948 Welfare State.

In 2010, the reduction of the overall Housing Benefit budget across the country was central to a package of welfare changes aimed at decreasing public expenditure. The Welfare Reform Act (2012) was enacted to create more incentives for people to get into employment through assurances that ‘work always pays’ and that the ‘benefits trap’ where people find themselves worse off once they enter into a job, will no longer be an issue for people seeking employment.

Under the Welfare Reform Act (2012) several changes were implemented which, after more than a decade, continue to cause notable gaps between the maximum Housing Benefit entitlement and market rents across the UK, particularly when attempting to access the private rented sector.¹⁸ Changes included;

- Restricting Local Housing Allowance to four-bedroom properties
- Setting weekly Local Housing Allowance caps for each property size
- Setting Local Housing Allowance rates at the 30th percentile of rents in an area rather than the median level
- Extending the Shared Accommodation Rate (SAR) to most single people under the age of 35, instead of 25

Further [Crisis research](#) from 2022, assessing the experience of homelessness within a “cost of living crisis”, highlights that nationally, families on the breadline are facing an average £372 deficit between their Local Housing Allowance and the cost of the cheapest rents in their local area. In Stoke on Trent, this gap is slightly less, but still represents a significant shortfall. The table below shows the relative shortfall between LHA rates and the average market rents at a local level.

¹⁸ [Crisis Report – Everybody In: How to end homelessness in Great Britain \(2018\)](#)

Property Size	LHA Rate – Staffordshire BRMA (£pw)	Average Market Rent for Stoke-on- Trent (£pw)	Shortfall (£pw)
Shared Accommodation	£69.35	-	-
1 Bed	£97.81	£156	-£58.19
2 Bed	£110.47	£182	-£71.53
3 Bed	£136.93	£244	-£107.07
4 Bed ¹⁹	£184.11	£184	£0

The Crisis report from 2018 suggests that greater investment is needed in Universal Credit as a ‘crucial safety net’ to prevent low income households from becoming homeless following a period of unemployment or other personal disaster, which reflects the original intentions of the 1948 Welfare State model. The report reveals how people increasingly feel that the welfare system no longer provides adequate security in times of need because it does not accurately reflect the real cost of living.

4. Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Profile

The image most people conjure up in their minds when presented with the concept of homelessness is people sleeping rough on the streets. Rough sleeping is obviously one of the most visible forms of homelessness, but the reality of course is that rough sleeping represents only the ‘tip of the iceberg’, with a much wider group of people affected by many other forms of homelessness or a lack of safe and stable accommodation.

As outlined in [section 2.1](#) of this Review, the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 placed a duty on local authorities to take all reasonable steps to safeguard against accommodation ceasing to become available to people (‘Prevention Duty’). Alongside this, there is also a duty to ensure that suitable accommodation is made available to people who are already

¹⁹ The vast majority of the 4 bed properties available for rent (at the time of writing this report) are student properties available as a house share option rather than large family homes. In some cases, the rental price displayed is per person, per week and in others, the price is for the full property per week. This variance means that the average market rent figure is not directly comparable to the smaller properties.

homeless or who become homeless following the end of the prevention duty ('Relief Duty'). For those who cannot be assisted through these measures, the main duty to accommodate those who are deemed to be in priority need and who are found to be unintentionally homeless also remains in place.

4.1 Levels of Homelessness:

Homelessness is set to hit record levels in 2024 in the UK. Historically, rough sleeper counts and annual estimates have been subject to some scrutiny, facing criticism that people may be missed due to the criteria prescribed by Government²⁰. However, the multi-agency approach to calculating the figures does provide a useful indication of the numbers of people sleeping on our streets.

Chart 2 shows the numbers of people sleeping rough on a single night each year since the Government's annual snapshot approach to rough sleeper counts was launched in 2010. The latest Rough Sleeping snapshot (2023) reports that there were an estimated 3,898 people sleeping rough across England on a single night²¹, which continues the significant increase seen in the last few years.

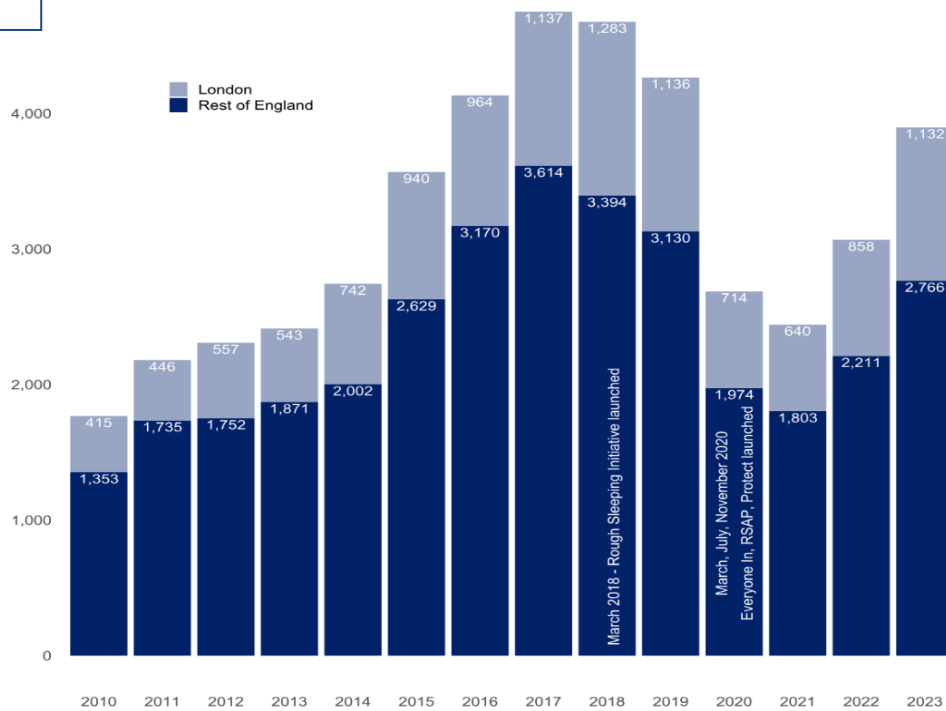
The total number of people sleeping on the streets at the last estimate is still lower than it was at its peak in 2017, with that year's figure reaching 4,751 people. In response to the record high figure that year, the Government introduced the Rough Sleeper Initiatives Programme in March 2018, which led to a steady decline over subsequent years. The Covid-19 pandemic and the consequent "Everyone In" initiative, led to a 37% drop in rough sleeping, with numbers in 2021 falling to 2,407 people. However, as the chart clearly demonstrates, the trend is sadly now creeping back up towards those record levels reported in 2017.

²⁰ For the purposes of the count, rough sleeping is defined as;

- people sleeping, about to bed down (sitting on/in or standing next to their bedding) or actually 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')

²¹ [Government Rough Sleeping Snapshot – Autumn 2023](#)

Chart 2



The overall trend in Stoke-on-Trent mirrors the national picture to a large extent, with numbers falling to record lows following the “Everyone In” initiative, but more recently reaching higher levels than previously reported in the area. Chart 3 shows the number of rough sleepers, as recorded by the local authority commissioned Rough Sleeper Outreach Service.

As at the 31st May 2024, there were a total of 44 individuals on the Rough Sleeper Outreach service caseload. Of these, 30 were identified as long-term rough sleepers and 8 were reported as occasional or infrequent rough sleepers.



Although there are various ways in which homelessness statistics are reported, the true scale of the issue is often difficult to quantify due to much of homelessness being “hidden”. Many individuals are classed as “sofa-surfing”, when they are staying with friends or family temporarily. More specific information on this subset of households is difficult to fully capture due to the very nature of “hidden” homelessness, however, data collected via the annual English Housing Survey, revealed that between 2019 and 2021, 538,000 households had someone staying with them, who would otherwise be homeless.

In July 2011, Crisis carried out a research project looking at ‘hidden homelessness’ in England.²² For the purposes of the study, hidden homelessness was defined as ‘**non-statutory homeless people living outside of mainstream housing provision**’, in other words; people who become homeless but who find a temporary solution by staying with family members or friends, living in squats or in other insecure accommodation. The report indicated that people experiencing ‘hidden homelessness’ tend to fall into one of two categories:

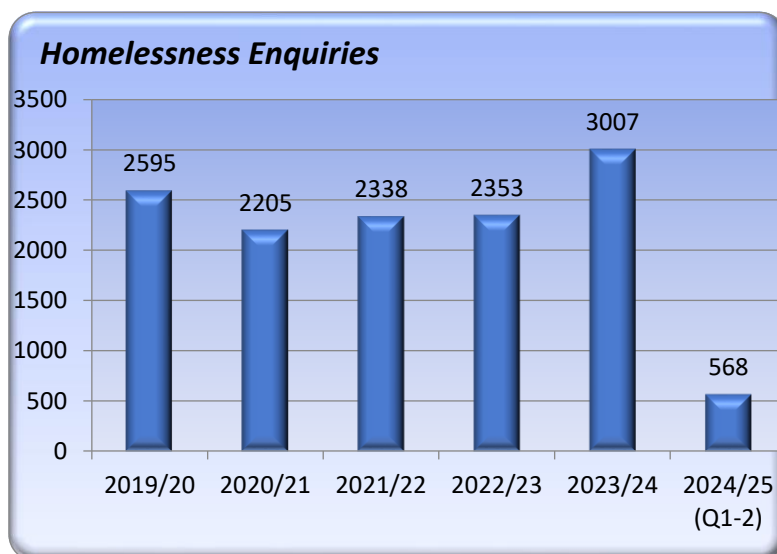
- People who could have exited homelessness promptly with the correct assistance, but instead are at risk of joining the population of long-term homeless people with complex needs if their homelessness endures or;
- Vulnerable people with high support needs for whom a system of support exists (rough sleeper teams, supported housing, hostels etc.), but who are not accessing this support.

²² Crisis report: [“The Hidden Truth about Homelessness”](#) – July 2011 (450 people surveyed)

There are estimates of around 300,000 people living in hostels, temporary shelters and unsuitable, overcrowded accommodation around the UK. People who experience ‘hidden homelessness’ are likely to be a diverse group, comprising many different ages and nationalities but the Crisis report concluded that as many as 62% of single homeless people may not be recorded in official statistics, indicating that this is likely to be the most common group of people hidden from services. Although these figures are just estimates, they provide some insight into the extent of the issue and the challenges around enumerating that population.

Chart 4 shows the number of homelessness enquiries recorded by the Council over the last 5 years. Numbers have increased steadily since the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, but this accelerated in 2023/24 with the Housing Solutions Service recording an increase of 28% on the previous year. The 568 approaches within the first two quarters of this year is already 59% higher than the 357 approaches recorded at the same period in 2023/24.

Chart 4



As statutory duties are now owed to any household threatened with homelessness within 56 days, following the enactment of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, the amount of “hidden” homelessness may have decreased. Performance data on homelessness activities is reported on a quarterly basis through the Homelessness Case Level Information Collection (H-CLIC) system. This process was introduced alongside the Homelessness Reduction Act in 2017 (HRA) as a replacement for the previous P1E reporting system. Chart 5 shows the proportion of assessments, which resulted in a legal duty being accepted by the Council.

Chart 5

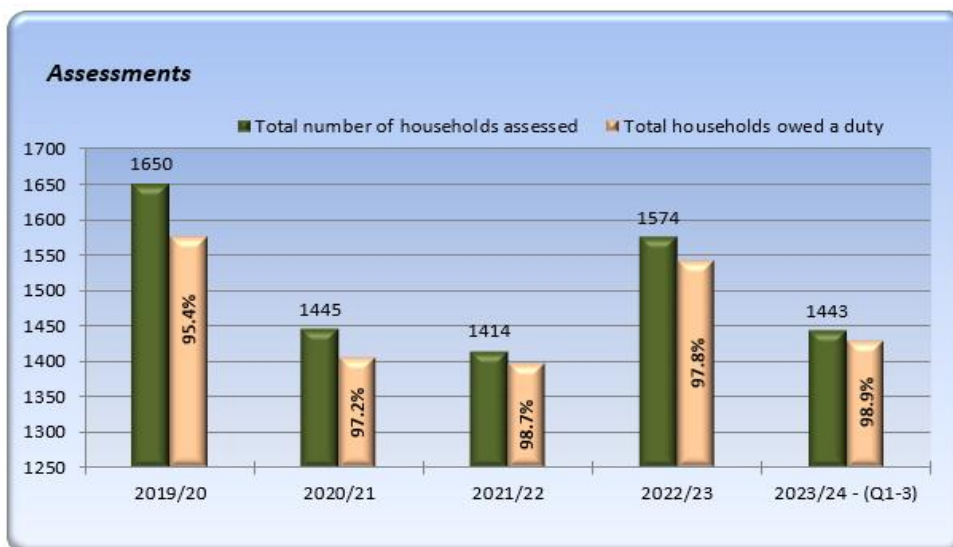


Chart 6 shows the relative breakdown of those decisions. The chart highlights that consistently over the last 5 years, a Relief duty was owed in the majority of cases. There is also a steady increase in the number of valid section 21 notices issued, leading to a prevention duty being owed. An issue which may be addressed with the proposed Renters Rights Bill, outlined in [section 2.4](#) of this Review.

Chart 6

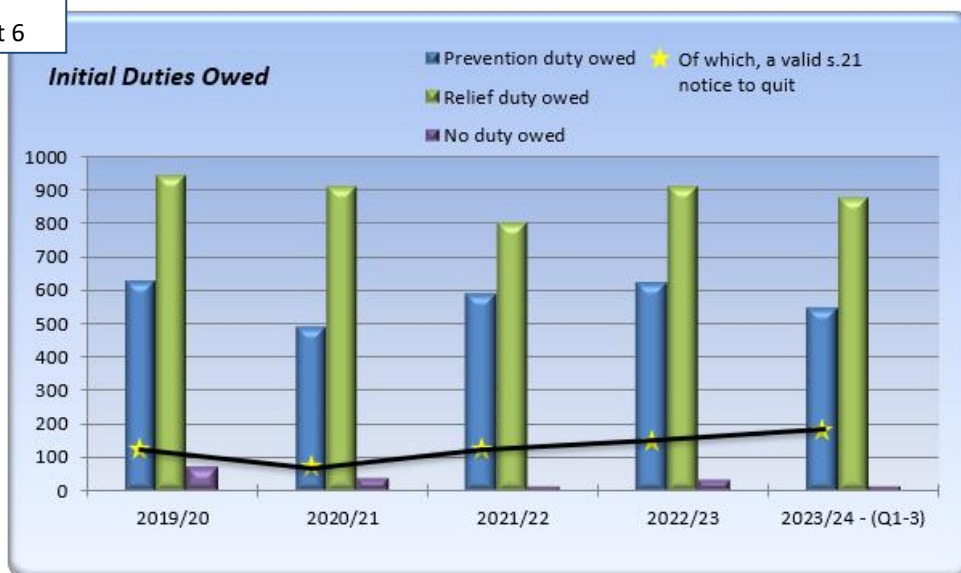
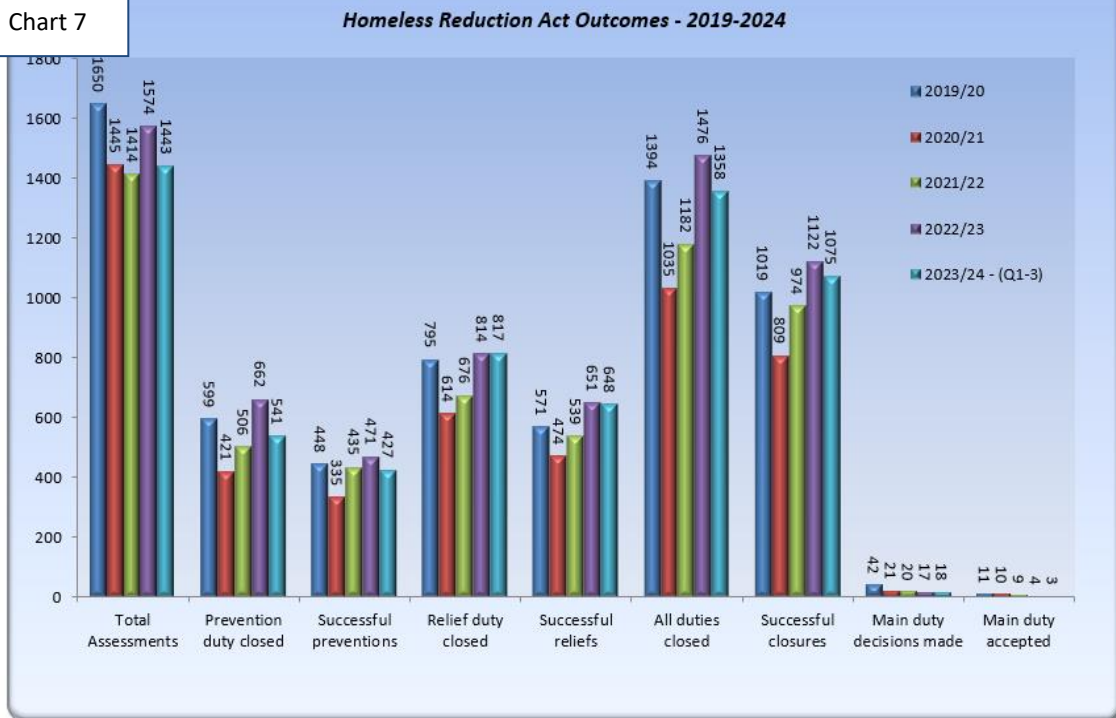


Chart 7 documents the activities carried out by the Housing Solutions Team in Stoke-on-Trent since 2019, including the first three quarters of the current financial year (April – December 2023).

Chart 7



The Homelessness Monitor, a longitudinal study in England, commissioned and funded by Crisis, provides an independent analysis of the homelessness impacts of recent economic and policy developments in the United Kingdom.²³ The key findings from the most recent study reveals baseline forecasts showing core homelessness rising significantly in the immediate future, with the key drivers of this increase being inflation levels putting pressure on already low incomes, increasing poverty and destitution, alongside rising private rents and evictions and declining social rented lettings.

4.2 Who becomes homeless?

According to the UK Poverty and Social Exclusion Survey 2012, homelessness tends to be heavily concentrated amongst young, underprivileged lone parents or single people, who are renting accommodation within urban areas of the UK, a description which, even more than a decade on, is still relevant and largely synonymous with the statistical profiles of Stoke-on-Trent.

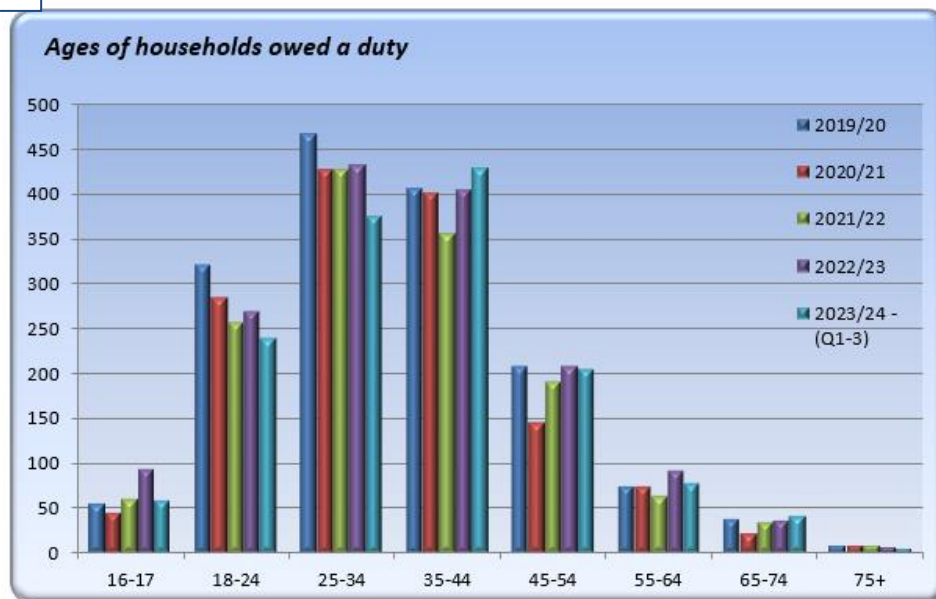
4.2.1 Age:

People in Stoke-on-Trent, who are owed a statutory homeless duty (both prevention and relief) under the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, are most commonly aged between 25-34. This has been a consistent pattern over many years. However, the volume of young people under 25 has increased in the last 12 months, with numbers of 18-24-year-olds

²³ [The Homeless Monitor: England 2023](#) report

looking likely to be higher in 2023/24 than last year, once final figures for the year are published. The impact of youth homelessness is explored in more detail in section 5.2 of this review report. Chart 8 displays comparative age trends for Stoke-on-Trent over the last 5 years.

Chart 8



In line with the increase in the overall number of people sleeping rough across the country, so too is the proportion of young people falling into that category. According to the Rough Sleeping Annual Snapshot figures, the number of young people ages 18-24 on England's streets has risen by 1% over the last few years, from 5% to 6% of the total population. In Stoke-on-Trent, that percentage has actually decreased from 10%²⁴ to 0 over the same time period.

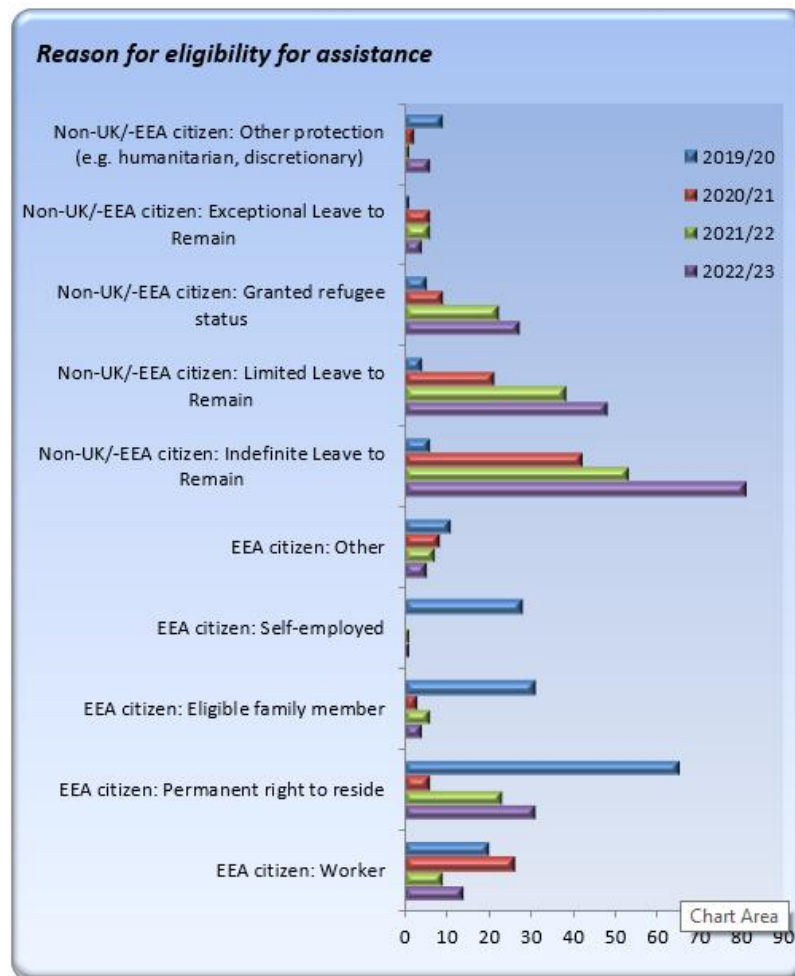
Analysis of the rough sleeper caseload as at 30 May 2024 shows that there the majority of people sleeping rough in Stoke-on-Trent are aged between 35-44.

4.2.2 Ethnicity:

The HCLIC reporting system records the reasons why applicants were considered to be eligible for a homelessness duty under the HRA17. The figures show that on average each year in Stoke-on-Trent, around 88% of all eligible applicants report British citizenship. Chart 9 shows the reasons why the remaining applicants were eligible for assistance.

²⁴ 10% in this case equated to 2 out of 19 people who were under the age of 25.

Chart 9



The data reveals an increasing number of non-uk / EEA citizens being granted Refugee status and limited or indefinite leave to remain. It could be speculated that this increase is simply reflecting the increase in decision making by the Home Office following the inevitable delays caused during the Covid-19 pandemic, as outlined in [section 3.1](#) of this Review.

Heriot-Watt University’s Social Policy, Housing and Equalities Research (I-SPHERE), in partnership with Race on the Agenda, have released the first report of ‘Homelessness Amongst Black Minoritised Ethnic Communities in the UK: A Statistical Report on the State of the Nation’²⁵.

One of the key quotes from this report sums up the findings; “There is overwhelming statistical evidence that people from Black and minoritised ethnic communities, taken as a whole, experience disproportionate levels of homelessness in the UK”. The report is an

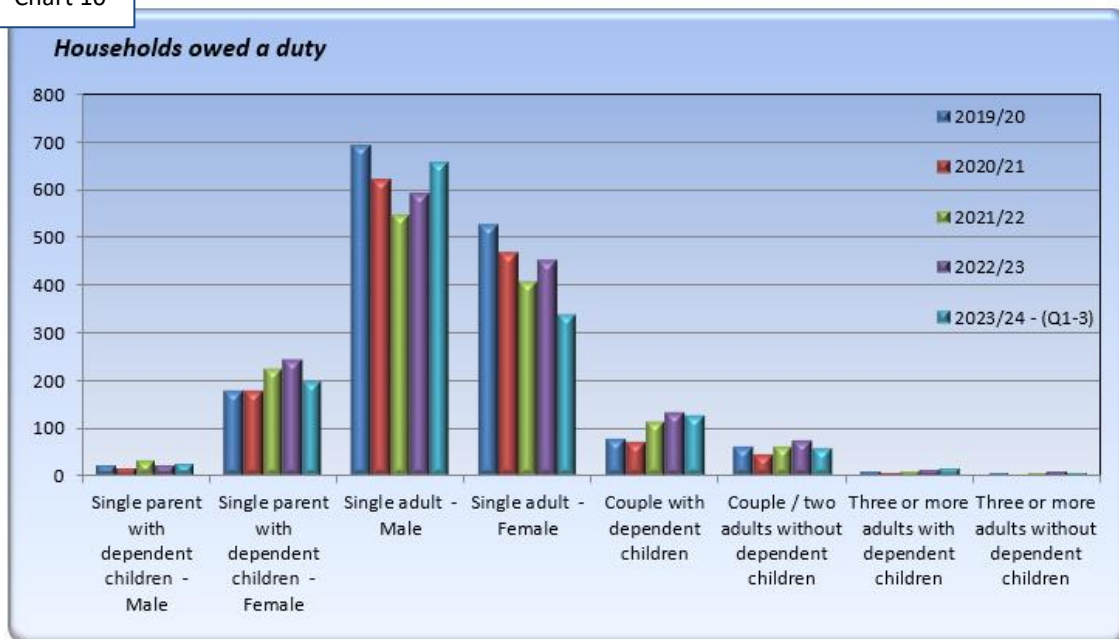
²⁵ [Homelessness Amongst Black Minoritised Ethnic Communities in the UK report \(2022\)](#)

initial statistical analysis running until late 2024. During the lifetime of the study, further ‘deep dive’ reports will be published.

4.2.3 Household Composition:

The information in Chart 10 highlights the family compositions of households owed a duty (prevention and relief) in Stoke-on-Trent according to official HCLIC statistics over the last 5 years.

Chart 10



Since the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, specifically, the additional duties to prevent and relieve homelessness before the main homelessness duty becomes active, the numbers of single adults owed statutory assistance has increased substantially. This demonstrates a significant shift from the old priority need categories.

In 2023, there were 3,214 men (82%) and 568 women (15%) sleeping rough on a single night in Autumn in England. The rough sleeping population of Stoke-on-Trent is also primarily a male dominated population; however, the prevalence of females has almost doubled in the last 5 years. In March 2019, there were 43 people on the rough sleeper caseload in Stoke-on-Trent, of which 7 were female (16%). As at 31 May 2024, there were 44 people on the caseload, of which 13 were female (29.5%).

The annual [Rough Sleeping Snapshot](#), referenced in section 4.1 of this Review, recognises that sleeping patterns of females experiencing rough sleeping is often more hidden and therefore may not be fully captured within the snapshot figures.

Women's homelessness in general is frequently under-reported and commonly linked to experiences of abuse. Reports from Crisis, Homeless Link and St Mungo's amongst others have highlighted the hidden nature of female homelessness, with a call for specialist women's sector services to collaborate more closely with the rough sleeping sector to deliver a gender specific approach to rough sleeping that is responsive to the differing routes into and out of homelessness. It is reported that when women are fleeing from abuse, 40% will stay with friends or relatives in the first instance²⁶. When these arrangements break down, they will often rough sleep as a last resort. This trend is especially true for women without dependent children and / or those with a substance misuse issue or underlying mental health conditions.

There are currently a number of services in Stoke-on-Trent which are commissioned specifically for women, including the women's refuge, providing housing related support service for women fleeing domestic abuse and the Snow Hill provision within the Destination: Home single homeless service. The Council also commissions the Adult Sex Worker Support Service which, although commissioned for all adults who engage in sex work irrespective of gender, supports a service user group comprising almost entirely females. Current figures show that there are around 20 street sex workers in operation in Stoke-on-Trent²⁷, each of whom have a level of complex needs including homelessness. Anecdotal evidence suggests that often, women within this client group do not consider themselves to be homeless as they may stay with several customers on a regular basis. Evidence from the Adult Sex Worker Service suggests that over the last decade the sex industry has changed markedly, with online sex work becoming much more prevalent. There has been a continuous decrease in the number of street sex workers over the years with the vast majority of current workers being in the industry for long periods of time.

4.2.4 Support Needs:

Chart 9 shows data relating to the support needs of people approaching the local authority as homeless. The data is captured via the HCLIC returns over the last 4 years. The information highlights the high levels of mental and physical ill health causing vulnerabilities amongst people facing and experiencing homelessness. In addition, there are significant numbers of people who are vulnerable as a result of domestic abuse and there is a prevalence of drug and alcohol dependency issues within the cohort.

The number of people approaching the authority for assistance with a history of rough sleeping rose to 225, with the outbreak of the Covid pandemic of 2020. The significant jump

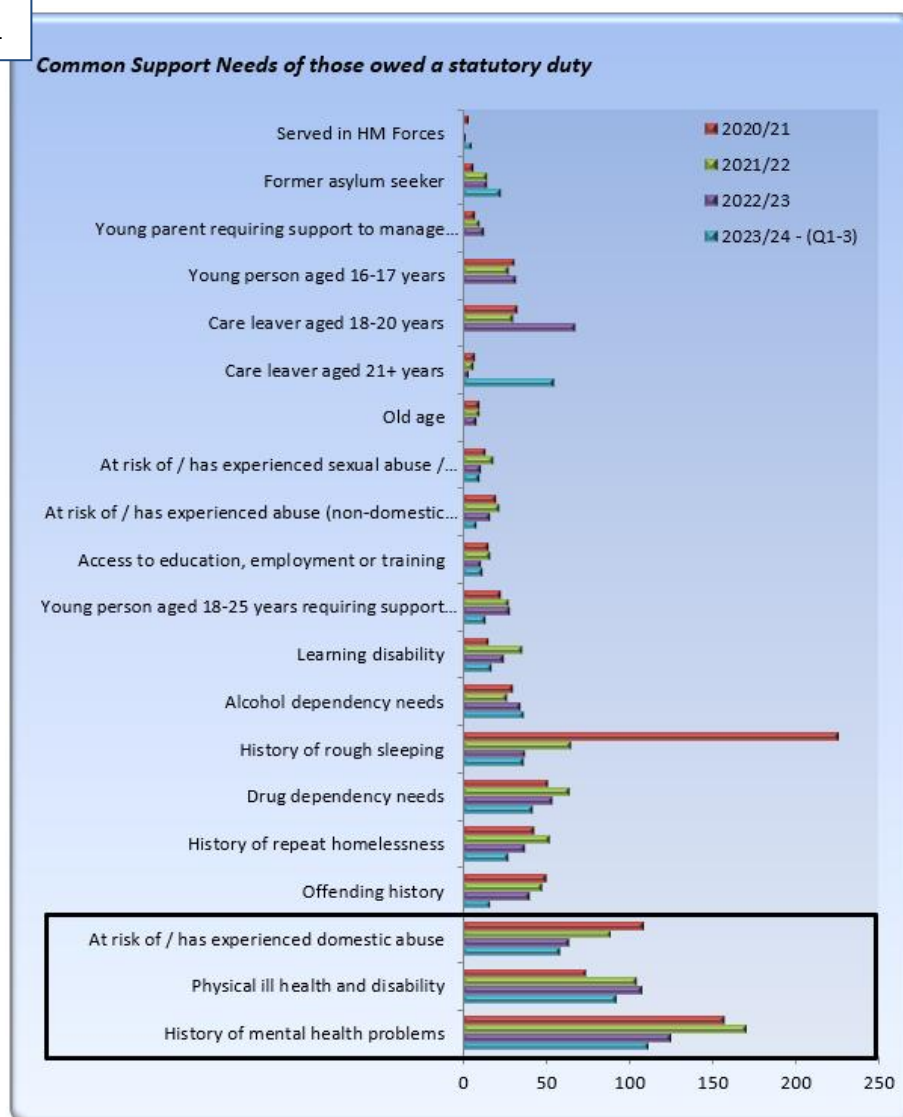
²⁶ Women's Aid Study: ['Nowhere to Turn'](#) (2017)

²⁷ Adult Sex Workers Scheme performance report (March 2024)

is reflective of the successes of the “Everyone In” programme. Those numbers have decreased sharply in subsequent years, but 2023/24 looks set to show a further increase.

The last 12 months has seen an apparent surge in the number of Care Leavers coming into contact with homelessness services. However, this must be considered with caution due to the fact that at the end of 2022/23 the HCLIC categories were amended. From 2023/24, the category of “Care Leaver aged 18-20” was replaced and “Care Leaver aged 21+” was introduced. In addition, the number of young people aged 16 and 17 is recorded as “0” for 2023/24, dropping from a relatively consistent level in previous years.

Chart 11



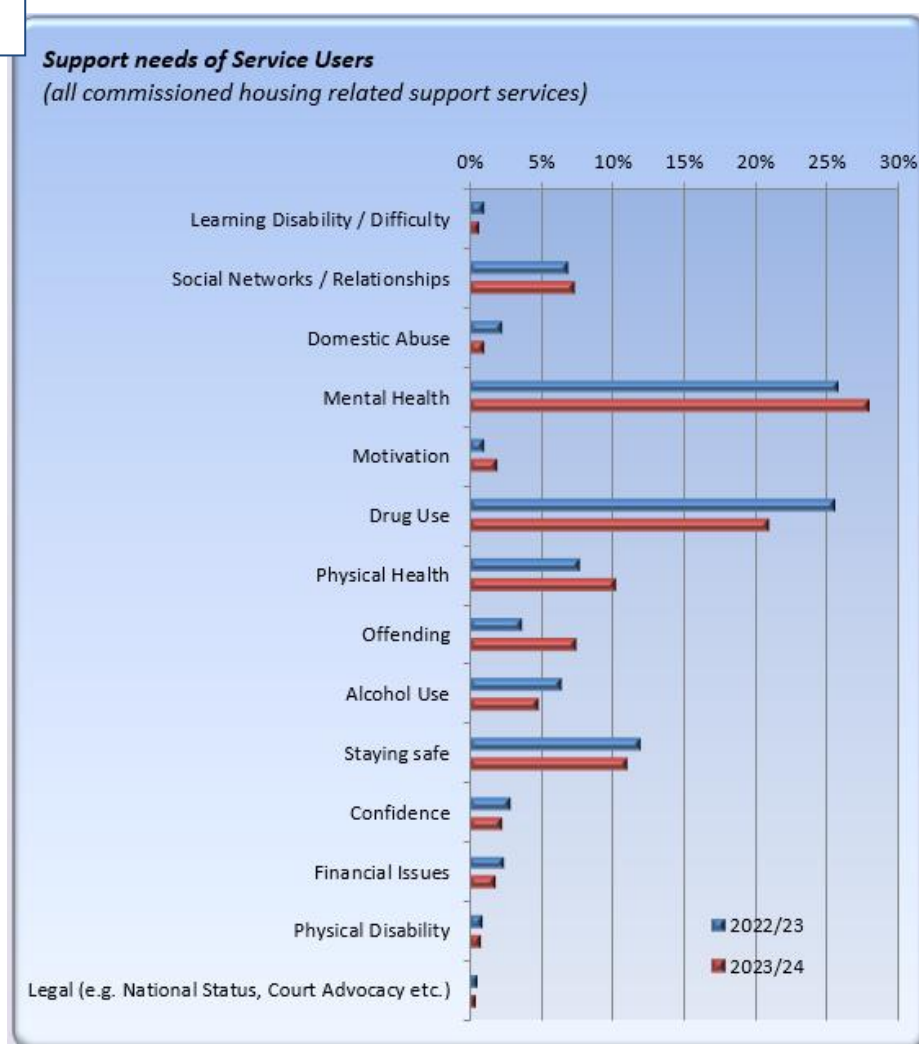
Packages of support within short term housing related support services (HRS services) vary depending on the service type and the provider delivering the support; however, there is

generally a common emphasis on enabling people to live independently using a psychologically informed approach to support people with a wide variety of needs.

Chart 11 displays a summary of the most commonly cited support needs recorded within local authority commissioned homelessness services in Stoke-on-Trent over the last two years for comparison. It is clear from first glance at the chart that despite minor changes in their abundance, mental health and drug use are by far the most prevalent support needs within this environment.

The data also highlights a significant amount of people with a need to stay safe, suggesting that more than 10% of the cohort in housing related support services are considered to be at risk of harm or danger. In addition, there are notable increases in the proportion of people with a physical health need and also those needing support around their offending behaviour within the last 12 months.

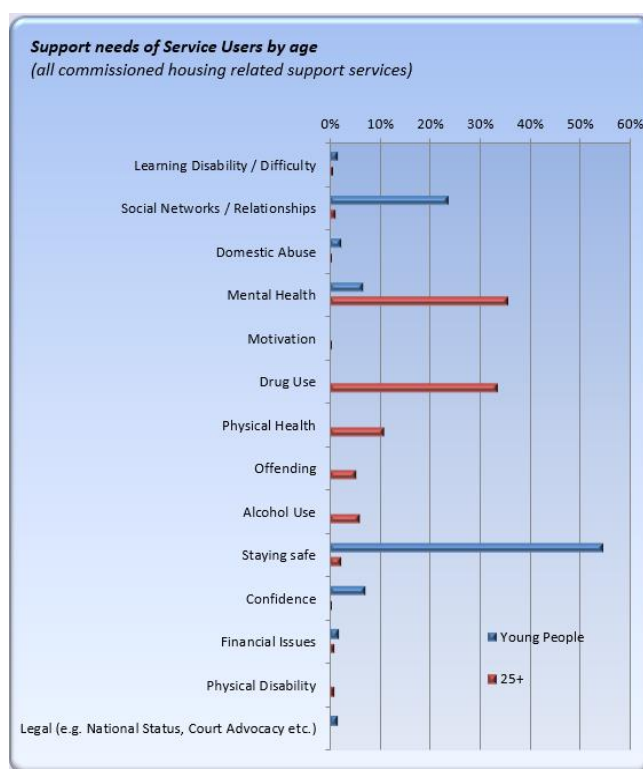
Chart 12



The data in Chart 12 comes from analysis of the performance workbooks from 6 commissioned HRS services, each providing support specifically to the homeless client group. However, it is important to note that support needs vary quite significantly depending on whether the service supports younger people or those who are over the age of 25.

Chart 13 shows a more detailed breakdown of the differences in support need according to the general ages of the service users²⁸. The data reveals that there is significantly more need for support with mental and physical health, offending behaviour and substance misuse within services for older adults compared with young people services. Conversely, there is a substantially greater need for support around personal safety, confidence issues and relationship building within social networks for our younger service users. This progression in support needs as people grow older in supported housing services is a graphic demonstration of the importance of homelessness prevention services at the earliest opportunity.

Chart 13



²⁸ For the purposes of the comparison in Chart 11, the 'young people' category includes the YMCA provision and Gingerbread services for teenage parents and families, whilst the '25+' category includes the Destination: Home service for single homeless people and the Rough Sleeper Service. It is acknowledged that there are some younger people within the Rough Sleeper service and the Destination Home service, but the vast majority of service users within these services are aged over 25.

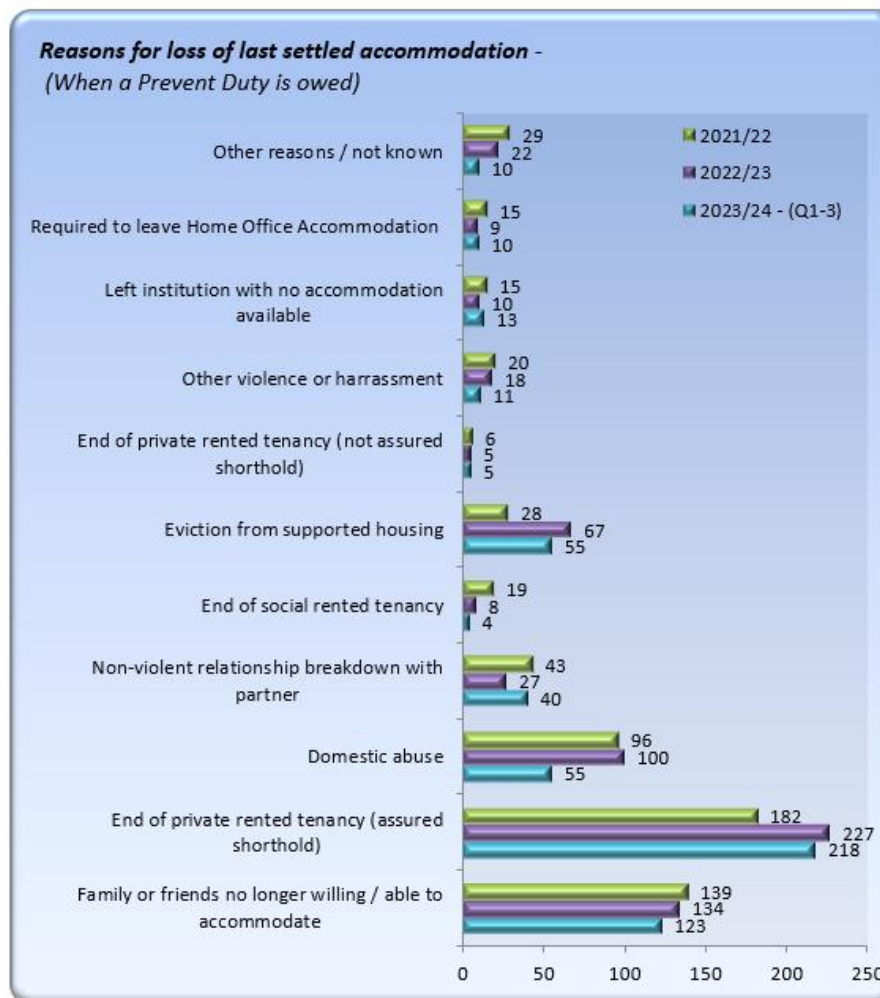
4.3 Causes of homelessness & rough sleeping:

In 2022-23, the most common reason for the loss of a settled home for single households in the UK was “family or friends no longer able to accommodate”. This accounted for 30.4% of single households owed a prevention duty, which is a 1.9% increase from 2021-22. For single households owed a relief duty, this figure equated to 34%, which was a 9.5% increase on 2021/22. In addition, the number of single households citing the end of a private rented assured shorthold tenancy increased by 23.6% for those owed a prevention duty and by 37% by those owed a relief duty.

Chart 14 displays the most common reasons why people are threatened with losing their settled accommodation (people owed a prevention duty) over the last 3 years. In Stoke-on-Trent, the most frequently cited reason for people threatened with losing their home is consistently the end of a private rented tenancy, with those numbers showing quite a stark increase over the last 3 years. In addition, 2022/23 saw a substantial increase in the volume of people being threatened with eviction from supported housing, a statistic which looks set to record a further increase in 2023/24.

The data in the chart also highlights that there are several areas which are reducing in frequency. For example, there has been a decline in the amount of people who are threatened with homelessness due to the loss of their social rented tenancy and the incidence of violence or harassment (outside of a relationship).

Chart 14

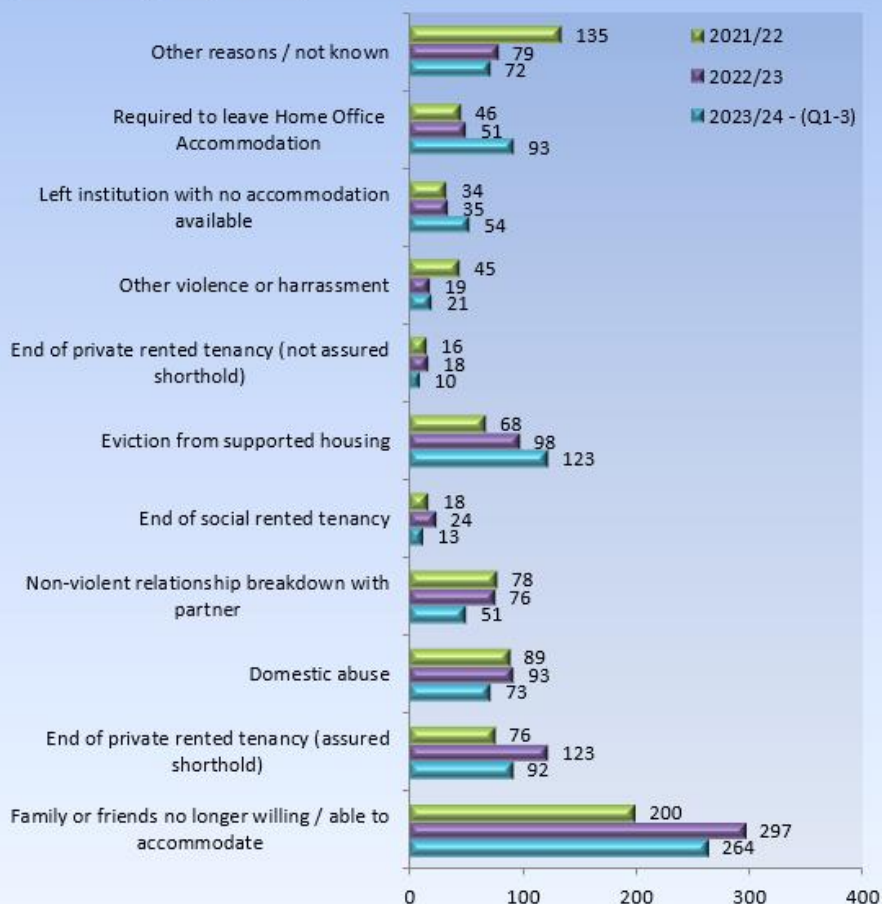


The data in Chart 15 shows the reasons why people have become homeless (people owed a relief duty) over the last 3 years. This chart reflects the national situation in that family or friends no longer willing to accommodate is by far the most common reason for people being homeless immediately. The ending of a private rented tenancy is significantly less frequent as a cause of actual homelessness, which may relate to the success of the prevention work carried out in this area.

The chart also displays a considerable surge in the number of people being asked to leave their Home Office accommodation within the last 12 months. The data suggests that people within these communities will often wait until the point of actual homelessness before approaching the local authority for assistance, as the numbers in this category are much higher for the Relief duty.

Chart 15

**Reasons for loss of last settled accommodation -
(When a Relief Duty is owed)**

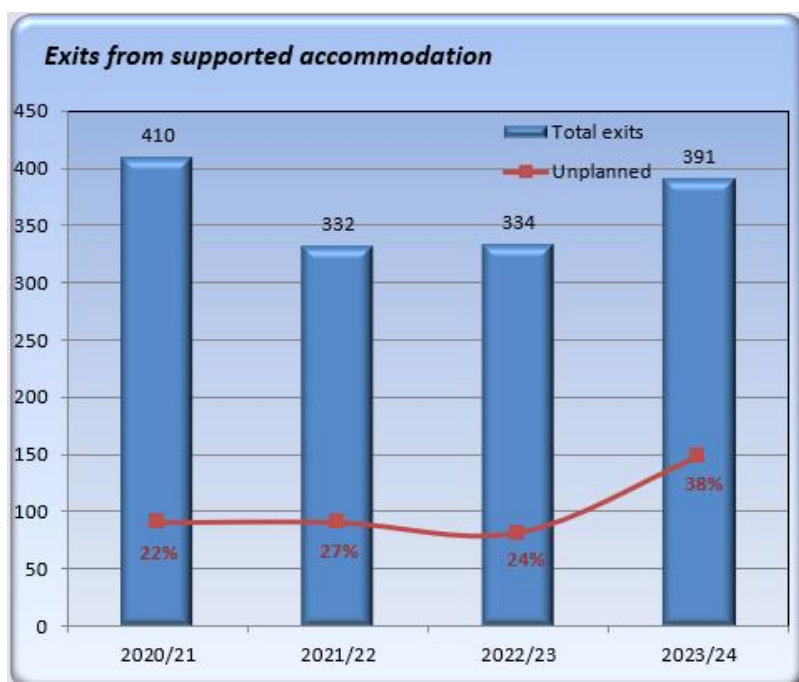


The number of evictions from supported housing leading to immediate homelessness has increased by quite a large degree over the last 3 years, which is a concerning statistic, given the high levels of substance misuse and mental and physical health problems which are prevalent within housing related support services²⁹.

Chart 16 shows the number of exits from housing related support service over the last 4 years, highlighting how many of those exits were recorded as “unplanned”. It is clear from the data that there was a big drop in departures from services during 2021/22 but there has been a steady increase since that time. The quantity of people leaving supported accommodation in an unplanned way has increased by almost 15% in the last 12 months.

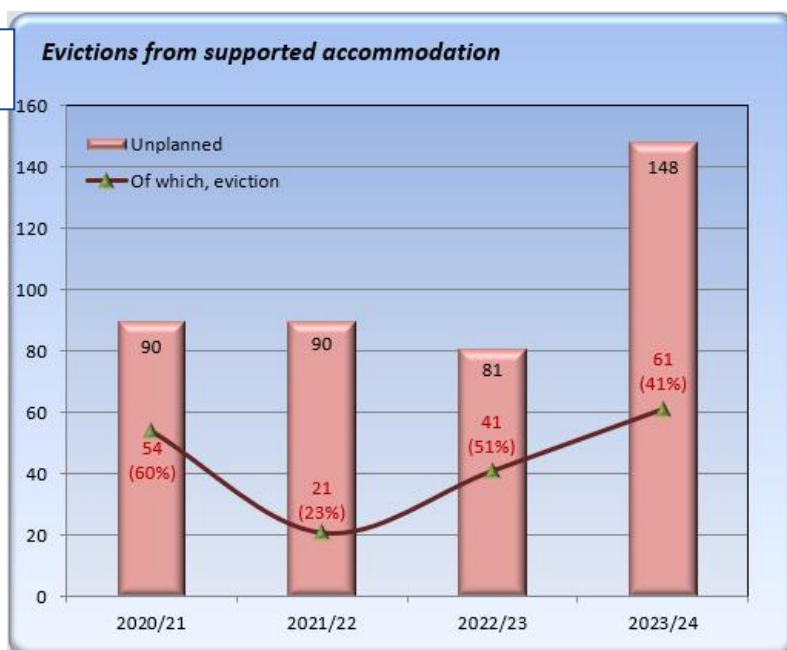
Chart 16

²⁹ See data in Charts 10 and 11



The data in Chart 17 shows further detail regarding the proportion of unplanned exits, which were due to an eviction from supported housing services. There has been quite a substantial increase in evictions since 2021/22, accounting for almost half of unplanned exits and 15% of all exits from services in the last 12 months. Analysis of the data from performance workbooks reveals that failure to pay service charges was the most common reason cited by providers for evictions last year (10.8%). The threat of violence or actual violence combine to account for a further 10% of evictions and substance misuse being another significant factor in 8% of cases. These reasons have been consistent issues causing evictions over the last 4 years of reporting.

Chart 17



5. Wider Factors of Homelessness & Rough Sleeping

Whilst statutory homeless figures and performance monitoring reports provide a useful indicator as to why people are losing their accommodation in the city, in reality they simply highlight the event immediately prior to an episode of homelessness, rather than a root cause. As part of the Economic and Social Research Council's programme of research into 'multiple exclusion homelessness', the Universities of Salford and Lincoln carried out a two-year research project specifically investigating the lives of people with experience of homelessness in Stoke-on-Trent. The resulting report; 'Losing and Finding a Home' (2009), explains how the complex interplay of situations and events can create social conditions within which homelessness tends to occur. In other words, the exact cause of a person's homelessness is often rooted in a series of other, often earlier, events in that person's life, rather than simply through the act of losing their home.

Crisis has asserted that homelessness is a political and social issue and that it happens as a consequence of there not being enough good quality, affordable homes available for people on the lowest incomes³⁰. The charity claims that people are pushed into homelessness as a result of general systemic inequality, poverty and income levels that are failing to keep up with the rising cost of living. These structural factors, together with individual factors such as life events and/or trauma affecting families and relationships, mental or physical health problems or substance misuse, combine to put people under considerable strain, which can often lead to the loss of a home.

5.1 The Need for Supported Accommodation:

The National Statement of Expectations on Supported Housing recognises that supported housing provides crucial help to some of the most vulnerable people in our country. It can have an enormously positive impact on the individual's quality of life; from their physical and mental health, to their engagement with the wider community³¹.

According to the National Housing Federation, supported housing also helps to ease pressure on the NHS and care services, estimating that collectively it saves the public purse around £940 per resident, per year³². However, consistent revenue funding reductions over

³⁰ An observation also reflected in the findings of the move on audit completed in April 2024. See [section 3.3.5](#) of this Review document for more information.

³¹ [Supported housing: national statement of expectations - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#) (2020)

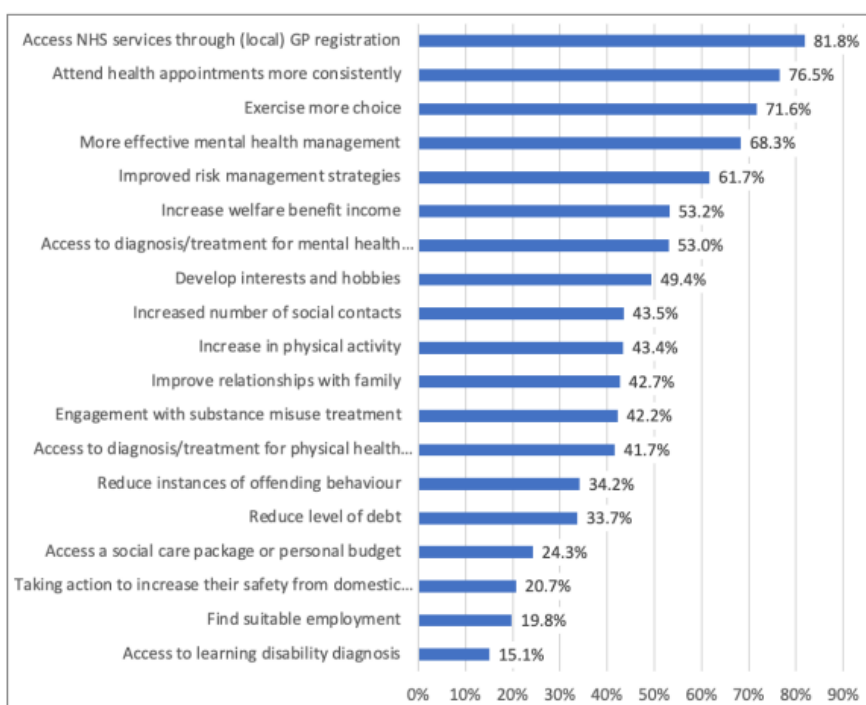
³² [National Housing Federation research](#)

the last decade has unsurprisingly reduced the supply of supported housing both nationally and within Stoke-on-Trent.

The research program, commissioned in 2023 by the NHF evidences the positive impact of supported housing on improving outcomes for people in services across areas like health and wellbeing, employment and training and substance misuse. Their research surveyed support staff regarding the progress service users made against various different areas of support.

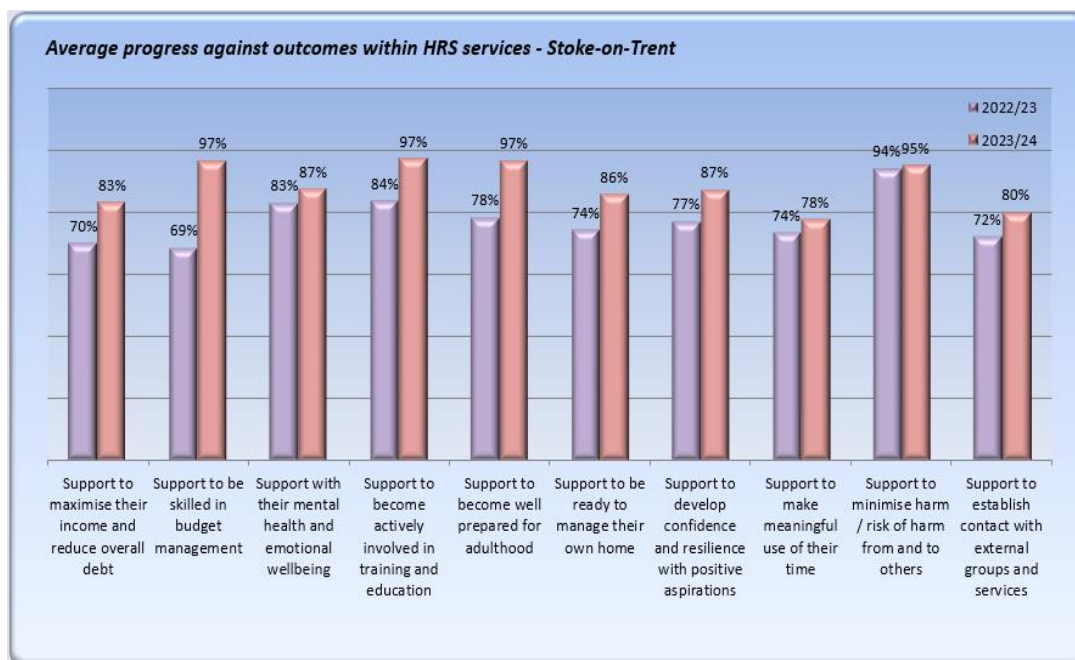
Chart 18 is taken directly from their research piece and shows proportion of progress against health and wellbeing outcomes.

Chart 18



In Stoke-on-Trent, outcomes are recorded in slightly different categories to the NHF research, however, the principle remains the same. Chart 19 displays the average percentage of service users who achieved some positive progress within Housing Related Support services over the last 2 years. The data within the chart paints a very positive picture, particularly over the last 12 months.

Chart 19



The Kerslake Commission³³ recommends that supported housing should be a permanent feature in every local authority and treated as an essential frontline service, much like schools or health provision.

The new Supported Housing (Oversight) Act, will require local authorities to carry out a strategic need assessment of the need for supported housing in their area. In Stoke-on-Trent, this piece of work is being carried out by Homeless Link with the first findings scheduled for publication around December 2024 following receipt of funding from the Government's Supported Housing Improvement Program.

5.2 Youth Homelessness:

Young people with experiences of homelessness are one of the most vulnerable groups in society and continue to make up approximately half of the people accessing homelessness services across the country³⁴. Research suggests that young people have different routes into homelessness than adults as well as different experiences of the system. They face distinct structural and systemic disadvantages such as higher risks of poverty, insecure employment and discrimination in the housing and labour markets. They receive lower rates of Local Housing Allowance (shared accommodation rate), reduced levels of Universal Credit

³³ [Report: Turning the Tide on Homelessness \(2023\)](#)

³⁴ [Homeless Link Report: Young and Homeless \(2020\)](#)

and are at greater risk of benefit sanctions. Essentially, young people who experience homelessness will have a history of being failed by authorities, services and people who are supposed to protect them.

It can be argued that being 'young' is a substantial support need in itself. Ideally, the transition from the parental home to independent living should be a process during which young people become emotionally and physically comfortable with the concept. Support is critical to the success of that transitional process, particularly in cases where there are additional and often complex support needs identified in the young person's life. It is reported that homeless children are more likely to be in significantly poorer health than those children who have a stable and secure home³⁵ and the longer a person experiences homelessness, the more likely their health and wellbeing will be at risk across their life course.

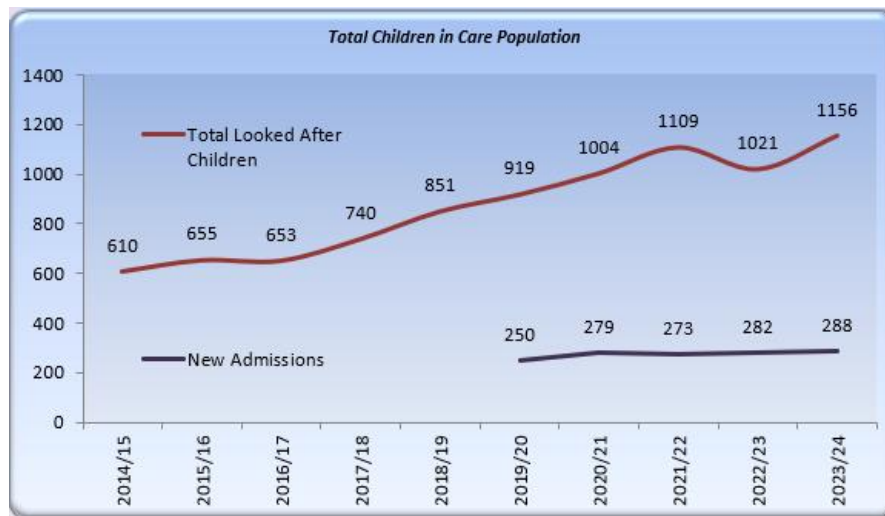
In Stoke-on-Trent, a total of 1494 people accessed housing related support services during 2023/24 (including the Rough Sleeper Service), of which 353 (24%) were under the age of 25.

Every year, around 10,000 16-18-year olds leave foster or residential care in England. Research has shown that nationally, over 60% of children in care are there because of neglect or abuse, which can have a major impact on a person's mental health and emotional wellbeing.³⁶ In addition, the study reveals that children leaving care are at a heightened risk of becoming homeless with roughly a third of care leavers becoming homeless within the first two years after leaving care. Evidence from the report also suggests that around 25% of all homeless people have been in care at some point in their lives. Chart 20 shows the number of children coming into care in Stoke-on-Trent over the last 10 years alongside the number of new admissions each year over the last 5 years. The number of children coming into Care services each year has been greater than the number who are leaving the Care system, with the exception of 2022/23, where there appeared to be more children leaving Care than being admitted. Overall though, the data depicts a 47% increase in numbers since 2014.

Chart 20

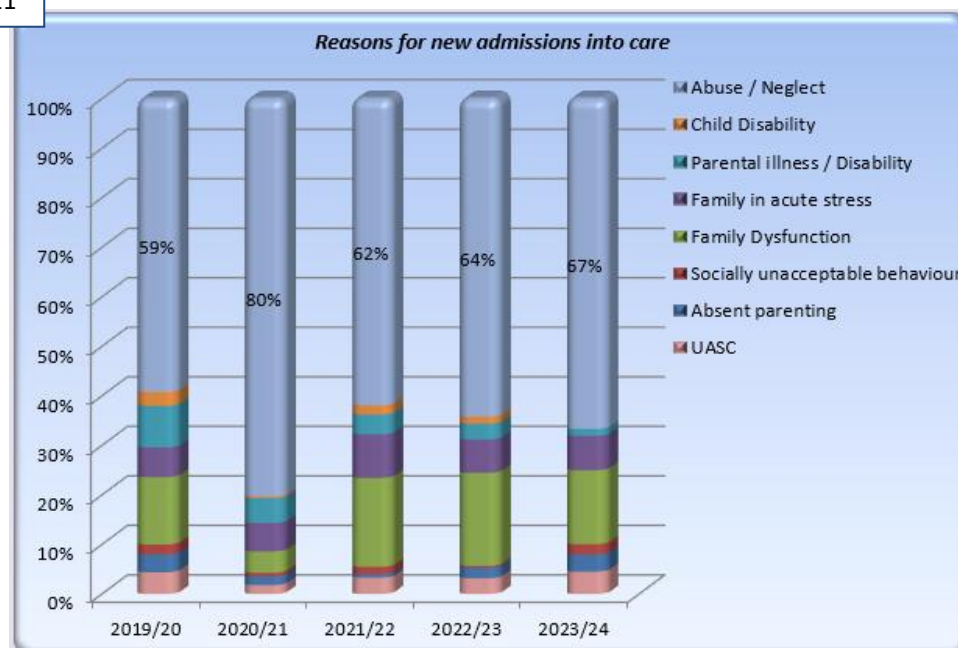
³⁵ [Harker L. Chance of a lifetime: the impact of bad housing on children's lives](#) (Shelter: Accessed 2019)

³⁶ National Audit Office: (2015) Care leavers' transition to adulthood. Available at: <https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/Care-leavers-transition-to-adulthood.pdf>



The information displayed in Chart 21 demonstrates the reasons why children have been admitted into Care services in Stoke-on-Trent over the last 5 years. The proportion of cases involving the abuse or neglect of young people is by far the most common reason for admission. One poignant observation is that 80% of children brought into Care during the year of the Covid Pandemic was a result of abuse or neglect.

Chart 21



Local providers of youth HRS services have reported significant increases in complexities of need amongst the young people within their services over recent years. The need level has shifted from not knowing where they would like to study to not knowing that they need to

brush their teeth in the morning³⁷. This anecdotal evidence reflects the general level of support that is required for many young people within the city.

In 2020, the “Positive Pathways” documents, created by MHCLG and St Basils were updated in line with the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. The documents recognise the need for a planned and multi-agency approach to tackling youth homelessness, which invariably involves their families.

5.3 Multiple Exclusion Homelessness:

Multiple exclusion homelessness is a severe form of disadvantage involving not only homelessness, but also substance misuse, mental ill-health, involvement with the criminal justice system and ‘street culture’ activities such as begging or street drinking. In light of increasing reports regarding the impact of multiple exclusion homelessness, there is a heightened awareness in the UK that those people with the most severe issues are often the most costly to both society and the ‘public purse’.

Research³⁸ carried out by DLUHC with over 500 people who had experienced street homelessness, found that before sleeping rough, most people had not been in stable accommodation, had high levels of vulnerabilities, had experienced adverse childhood events, were not currently in employment, but were registered at a GP surgery and had previously sought help from a local authority. Half had been involved with the criminal justice system and had also experienced hidden homelessness before becoming street homeless.

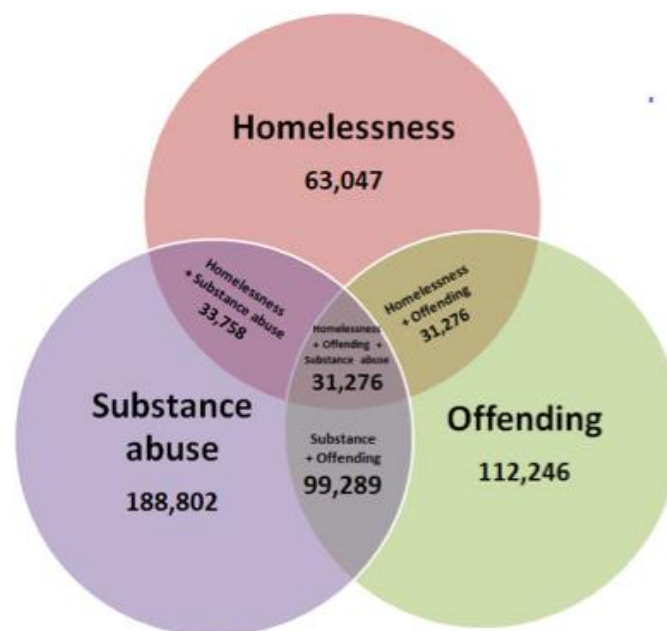
As reported throughout this Review, homelessness locally and across the UK is increasing and projections indicate that it set to continue to rise over the coming years. It is commonly reported from research into the field, that complex issues often stem from adverse childhood experiences and, without the right care and support, can often develop into self-medicating substance misuse and either consequent or contributory mental health problems. This, often coupled with significant social exclusion, leads to a substantial difficulty in the provision of effective support services to reduce and prevent homelessness.

³⁷ Evidence taken from contract monitoring meetings with young person support services (2024)

³⁸ Rough Sleeping Questionnaire: [“Understanding the multiple vulnerabilities, support needs and experiences of people who sleep rough in England”](#). Department for Levelling up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) (2020).

Since 2019, there has been little in the way of new research into Multiple Exclusion Homelessness within Stoke-on-Trent. The findings from the “Hard Edges” Report of 2015³⁹ is the most recent evidence we have in terms of the scale of the problem. The information in that report estimated that there were approximately 2,155 people in Stoke-on-Trent with overlapping problems of homelessness, substance misuse, mental ill-health and contact with the criminal justice system in any one year. Chart 22 is taken directly from the “Hard Edges” report and depicts the estimated scale of people in the UK with overlapping levels of need.

Chart 22



It can be reasonably be deduced that no single intervention on its own will reduce or prevent homelessness. A system wide, integrated approach is needed to ensure that there a range of linked services available to meet the needs of those with highly complex needs. A home is one of the key factors required to support this group and evidence suggests that simply having appropriate long-term accommodation in place can have a significant impact on those with complex needs, who are often the most socially isolated and excluded people within our communities.

Since the commencement of the Changing Futures Programme in Stoke on Trent in February 2022⁴⁰, there have been a total number of 240 referrals into the service. Of these referrals 45% of people reported having no fixed address. Introductions to the service often come via

³⁹ [Hard Edges Report \(2015\)](#)

⁴⁰ See [section 7.8](#) of this Review report for more information

the Multi-Agency Resolution Group (MaRG), which consists of representatives from across the sector. The most common themes associated with these introductions are:

- Homelessness
- Substance misuse
- Poor mental health
- Chaotic or unpredictable behaviour.

Often, the most challenging issue faced by staff is finding suitable accommodation for the individuals in need of support. Most accommodation providers will work flexibly and are prepared to adjust their standard access criteria due to additional support measures being put into place by partners. However, in the most complex of cases, such flexibilities have not been possible or appropriate. This reaffirms the point that has been made previously regarding a gap in the provision of supported accommodation for the most complex of cases in the City and the need for a review to identify how to fill that gap.

5.4 Immigration:

The protection provided by a country to someone who is fleeing persecution in their own country is called Asylum. Asylum is granted under the 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees. In order to be recognised as a Refugee, a person must have left their country and be unable to go back due to a well-founded fear of persecution.

Asylum Seekers, upon claiming asylum in this country, are housed in Initial Accommodation and then relocated across the country into dispersed accommodation.

In 2015, the Government proposed changes to the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 to review the support available to failed asylum seekers and other illegal migrants. In May 2016, that Bill received Royal Assent. The Immigration Act 2016 reformed the support system so that failed asylum seekers and other illegal migrants have no financial incentive to stay in the UK. However, the provisions within Schedule 12 of the Act (availability of local authority support) are not yet in force due to supporting regulations being awaited.

The Government's most recent plan for immigration was initially launched in May 2021 and updated on 29 March 2022⁴¹. The Plan proposes to introduce some of the changes within the 2016 asylum support provisions, but it does not specify whether the Home Office will implement Schedule 12 of the Act, which takes the provision of accommodation and financial support for failed asylum seekers who are destitute with children (including adults leaving care who are failed asylum seekers) out of the scope of the Children Act 1989 and establishes a new statutory basis for providing such support (paragraphs 10A & 10B

⁴¹ [New Plan for Immigration: policy statement \(accessible\) - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/new-plan-for-immigration-policy-statement)

Schedule 3 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002). Until further regulations are made, Local Authorities must continue to follow current legislation around support.

Support for Migrants can be both complex and confusing, requiring a specialist understanding of the associated legal and Home Office systems. Without this specialist support, Migrants can often face severe hardship, homelessness and destitution. The current political landscape suggests that specialist migration support services are becoming increasingly necessary to assist with the prevention of homelessness and the provision of critical legal advice and guidance for Migrants coming into the country.

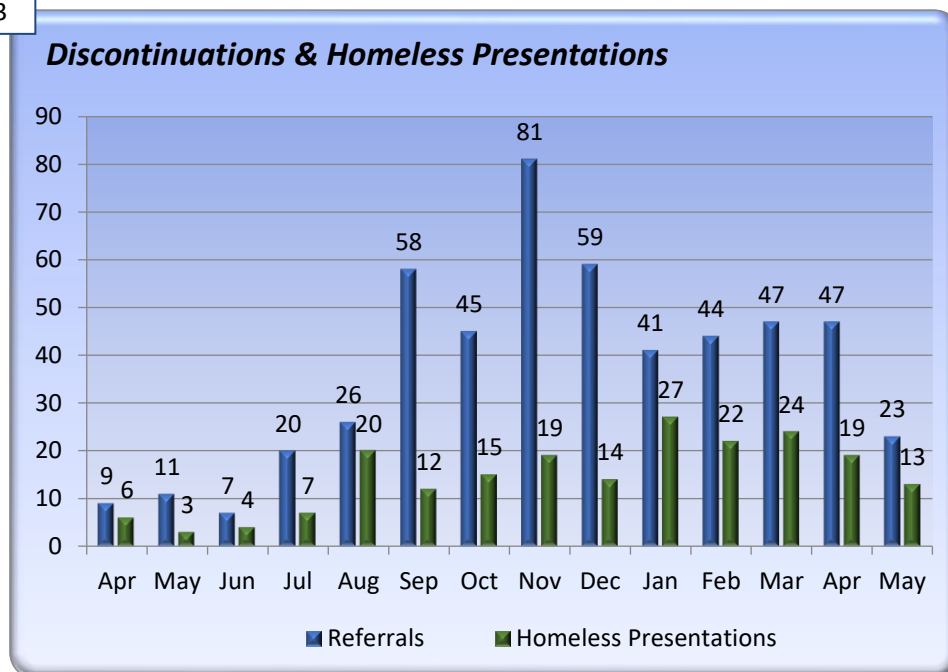
Evidence from commissioned services relating to Migration Support confirms that the last 12 months has seen an increase in the numbers of new Refugees requiring assistance with accessing appropriate health services such as GPs. In addition, there has been a significant need to support Asylum Seekers with Section 95, Section 98 and Section 4 applications and appeals. This is largely due to people needing to provide additional information to the Home Office to support their applications, but are unsure of complicated administration processes.

Crisis research into the scale, causes and impact of homelessness amongst EEA citizens reveals that EU citizens and other non-UK nationals living in the UK are almost twice as likely than the general population to experience homelessness and almost three times as likely to end up sleeping rough. The causes of homelessness within this cohort are largely similar to the rest of the population, but they are compounded by restrictions that limit the support they can receive. This means that when they are faced with some of the structural or individual factors which can lead anyone into homelessness, this cohort are often left without a robust safety net.

In an effort to relieve the current pressures on the asylum system, the previous Conservative Government introduced the Streamlined Decision-Making Process for nationals of Afghanistan, Eritrea, Libya, Sudan, Syria and Yemen, which have received high levels of positive decisions in the past. Once an individual receives a positive decision and are therefore granted leave to remain in the country, they will qualify for state support including housing advice. Only those deemed to be in [priority need](#) and with a local connection, will be eligible for accommodation support from the local authority.

The impact of this has been a significant increase in the number of discontinuations from dispersed accommodation and subsequent homeless applications in recent years, as shown in chart 23.

Chart 23



5.5 Health:

Homelessness and health are intrinsically linked, with each sector having a role to play in tackling the issues together. Research tells us, unsurprisingly, that the health of people experiencing homelessness is significantly worse than that of the general population and the ‘cost’ of homelessness to the NHS and social care purse is considerable⁴². Chronic homelessness is characterised by tri-morbidity, which means they are more likely to suffer from mental ill-health, physical ill-health and substance misuse and are less likely to access the health provision they need to. This combination of factors leads to high rates of mortality within the homelessness population.

It is a widely reported statistic that people who experience long term homelessness die on average 30 years before people who have had no experience of homelessness. Figures indicate that men and women from the long-term homeless population are dying on average aged 47 and 43 respectively, which is a significant contrast to the national average age of 77.⁴³

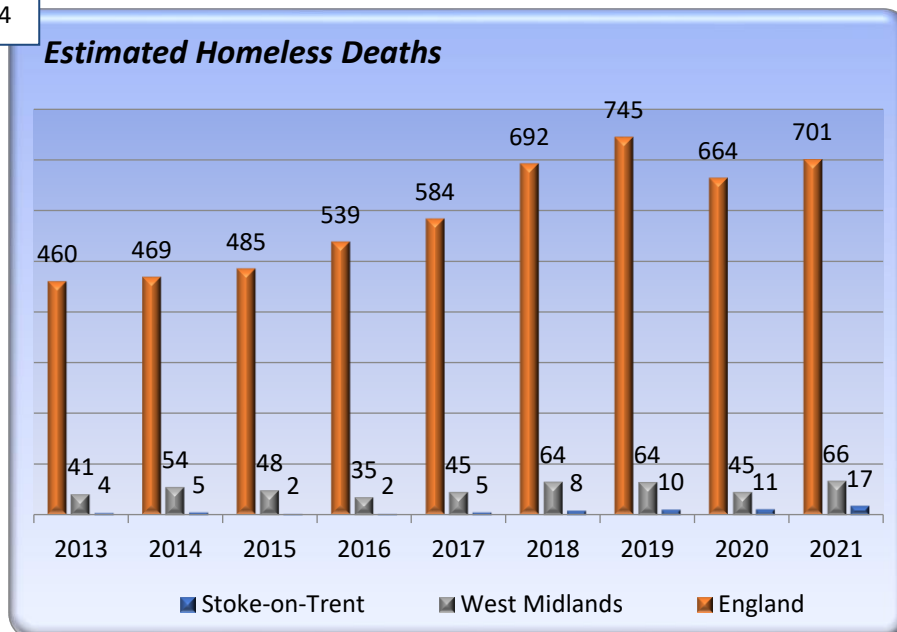
Research carried out by the Office for National Statistics in November 2022 estimates that there were 701 deaths of homeless people in 2021 across England. This represents a 5.2% increase on the previous years figure and a 34% increase since 2013. In Stoke-on-Trent,

⁴² Reference: [‘The Impact of Homelessness on Health’ \(LGA 2017\)](#)

⁴³ www.crisis.org.uk – National single homeless charity

there were an estimated 17 deaths of homeless people, signifying a concerning 76% increase on 2013 numbers. Statisticians at the ONS confirm that the methods used to estimate the figures is robust but conservative and so true figures may in fact be greater. Chart 24 below shows comparative data since 2013 across England, the West Midlands region and locally in Stoke-on-Trent⁴⁴.

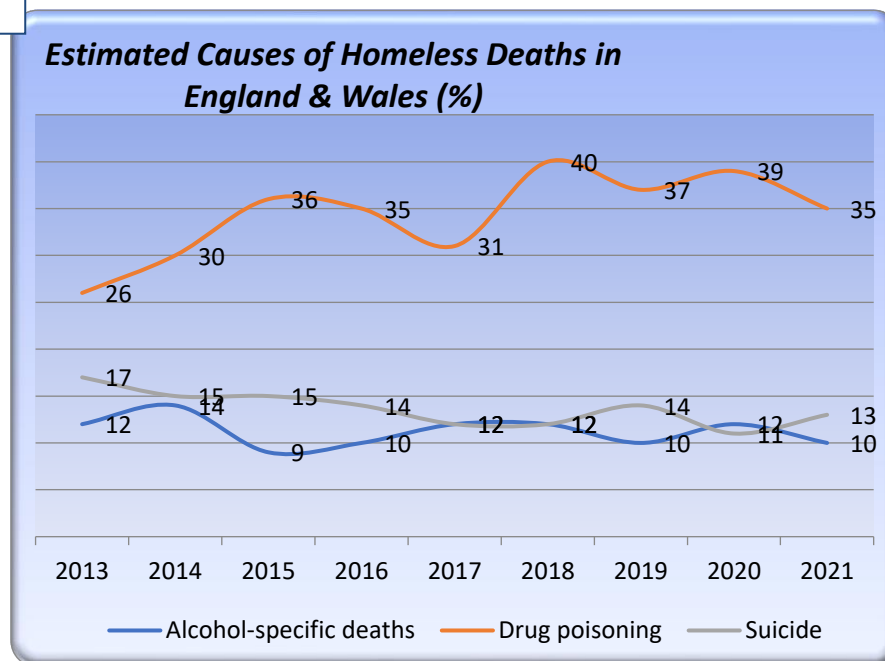
Chart 24



The ONS research shows that drug poisoning remains the most common cause of death when someone has been homeless. Chart 25 below highlights the proportion of deaths related to drugs, alcohol and suicide over the last few years. The trends reveal a steady decrease in the number of suicides recorded, no significant change in the prevalence of alcohol specific deaths, but a significant rise in the percentage of deaths related to drug poisoning across England and Wales, particularly within the last 4 years.

⁴⁴ [ONS report](#) into the number of deaths of homeless people from 2013-2021

Chart 25



To add further context to the common causes of death for homeless people, researchers from the King’s Fund report that around a third of the deaths recorded within the homeless population are actually from treatable medical conditions, such as respiratory disease and HIV. As well as practical barriers, like not owning a phone, the attitudes of some staff and a misbelief that patients require a home address to register with a GP, can combine to make it hard to access health services when needed. These challenges often lead to health issues not being picked up until they are more serious and require hospital treatment.

“The Gatekeepers report: Access to primary care for those with multiple needs” (2016) and the “Access to Primary Care Services for Patients with “No Fixed Abode” report (2018) (both commissioned by the VOICES program in Stoke-on-Trent) add further local context to the stigma and exclusion that people who are homeless encounter when attempting to access primary care services. Both reports found that local GP practices are often not aligned with Care Quality Commission expectations with regard to access. Not being registered with a GP prevents people accessing other services they need such as a social care, and mental health care.

The Local Government Association paper around the impact of homelessness on health (2017) also references how people who sleep rough, and those who are chronically housed in insecure accommodation, tend to face greater risks to their health and life chances. The prevalence of infectious diseases, such as tuberculosis, HIV and hepatitis C is significantly higher than in the general population and people who are dependent on alcohol often struggle to fully benefit from a medical detoxification programme upon discharge, due to having no appropriate accommodation to return to.

Findings from the most recent Homeless Link Health Needs Audit⁴⁵ reveal that the incidence of mental health problems within the homeless population has increased from 45% of respondents in 2015 to 82% in 2021. The research asserts that people who are homeless are three times more likely to visit Accident & Emergency (A&E) than the general population, most commonly (30% of respondents) to treat a physical health condition such as aching bones or joints, but in 18% of cases the attendance at A&E was due to a self-harm or suicide attempt and 14% of the time for other mental health issues.

The cost of an attendance at A&E can vary immensely depending on what the presenting needs are and the type of A&E department. For an individual who attends a major consultant-led department within a hospital (such as the Royal Stoke University Hospital in Stoke-on-Trent), the cost ranges from £137 to £445 per person⁴⁶. In 2022/23, the average cost of a person taken by ambulance to A&E was £417. Once people who are homeless have visited A&E or have been admitted to hospital, they can sometimes be discharged to inappropriate or insecure places or even discharged back onto the streets. Not surprisingly, a discharge from hospital directly to the streets often leads to worsening health problems, increased use of emergency departments and in many cases, repeat hospital admissions, creating a 'revolving door' effect for many people.

There is a wealth of knowledge and research surrounding the intrinsic links between homelessness and the adverse impacts that it has on a person's health and wellbeing. There have been some positive inroads established in terms of joint working, increased staffing and commissioned services specifically to tackle this area of work over the last 2 years. However, some challenges still remain on a practical level. Ultimately, the aim is for all public services and voluntary sector organisations to work together in a way that recognises the personal needs, strengths and assets of each individual. There is also further work to be done to establish the most effective pathways for those people with multiple needs and longer-term health conditions, who often encounter the aforementioned 'revolving door' effect.

5.6 Offending Behaviour:

Street activity, such as begging, is still a concern both nationally and in Stoke-on-Trent. It is a common perception amongst the general public that people who are begging in our towns and cities are also homeless. However, this perception is being gradually challenged with increased media attention and the introduction of more innovative ways for people to give

⁴⁵ [Homeless Link: The Unhealthy State of Homelessness report \(2022\)](#)

⁴⁶ Reference: [The Kings Fund: Key facts and figures of the NHS \(2023\)](#)

money, such as encouragement to donate to homeless charities rather than to people directly.

Of course, the reality is that the relationship between street begging and homelessness is actually quite complex. It can be argued that whilst homelessness and begging are inextricably linked, it is not necessarily the case that all beggars are rough sleeping. It is however also true to say that begging is an indicator of poverty and so, whilst some street beggars may have access to accommodation, it does not automatically follow that they are adequately provisioned and have no needs.

One of the primary concerns locally is around those people who are ‘aggressively begging’. Begging in any form is an offence under section 3 of the Vagrancy Act (1824), but unlike rough sleeping, there are no national counts or estimates on the number of street beggars in the UK. Therefore, the data on arrests as a result of police action is likely to underestimate the true extent of the issue.

Staffordshire Police reports a significant increase in levels of Anti-Social Behaviour recorded under the category of Begging or Vagrancy over the last 12 months. Figures from the first 6 months of 2023 compared with the first 6 months of 2024 reveal a 47% increase in the number of recorded incidents, with the most noticeable increase seen around high footfall stores and food outlets both within and outside of town centres⁴⁷. At the time of writing this Review report, the biggest challenge facing Police when dealing with reports of anti-social behaviour and begging comes from those people who cannot be housed⁴⁸ or who choose not to be housed.

The Ministry of Justice published a Prisoner Crime Reduction Survey Report in 2012⁴⁹, which captured survey responses from a cohort of 1,435 adult prisoners across the UK who had been sentenced to between 1 month and 4 years in custody for a variety of different crimes. The survey posed questions relating to their accommodation status both prior to and on release from custody. The findings of the study revealed that 15% of the responding prisoners reported being homeless prior to their custodial sentence. A further 16% were living rent free in someone else’s home or living with a family member, which are also potentially insecure accommodation arrangements and indicative of hidden homelessness.

⁴⁷ Source: Staffordshire Police Incident Recording Database

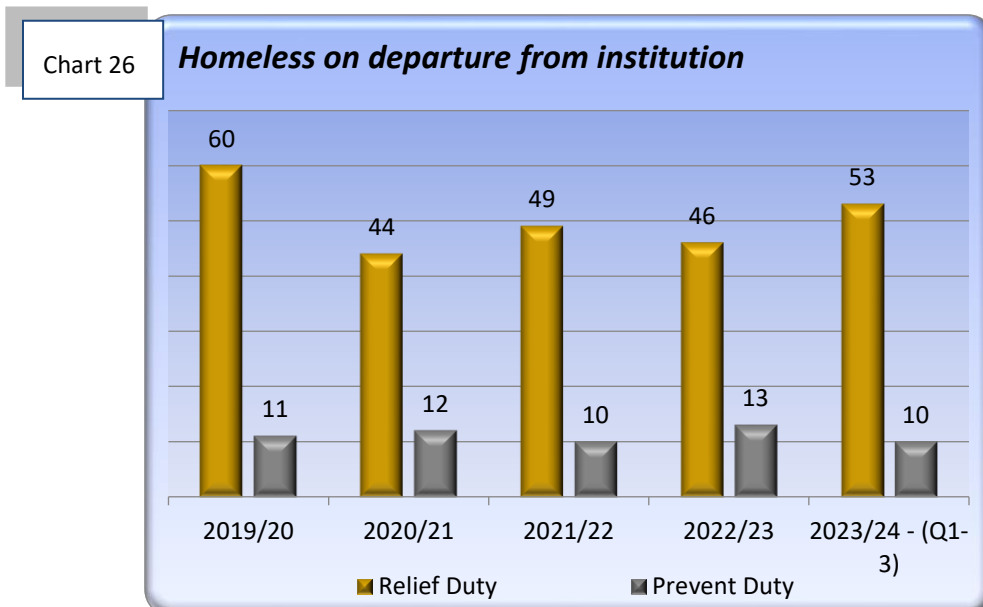
⁴⁸ This can include people with arson convictions or serious sexual offences for example

⁴⁹ [Prisoner Crime Reduction Survey](#) (2012)

The study also highlighted that people who were serving shorter sentences were generally more likely to have been homeless prior to custodial sentence. Of those who were homeless prior to their prison term, almost 80% were reconvicted in the first year after release, compared with less than half of those who did not report being homeless. 60% of responding prisoners believed that having a place to live was an important factor in stopping them from reoffending in the future and a significant 37% of them stated that they need help to find a place to live once they were released. Moreover, the majority of those who needed help finding accommodation felt that they needed ‘a lot’ of help.

Despite that study being undertaken more than a decade ago, the issues being revealed in the evidence are still relevant today. In 2021, The Ministry of Justice reported that 15% of people in prison in England and Wales had been homeless prior to entering custody and that people who are released from prison with no adequate accommodation are around 50% more likely to reoffend⁵⁰. The data also highlighted that between April 2020 and March 2021, more than half of prison leavers were released without settled accommodation and almost 10% were released as homeless.

Data from HCLIC returns shown in Chart 26 below, reveal that the number of people being released from an institution when they make a homeless application decreased in 2020, but is now gradually rising. The chart also highlights that in the majority of cases, those people are owed a relief duty rather than a prevent duty, which indicates that there is still little in the way of planned releases from prisons.



⁵⁰ Reference: [Crisis Expert Review Panel: Criminal Justice and Homelessness](#) (2023)

What is not certain from any of the research is the extent to which prisoners also had other complex needs contributing to their offending behaviour. What is clear however is that targeted help with accommodation upon release is very likely to impact positively on reoffending rates.

6. Homelessness Prevention:

The Homelessness Reduction Act (HRA 2017) came into force in April 2018, putting an important focus on the prevention of homelessness. As part of the legislation, local authorities have a greater responsibility to support those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness and in order to support authorities to address those responsibilities, the government has pledged significant investment across the country over the last 5 years.

The availability of effective prevention initiatives can be far more cost effective than a reactive response to a crisis situation. The challenge for the local authority is to find the right balance between the need to make immediate savings in services and investment in measures which will result in longer-term savings.

As suggested throughout this review, homelessness can frequently be predicted and in those cases, should never be inevitable. Nobody should be forced to leave their home or even an institution like prison or hospital with no accommodation options available to them.

There is an abundance of evidence available to suggest that effective early interventions reduce the financial cost of homelessness in the longer term. A number of studies have attempted to calculate the 'true' cost of homelessness over the years, with a number of methodological limitations. The most recent Governmental Evidence Review of the Cost of Homelessness asserts that if 40,000 people were prevented from becoming homeless in one year in England, it would save the public purse around £370 million. The report claims that the financial burden of the issue is likely to be between £24,000 and £30,000 (gross) per person, amounting to circa £1 billion (gross) per year⁵¹.

These figures were updated in 2016 with a Crisis study taking the experiences of 86 individuals over a period of 90 days and scaling the public expenditure up to 40,000 people for a year with the same patterns of service use. The resulting estimates from this study placed annual public spending at close to £1.38 billion per year⁵²

In addition to the undoubtedly substantial financial cost, there is also the very significant human cost of homelessness to consider. As we have explored throughout this Review

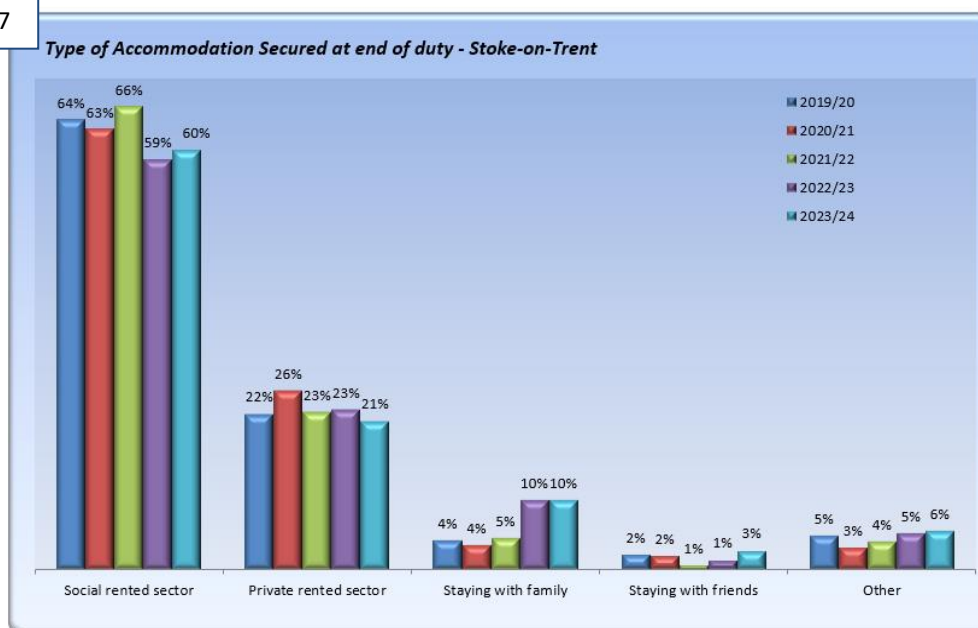
⁵¹ [\(DCLG\) Evidence Review: The Cost of Homelessness](#) (2012)

⁵² [Crisis Research: Better than Cure](#) (2016)

document, the distress of losing a settled home can cause or intensify social isolation, create barriers to education, training and paid work and undermine a person’s mental and physical health. When homelessness becomes prolonged or it is repeatedly experienced, there are often even further deteriorations in overall health and wellbeing.

The most common reason for ending the Prevention Duty in Stoke-on-Trent is through securing alternative accommodation for a period of more than 6 months. Chart 27 highlights that of those properties, the vast majority are secured within the social rented sector with only between 20-25% being sourced in the private rented sector. It is also noted from the data that there has is an increasing proportion of households who are moving to live with their family and, to a much lesser extent, their friends in the last 2 years.

Chart 27



The trends in Stoke-on-Trent have remained a constant over the last 5 years, but the picture on a national level is much more evenly balanced between the social and private rented sectors, with figures consistently being only a few percentage points apart.

Chart 28

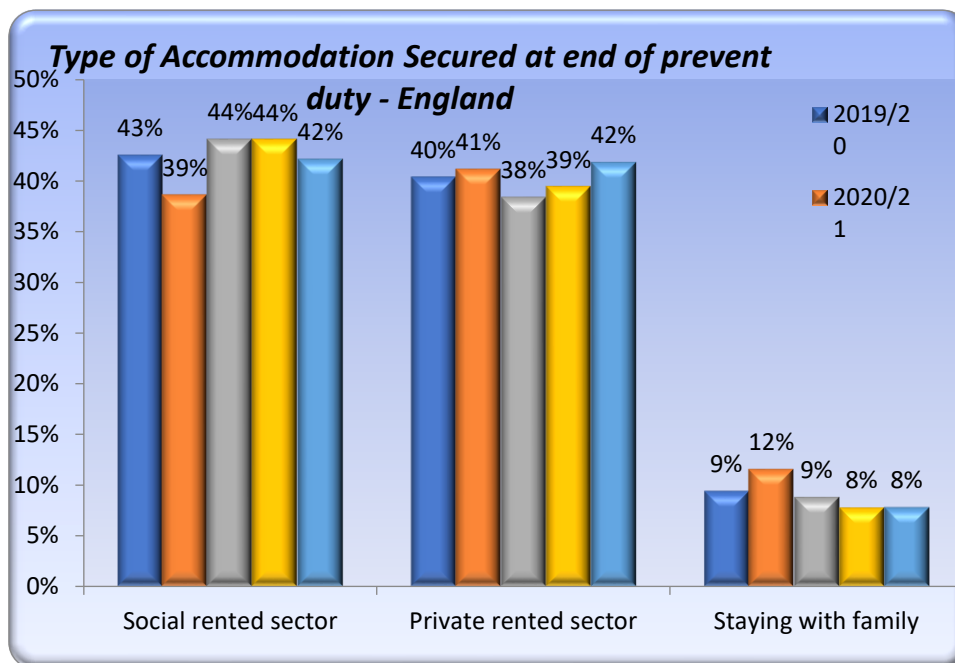
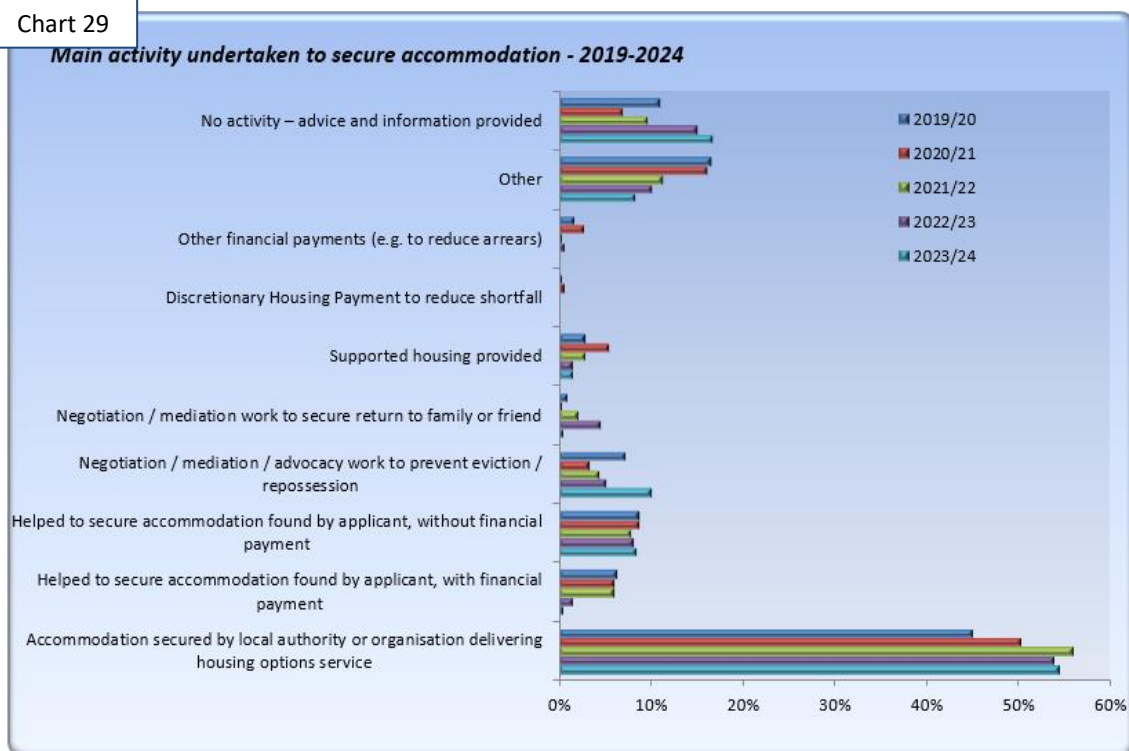


Chart 29 demonstrates the main activities undertaken by the Housing Solutions Service to secure alternative accommodation for households threatened with homelessness over the last 5 years. From the data, it is clear that for the most part, the accommodation was secured by the local authority team, but in an increasing number of cases over the last 12 months, there was only advice and guidance provided.

Chart 29



7. Available Resources:

The previous Government had an ambition to end rough sleeping for good within its most recent strategy, published in 2022⁵³, with an appreciation of the complexities that lead to a person having to sleep rough in the first place and the recognition that no country could ever completely eradicate the possibility of rough sleeping. The Strategy commits to preventing it wherever possible and when it does occur it is rare, brief and non-recurrent.

Whilst we cannot be certain of an exact financial figure to solve the problem of homelessness and rough sleeping, there have been many informed estimations, all of which indicate that effective homelessness prevention measures and early interventions reduce both the human and financial costs associated with homelessness.

This section summarises the resources available in Stoke-on-Trent to tackle homelessness and rough sleeping. For the purposes of this review document, the resources considered here include a summary of financial investment in the City and the people available within the local authority.

7.1 Homelessness Prevention Grant:

Stoke-on-Trent City Council receives an annual Homelessness Prevention Grant directly from Central Government via the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC). This fund is ring-fenced to 'homelessness' and Government expects that local authorities will use the resource as intended. The grant allocation for 2024/25 is £877,170, which represents an overall increase of 11.6% since 2021/22. This equates to a total investment into the area of £3.2M for homelessness and rough sleeping during the lifetime of the current Homelessness Strategy (2021-2025)

To place this into the national context, December 2022 brought an announcement from DLUHC that £654 million would be allocated to local authorities across England, over a two-year period (2023-2025). This pledge strengthened the already significant investment of £315.8 million, which had been committed for 2022/23. The new increased figure included an additional £24 million to cover the cost of "new burdens" following the enactment of the landmark Domestic Abuse Act 2021, more specifically, the extension of "priority need" status under Part VII of the Housing Act 1996 to include those who become homeless as a result of domestic abuse.

In June 2023, following the outbreak of war in Ukraine, DLUHC announced that local authorities would receive a 'top up' of £109 million to their Homelessness Prevention Grant for the financial year 2023/24. This additional funding was specifically to assist Ukrainians

⁵³ [Ending rough sleeping for good - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/ending-rough-sleeping-for-good)

settle into accommodation and prevent their homelessness. The following February (2024), DLUHC confirmed a further payment of £109 million would be granted for the financial year 2024/25 to ensure the continuation of assistance being provided for Ukrainian families.

There are a range of local schemes and projects funded by the Homelessness Prevention Grant, many of which are also cross-funded, in part, by other relevant governmental funding streams as well as resources allocated from within the Stoke-on-Trent City Council General Fund:

7.1.1 *Rough Sleepers Outreach Service:*

The Rough Sleepers Outreach Service is jointly commissioned by Stoke-on-Trent City Council and Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council. The service helps people who are sleeping rough to move off the streets and into relevant support services and/or accommodation as quickly as possible. The service team undertakes assertive outreach work activity across both local authority areas. The service promotes and adheres to the Government's "No Second Night Out" (NSNO) standard approach, aiming for no-one to spend a second night out on the streets.

7.1.2 *Citywide Citizen's Advice Service:*

The Citywide Citizen's Advice Service includes four key elements including the provision of generalist advice, more specialist debt and money advice, welfare benefit guidance and independent housing advice. Access to each service element is via drop in sessions at the Citizen's Advice main office in Hanley or at various 'hub' outreach locations across the city.

The service is geared towards helping people resolve complex debt, welfare benefit or housing issues, which may otherwise result in the person or their family becoming homeless or destitute. This includes help with illegal eviction, disrepair, assistance and representation with warrants of eviction, claims for possession, Debt Relief Orders and support with applications and appeals in relation to welfare benefits.

7.1.3 *Young Person's Emergency Bed and Rebuilding Families Service:*

The Young Person's Emergency Bed Space and the Rebuilding Families Service are part of the wider YMCA youth campus service (funded in the main via HRS Grant).

The emergency bed is a dedicated single unit of accommodation at the YMCA Foyer Edinburgh House, which is used on an emergency basis for 16-17-year olds who have nowhere safe to stay that night or for a short-term period whilst more secure arrangements are agreed.

In addition, the Rebuilding Families service is a relationship building and mediation service for individuals aged 16-25 years to help them build positive relationships with friends and family and/or to facilitate return to the family home where appropriate

7.1.4 Severe Weather Emergency Provision (SWEP):

Each year Stoke-on-Trent City Council reviews Severe Weather Emergency Provision (SWEP) in partnership with neighbouring authority Newcastle under Lyme Borough Council and works in partnership with the commissioned Rough Sleepers Outreach Service to ensure that there are appropriate arrangements and provision in place to protect anyone rough sleeping, whilst cold weather conditions exist and payments are made from the Homelessness Prevention Fund to support the delivery of the SWEP initiative and secure safe/warm accommodation for all those verified as rough sleeping.

The development and agreement of a SWEP protocol aims to ensure that a clear procedure is adopted by all partners when SWEP is triggered and so that every effort can be made to engage with, vulnerable individuals to make sure they can access appropriate accommodation and support at this time. The SWEP protocol operates outside of the usual Homelessness eligibility and entitlement and is only applicable to those who do not have any other forms of accommodation available to them.

7.1.5 Bond Guarantee Scheme:

The Bond Scheme was introduced in 2010 in Stoke-on-Trent and helps people to secure a private rented sector (PRS) tenancy. The purpose of the Scheme is to make accommodation within the private rented sector a viable option for people in the city. It is available for people on low income with a housing need to help support them to find somewhere to live; the bond is used to secure the property to act as a deposit.

Once the customer has been accepted on to the scheme, the City Council's Bond Officer will source a suitable property for them. The property will be affordable, in line with the local authority housing allowance wherever possible and will meet the needs of the person/household. The bond is secured for a period of 2 years, although plans are underway to extend this to 3 years. In addition to the bond itself, there is also a "cashless deposit" scheme, whereby the landlord can claim back 2 months rent from the Council if there is any arrears or damage to the property, excluding standard wear and tear.

The funding available for the Bond Guarantee Scheme for 2023/24 was £22,000 of which £11,371.82 (51.7%) was spent. A total of 37 bonds were secured by the scheme during 2023/24 compared to 55 bonds secured during 2022/23.

7.1.6 Tenancy Relations Officer:

The role of the Tenancy Relations Officer was, until very recently, funded through the Homelessness Prevention Grant, but now sits within the Private Sector Housing. The aim of the role is essentially to manage and support relationships between private sector landlords and their tenants with the ultimate aim of reducing the incidence of tenancies breaking

down, illegal evictions and harassment cases and consequently, preventing homelessness wherever possible.

The officer works with anyone threatened with homelessness, negotiating with landlords on behalf of tenants and taking legal action when required.

7.1.7 Homeless Hardship Fund:

The Homelessness Hardship fund (Prevention Pot) is a small amount of funding that can be used in a range of bespoke circumstances to prevent homelessness. Each case put forward to use the funding is assessed on merit by Housing Solutions staff and can be used if there is no other resource available to prevent homelessness from occurring.

The Homelessness Hardship fund is primarily used in cases where the applicant is likely to be owed a priority need under the homelessness legislation. Requests are discussed with housing staff that can offer guidance on use of the budget and authorise payments.

Examples of what the pot can be used for include;

- Boarding payments to keep someone in the home until a solution is found. This is for a maximum of 4 weeks with the aim of avoiding bed and breakfast accommodation.
- Rent in advance
- Security deposit payments
- Administration fees
- One off rent arrears payment
- Travel costs
- Purchasing white goods

This funding is open for all Housing Needs Officers, who are encouraged to be creative, whilst keeping in mind that payments should aim to prevent homelessness and avoid bed and breakfast accommodation use wherever possible.

7.2 Rough Sleeper Initiative (RSI) Programme:

The Rough Sleeper Initiative (RSI) Programme was implemented by Central Government in 2018, bringing with it a targeted financial investment to support rough sleepers off the streets and develop their wellbeing and stability. Annual budgets were allocated to a number of Local Authority areas, including Stoke-on-Trent, from 2018 to 2022.

The refreshed Strategy⁵⁴ was published in September 2022 and to accompany the Strategy, the first multi-year funding allocations were announced for the new RSI Programme, amounting to a substantial £2.4 billion investment in tackling rough sleeping across the

⁵⁴ [Ending rough sleeping for good - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/ending-rough-sleeping-for-good)

country. The funding presents local authorities with longer-term funding opportunities to support those sleeping rough or at risk of rough sleeping.

Alongside the increased investment into Homelessness Prevention Grants (as detailed in [section 7.1](#) of this Review), DLUHC also implemented a range of funding Programmes to enhance the RSI programme and to support homelessness prevention. The table below summarises the national picture and the local impact of the programmes:

The Rough Sleeper Accommodation Programme (RSAP); launched nationally in 2020 to provide Move-On homes with relevant accompanying support to rough sleepers or, where rough sleeping numbers have reduced, to those at risk of rough sleeping. The vision for the programme is to achieve a sustainable reduction in rough sleeping by offering a pathway off the streets into settled accommodation. More than 3,300 new Move-On homes for rough sleepers across the country were approved, backed by DLUHC investment of more than £150 million

In Stoke-on-Trent the Council has been awarded £972,000 of funding through the DLUHC, for the four-year period 2021-2025. This has enabled the creation of two new projects, providing support for up to 35 individuals at any one time. The revenue funding has been used to recruit staff to deliver tenancy sustainment support for individuals in Social housing settings, which includes; 15 units of Council owned single self-contained accommodation and 20 units of Registered Provider shared living accommodation in the community

In July 2021, DLUHC announced the £13 million **Accommodation for Ex-Offenders Programme (AfEO)**, inviting 174 selected local authority areas, which were deemed to have sufficient need for the funding. The Programme aimed to increase access to private rented sector (PRS) tenancies for ex-offenders who were homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. The initiative stemmed from reports that 53% of rough sleepers in the previous year had been in prison. The AfEO programme targets prison leavers without settled accommodation and tackles some of the known challenges for them when trying to access the private rented sector, reducing further rough sleeping.

In Stoke-on-Trent the AfEO service commenced in 2021 and the Council has been awarded more than £459,000 to support ex-offenders in the City over this four-year period. The funding has been used by the city council to provide;

- access to accommodation for ex-offenders, with the aim of providing up to 25 new additional self-contained properties each year and;

- additional staff to support people to sustain and maintain accommodation or those at risk of homelessness to help repeat cycle of homelessness and re-offending

In September 2022, the **Single Homeless Accommodation Programme (SHAP)** was launched nationally. This was a £200 million fund to deliver up to 2400 homes and support services for people sleeping rough or at risk of sleeping rough. SHAP aims to provide supported housing, Housing First and housing-led accommodation for two main groups; adults experiencing multiple disadvantage, who may have a history of rough sleeping and require high levels of support and young people at risk of experiencing homelessness or rough sleeping.

In Stoke-on-Trent the Council was awarded £800,000 of funding for a three-year period 2023-2026. The funding has been used by the Council to provide;

- access to accommodation for individuals with complex needs/multiple-disadvantage, providing 19 single-occupancy units with 24/7 support
- additional staffing capacity to support individuals with presenting complex needs supporting up to 12 individuals at any time within a hostel setting with 24/7 support
- flexible support with meaningful activity to aid recovery

In 2022/2023 a three-year settlement of just under £3 million was agreed for Stoke-on-Trent City Council to provide a longer-term approach to reducing rough sleeping in the city. This additional investment has enabled a number of new projects and initiatives to be developed including;

7.2.1 *Rough Sleeper Coordinator:*

A Rough Sleeper Coordinator role to provide a more strategic approach with a wider coordination role working with all services involved with those rough sleeping. The role was developed jointly with Newcastle under Lyme Borough Council to provide a collaborative approach across both local authority areas.

7.2.2 *Homelessness Hub:*

The Homelessness Hub (“Hanley Connects”) provides a central point of access to enable rough sleepers to access support in one location. Support includes access to; personal washing and laundry facilities, hot food, help with securing accommodation, access to personal health services including physical and mental health, signposting and structured activities to aid recovery and wellbeing.

7.2.3 *Specialist health roles:*

Specialist health roles have been created to support the wider health needs of those facing homelessness; a Senior Mental Health Practitioner role and a Homeless Health Care Team provide outreach support to reach the most vulnerable in the area, who are often disengaged from services, providing a more flexible approach to accessing support.

7.2.4 Outreach support staff:

Additional outreach support staff to provide assertive contact and engagement for those furthest away from services, resettlement and tenancy sustainment support for those accommodated.

7.2.5 Emergency accommodation provision:

Emergency accommodation has been provided to offer off the street accommodation for those new to rough sleeping to help ensure that rough sleeping is brief and non-recurring

7.2.6 Local Lettings Agency:

A Local Lettings Agency service has been implemented in the City, providing landlord liaison and tenancy sustainment support for individuals moving from the street into private rented accommodation. Landlord incentives have also been utilised to help secure accommodation within the private rented sector

7.2.7 Peer Mentor Coordinator:

A Peer Mentor Coordinator role has been funded to help those with 'lived experience' to provide peer support to their fellow service users and to develop new skills and confidence to aid their own individual recovery journeys. Their roles also help to increase support capacity in the sector.

7.2.8 Specialist Housing Needs Officers:

Three Specialist Housing Needs Officer posts have been created to provide additional targeted support including; securing accommodation for rough sleepers, individuals who are at risk of homelessness following prison release and provision of move on support for individuals moving on from supported housing settings.

7.2.9 LGBTQ+ Support Role:

An LGBTQ+ support role has been funded to help provide a focused support network and to enable individuals to receive peer support. The role looks to support anyone who is part of the LGBTQ+ community and has experienced homelessness, multiple disadvantages and/or complex needs.

7.3 Supported Accommodation (HRS):

In addition to the projects and initiatives detailed in previous sections of this Review document, the Council commissions a range of Housing Related Support (HRS) services

across the city to meet some of the diverse needs of vulnerable people facing homelessness in Stoke-on-Trent.

There is a current allocation of £929,000 of the Council's General Fund for Housing Related Support for the financial year 2024/25. At the time of writing this Review, there are a total of 618 units of HRS services commissioned, of which 492 are accommodation-based supported units and 126 are for the provision of floating or resettlement support within community-based accommodation units.

Housing Related Support Services

Service Type:	Service name:	Primary Support Category:	Number of units
Hostels	Destination: Home	Single Homeless <i>(Self-contained block accommodation)</i>	64
	Single Homeless Accommodation Programme (SHAP)	Rough Sleeper Initiative Single Homeless/Complex Needs <i>(Self-contained block accommodation)</i>	9
Accommodation based housing related support services	Destination: Home	Single Homeless <i>(Self-contained block & shared community-based accommodation)</i>	193
	Julia House	Domestic Abuse <i>(Refuge & Community based accommodation)</i>	27
	Edinburgh House	Single Young Homeless <i>(Self-contained block accommodation including 4 emergency rooms)</i>	90
	Rothesay Court	Homeless Families <i>(Self-contained block accommodation)</i>	22

Service Type:	Service name:	Primary Support Category:	Number of units
	Catherine Court	Teenage and Single Parent Families <i>(Self-contained block accommodation)</i>	11
	Supported Lodgings	Single Young Homeless <i>(settled placements)</i>	6
	Single Homeless Accommodation Programme (SHAP)	Rough Sleeper Initiative Single Homeless/Complex Needs <i>(Self-contained block accommodation)</i>	22
	Rough Sleeper Accommodation Programme (RSAP) Move On	Rough Sleeper Initiative Single Homeless <i>(Tenancy Sustainment in Self-contained & shared community-based accommodation with visiting support)</i>	35
	Accommodation for Ex-Offenders (AfEO)	Rough Sleeper Initiative Individuals with histories of Offending <i>(Self-contained community-based accommodation with visiting support)</i>	20 ⁵⁵
Floating Support Services	Rothesay Court	Homeless Families <i>(Resettlement units from Rothesay Court)</i>	7
	Catherine Court	Teenage Parents <i>(Resettlement units from Catherine Court)</i>	5
	Julia House	Domestic Abuse <i>(Resettlement units from the refuge)</i>	6

⁵⁵ Up to 20 new individuals supported annually for 2024/25

Service Type:	Service name:	Primary Support Category:	Number of units
	Destination: Home	Single Homeless <i>(Resettlement & tenancy Sustainment)</i>	101

7.4 Migration Support Funding:

The policy around local dispersal of people seeking asylum in the UK was introduced with the enactment of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999. Whilst awaiting decision on their claim, people seeking asylum are accommodated in different forms of temporary accommodation managed by the Asylum Accommodation and Support Contract provider (currently Serco), on behalf of the Home Office. Participation in asylum dispersal was not mandated until 2023. Consequently, not all local authorities took part, resulting in a disproportionate burden on those which did.

Stoke-on-Trent has long welcomed those fleeing conflict and persecution to the City including supporting asylum seekers placed in the City through the Asylum Seeker Dispersal scheme with households arriving from war zones in Syria, Afghanistan and most recently, Ukraine.

Although the Home Office now works with all local authorities regarding asylum dispersal, disproportionality still exists. In March 2022, the government announced its decision to move to a full dispersal model for asylum, supported by additional grant funding, but progress in this area has been slow.

7.4.1 Asylum Dispersal Grant:

In 2022, in recognition of ‘concerns raised... in relation to pressure on local services associated with supporting asylum seekers’⁵⁶, the Government made provision for an Asylum Dispersal Grant to be paid to local authorities, along with additional funding to ‘recognise the existing contribution and longstanding support’, of local authorities in accommodating asylum seekers. The allocation of funding is based on the number of asylum seeker bed spaces occupied in each local authority area on a quarterly basis.

All local authorities in receipt of the funding were given discretion on how to disperse the funds, on the basis that the money was ‘used to implement and/or bolster services’ for the asylum cohort in 2022/23. The initial tranche of funding in Stoke-on-Trent amounted to

⁵⁶ [Asylum Dispersal Grant: funding instruction](#)

£318,000 in 2022/23. This figure was increased for the following year, with the Home Office awarding funding of £1,232,250 for Stoke-on-Trent.

7.4.2 Migration Support Service:

Stoke-on-Trent City Council commissions a Migration Support Service for all migrants coming into the city, including Asylum Seekers and Refugees. The Service delivers legal advice and assistance to ensure that people receive all the support, income and other resources they are entitled to in accordance with relevant legislation.

Citizen's Advice Staffordshire North and Stoke-on-Trent, which provides this service on behalf of the Council, is registered with the Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner (OISC) as a level 3 Regulated Immigration Adviser, which allows them to legally carry out the work required within the service.

7.5 Domestic Abuse Funding:

The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 (The Act) came into force on 1 October 2021 and was introduced in order to provide an improved national response to the issue. The Act provides greater protection to those who experience domestic abuse, as well as strengthening measures to tackle perpetrators.

The Act placed new duties on all Tier 1 authorities to implement the following;

- Appoint a multi-agency Domestic Abuse Partnership Board which it must consult for all functions (listed).
- Assess, or make arrangements for the assessment of, the need for accommodation-based domestic abuse support in their area for all victims and their children who reside in relevant safe accommodation, including those who come from outside of their area.
- Prepare and publish a strategy for the provision of such support to cover their area having regard to the need's assessment.
- Give effect to the strategy (through commissioning/decommissioning decisions)
- Monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the strategy
- Report back annually to central government

The Act also placed new duties on each relevant Tier 1 local authority to provide support to victims of domestic abuse and their children in refuges and other 'Safe Accommodation'.

The Act defines relevant Safe Accommodation as:

- Refuge accommodation – single sex accommodation with specialist planned programmes of domestic abuse support tied to the accommodation
- Specialist safe accommodation – single sex accommodation alongside dedicated domestic abuse support which is tailored to support those who share a particular protected characteristic or share one or more vulnerabilities requiring additional support

- Dispersed accommodation – safe, self-contained accommodation with a similar level of specialist domestic abuse support as provided within a refuge but which may be more suitable for victims unable to stay in a refuge due to complex support needs
- Sanctuary Schemes – properties with local authority or private registered providers of social housing installed sanctuary schemes (including target hardened)
- Second stage accommodation – move-on accommodation where levels of domestic abuse support provided is less intensive than refuge.
- Other forms of domestic abuse safe accommodation – a safe space with domestic abuse support tied to the accommodation to enable victims to make informed decisions when leaving a perpetrator and seeking safe accommodation.

Funding has been provided for each Tier 1 Local Authority through the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC). The provision of the New Burdens Fund is for the delivery of Domestic Abuse support in Safe Accommodation duties. The payment of the grant is to cover revenue expenditure relating to the functions set out in the duty, which includes the support of commissioning activities.

The total New Burdens Funding received by Stoke-on-Trent City Council was £2.6 million for the 4-year period 2021 – 2025. The local authority has allocated funding within the following services and service elements:

Domestic Abuse Service Provision

Service Type:	Service name:	Service Description
Women's Refuge	Domestic Abuse Housing Related Support Service (Julia House)	Housing Related Support around domestic abuse and related issues within 12 units of Refuge accommodation and 15 resettlement units dispersed across the city
Specialist DA support staff within Safe Accommodation	Specialist Domestic Abuse Service (New Era)	Funding for 4 support staff within the Pan-Staffordshire Service to provide domestic abuse support within Safe Accommodation settings within Stoke-on-Trent. This includes 1 Sanctuary Coordinator
Safe Accommodation Support Service	Domestic Abuse Sanctuary and Safe Accommodation Support Service (DASSA)	Enhanced support provision for up to 10 people with multiple and complex needs within a safe accommodation environment
		Enhanced support provision for up to 20 people within move-on or second stage safe accommodation

Service Type:	Service name:	Service Description
		Enhanced support provision for up to 25 people by a specialist Housing Advocate
		Enhanced support provision for up to 25 children and young people by a specialist CYP worker
		Sanctuary Scheme

7.6 Temporary Accommodation:

Stoke-on-Trent City Council currently utilises three different types of temporary accommodation including;

- 40 units of council owned accommodation including a mixture of houses, flats and bungalows across the city (Homeless Units);
- Bed and Breakfast (B&B) accommodation at four different hotels / guest houses across the city
- Access to up to 4 emergency bed spaces within the YMCA, Gingerbread and Glow services.
- 5 beds funded through RSI funding specifically for new rough sleepers in 2024/25, to provide a responsive off-street offer.

The use of homeless units is viewed by the City Council as a more appropriate option for temporary accommodation than bed and breakfast hotels, but they are not always available or the most practical option and so in most cases bed & breakfast is accessed first. In 2023/24, the majority of placements (86%) initially went into bed and breakfast accommodation.

There have been several legislative changes over recent years, which have impacted on the use of temporary accommodation, not least of which being the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, which has contributed to a steady increase in the number of people placed in temporary accommodation over recent years. In 2019/20, there were 541 households living in temporary accommodation, representing a 5% increase on the previous year. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020/21 and the associated “Everyone In” Program (where accommodation was provided to anyone sleeping rough), that figure almost doubled to 945 households. As a snapshot figure at the time of writing this Review (March 2024), there were 25 households placed in Local Authority Homeless Units and 57 households in Bed & Breakfast accommodation across the city.

7.7 Housing Solutions Service:

Stoke-on-Trent City Council employs 16 permanent and 3 temporary full-time equivalent Housing Needs Officers within the Housing Solutions Service. The 3 temporary officers are funded via the Rough Sleepers Initiative (RSI) fund. Of those, 1 Officer works specifically with people who are street homeless, which involves working closely with the Rough Sleeper's Team and carrying out housing assessments outside of the office environment. 1 Officer works with people who are being released from prison and are at risk of homelessness and 1 Officer works with people moving on from supported housing settings. The wider team also has two specialist Young Person's Housing Needs Officers who work alongside the Next Steps team within Children's Social Care to provide support and assistance to care leavers and young people who need housing assistance.

In addition, the Better Care Fund also makes a contribution to another specialist post, which provides targeted support for people who are being discharged from hospital and are at risk of homelessness.

Further specialist posts within the team include the Bond Officer who works in partnership with the city landlords to assist customers into affordable private sector accommodation and a Temporary Accommodation Officer, who provides assistance to households placed into short-term homes.

The Housing Solutions team carries out a wide range of prevention and relief work including;

- Delivery of the Bond Scheme;
- Administration of the Council's Allocations Policy, Management of the Council's waiting list and nominations into Registered Provider properties;
- Provision of housing needs advice and administration of homelessness assessments
- Development of personal housing plans (PHP's) as required within the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017
- Mediation between people in housing need and their landlords, mortgage lenders, social services or friends and family as required
- Working closely with partner support agencies and providers across the city to secure supported accommodation as needed

This is not an exhaustive list of activities undertaken through this resource. The team is flexible when responding to people's needs, as people's circumstances can vary significantly

7.8 Changing Futures Programme:

Stoke on Trent was one of 15 areas in the country to be successful in securing funding (£3.9 million) to deliver the Changing Futures Programme. A joint initiative between the National Lottery Community Fund and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government

(MHCLG). The programme ends on 31st March 2025. The ethos is a partnership approach to improve outcomes for those experiencing multiple disadvantage – homelessness, offending, substance use, mental health difficulties, and victims of domestic abuse. The initiative brings together the public sector and community sector to drive the modernisation of public services for people experiencing multiple disadvantage. The focus is upon Individual, Service and System Change and overall strategy for resolving the systemic problems is to prototype an adaptive system that draws on practice-based learning and lived experience.

The model focuses on ensuring lived experience is embedded within the system and service practice. The programme features a staffing team of Case Co-ordinators, who ensure services engage effectively to support individuals experiencing multiple disadvantage. Workforce development also features significantly within the programme and a staff training programme has been developed and designed by people with lived experience to upskill staff and volunteers within the sector around the challenges of multiple disadvantage.

7.9 Drug and Alcohol Funding:

Stoke-on-Trent City Council received approximately £9.5 million over three years from 2022 to 2025 in four grants as set out below, to deliver the National Drug Strategy at a local level. Below is a summary break down of the funding programmes:

7.9.1 *Supplementary Substance Misuse Treatment Grant:*

In Stoke on Trent SSMTR funding has been used specifically to improve the quality and capacity of substance misuse treatment and recovery services for everyone accessing the Community Drug and Alcohol Service (CDAS). It is also to bring the aims of treatment and recovery more in line with the National Drug Strategy, “From harm to hope”.

The grant has increased the number of specialised staff within the service, which has seen a reduction of case-loads to a more manageable level as a result.

7.9.2 *Rough Sleeping Drug & Alcohol Treatment Grant (RSDATG):*

This grant has been introduced to enhance the CDAS service. The CDAS RSDATG team provides proactive engagement and outreach, offering bespoke support to people who are sleeping rough or are at risk of or sleeping rough. They provide people with coordinated pathways and access into treatment for their addiction including residential rehabilitation and detoxification.

7.9.3 *Housing Support Grant:*

This grant has been used to support people with drug and alcohol issues to access treatment and to access and maintain housing. The project is to help people with the most complex

needs to access and sustain suitable accommodation whilst receiving structured treatment from CDAS.

7.9.4 Individual Placement and Support Grant (IPS):

This grant provides funding to support people in recovery from drug and alcohol support services to find and sustain employment.

7.10 Supported Housing Improvement Programme (SHIP):

In July 2022, the former Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) announced a £20 million 3-year Supported Housing Improvement Programme. Bids were invited from all local authorities and successful applicants could secure a share of the total in order to drive improvement in Supported Housing in their local area⁵⁷.

In November 2022, Stoke-on-Trent City Council received confirmation that it had been successful in its bid for £958,824 for 3 financial years (until March 2025). The project has been operational since late February 2023.

7.10.1 Project Team Objectives and Timelines:

The objective of the overall SHIP programme is to directly target local quality and value for money issues within existing Supported Housing services. The following core activities are included in the programme:

- Review support arrangements through person-centred assessments of the support being provided to individuals and to obtain information directly from the organisations providing the accommodation and support.
- Carry out property inspections to ensure housing is accessible, appropriate, safe and hazard-free.
- Conduct a Supported Housing Needs Assessment to analyse the current provision for supported accommodation and also to forecast what future need there may be for supported accommodation across the city.
- Create a standardised 'gateway' process for all new prospective providers of supported housing. This updated process is much more in-depth and has additional evidence requirements that must be fulfilled. It is hoped that this process will deter potential 'rogue' or profit-making investment companies from trying to enter the supported accommodation arena in the city.

⁵⁷ this is in relation to 'exempt' supported housing which is funded via Housing Benefit.

8. Future Homelessness & Rough Sleeping:

Much of the data about homelessness levels is actually more indicative of the amount of help available to people rather than a measure of demand for services. The difficulty of quantifying the true extent of homelessness in the city is exacerbated further when looking to predict future levels of homelessness.

Homelessness in Great Britain is forecast to continue to increase over the coming decade. Research has identified some immediate pressures, such as the cost of living crisis and general housing shortages, which are likely to lead to further increases in homelessness and destitution across the country. Those risks, although projected at a national level, will also have an impact locally, as vulnerable people within Stoke-on-Trent continue to face the barriers presented by having low household incomes and the difficulties of accessing affordable and secure accommodation in the city.

Given the evidence presented throughout this Review, there are some key challenges facing Stoke-on-Trent over the coming few years, which if addressed, will help to make a considerable improvement to the situation locally:

Challenge 1: Raising the priority of prevention services

Effective homelessness prevention measures often require heavier investment in the short-term in order to achieve significant savings in the longer-term. Given the fact that you are preventing the use of immediate and emergency measures, the actual monetary savings can sometimes be difficult to quantify as a cash value.

As indicated throughout this Review, homelessness can frequently be predicted and in those cases, should never be inevitable. Nobody should be forced to leave their home or even an institution like prison or hospital with no accommodation options available to them.

One of the key messages emerging from both research in the field and from preliminary discussions with colleagues and partners is that the prevention of homelessness is critical both at a financial and humane level and it should be central to decision making.

Expanding further on what is perceived to be missing in Stoke-on-Trent relative to homelessness prevention, attendees at the Homelessness Summit in March 2024 specified a need to prioritise the following areas in order to progress effectively with homelessness prevention:

- Development of a wider range of accommodation options available in the city, for example accommodation for single households
- Launch education, training and awareness of homelessness campaigns across the city, to increase knowledge and recognition of potential pre-cursors of homelessness within fields

- Focus on young people, particularly Looked After children, to address the challenges they face with regards to their future housing and invest in measures to prevent escalation into homelessness
- Invest in new approaches to understanding “hidden homelessness”

With this in mind, the challenge, for the local authority, is to find the right balance between the requirement to make immediate savings and the need to commit to and invest in upstream prevention services, to address the root causes of homelessness in order to achieve longer-term savings and significantly reduce the scale of the problem.

Challenge 2: Improve affordability and supply of suitable accommodation

The Office for National Statistics cites a provisional estimate that average UK private rent values increased by almost 9% between April 2023 and March 2024. It also reveals that in 2023, full time employees in England could expect to spend around 8 times their annual earnings buying a home. Although these figures are quite heavily caveated depending on where you are in the country, they reflect the general consensus that the vast majority of areas in the UK have been experiencing a housing affordability crisis for some years.

Although Stoke-on-Trent remains one of the more affordable areas in the country, the cost of housing, including rising rent levels and household bills, is arguably one of the biggest pressures facing people on low wage incomes, people in receipt of welfare support and those who are “economically inactive”, which combined makes up a significant proportion of the city’s population.

This Review highlights the imbalance between demand for housing and the availability of suitable, affordable housing options in Stoke-on-Trent, an issue which has also been recognised within the current Housing Strategy (2022-27). The Housing Strategy pledges to drive growth and enhance the housing offer across the city. The pledge also includes the commitment to work closely with local Registered Providers to encourage increasing their supply of supported accommodation within the city.

The availability (and affordability) of housing-related supported housing is also a significant factor in people becoming entrenched in the homelessness pathway. It is commonly accepted that there will always be people in communities who need additional support in this area. The provision of high quality on-site or floating support is proven to transform lives by helping people to settle into new homes, maintain existing tenancies and improve life skills. The significant decline in revenue funding over the last decade has led to a reduction in the overall supply of commissioned supported housing on a national and ultimately also on a local level.

Research suggests that increasing the supply of affordable housing across all sectors, including social and private rented and supported accommodation, needs to sit within a large-scale national programme of housing development⁵⁸ and as such, it is beyond the scope of Stoke-on-Trent's Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy in isolation to find definitive resolutions to improving the situation. That said, the challenge remains for the local authority on how best to take a unified and collaborative approach to achieving the recommendations set out within its Housing Strategy and to focus on driving forward realistic and achievable measures to improve the affordability and supply of suitable accommodation for the most vulnerable residents of the city.

Challenge 3: Focusing the agenda on specific vulnerable groups of people

Whilst it is recognised throughout this Review that homelessness can affect anyone, there are some groups of people who, it could be argued, need a particular focus. The challenge for the local authority is how to prioritise the most vulnerable residents in the community in a dynamic and fluid manner, whilst keeping oversight of everyone who experiences homelessness and rough sleeping.

8.1.1 Young People:

Young people and Care Leavers are particularly vulnerable to homelessness and rough sleeping. National research has highlighted that young people are commonly failed by public services in one way or another when they are needed most, the knock-on effects of which can be a reduced level of general resilience, poor overall wellbeing and if faced with homelessness, an inability to cope with the challenges that come with it⁵⁹.

During the Covid Pandemic in 2020, young people at risk of homelessness became increasingly vulnerable to volatile housing situations, in particular, the impact that lockdown had on increasing family and relationship breakdowns and the removal of sofa surfing as an option for many people.

An experience of homelessness at a young age can significantly contribute to the likelihood of experiencing chronic homelessness and multiple disadvantage in later life. Research by Centrepont found that, on average, a 16-17 year experiencing homelessness can cost the state an extra £8,900 annually, rising to £12,200 for those aged 18-24⁶⁰.

⁵⁸ Source: The Kerslake Commission Report: [Turning the Tide on Homelessness](#) (2023)

⁵⁹ Source: Homeless Link research: [Young and Homeless](#) (2021)

⁶⁰ Source: Centrepont: [Preventing Youth Homelessness, What Works?](#)

There are examples of recognised good practice in the UK where youth homelessness is resolved quickly and effectively. Birmingham City Council has the “Positive Pathway” scheme, which involves Children’s Services and Housing Officers working in close partnership to operate a single access point or “gateway” into commissioned accommodation and support for all young people and Care Leavers.

Stoke-on-Trent has taken some positive steps in this arena, with the continued appointment of two dedicated Young Person Housing Needs Officers. However, a focus on early help and prevention is needed, rather than a sole emphasis on crisis intervention.

8.1.2 Women:

Homelessness, and in particular rough sleeping, is harmful and potentially dangerous to anyone, but women can carry the added burden of gender-based violence and abuse before, during and after their experiences. Hiding from harm can also mean hiding from support and missing out on homelessness services and statistics.

This Review has captured the fact that women’s homelessness in general is frequently under-reported and is also commonly linked to experiences of abuse. It is often the case that services, which are designed to be gender neutral, can struggle to support women effectively⁶¹. There are currently a number of services in Stoke-on-Trent which are commissioned specifically for women, including the women’s refuge, providing housing related support service for women fleeing domestic abuse and the Snow Hill provision within the Destination: Home single homeless service. The Council also commissions the Adult Sex Worker Support Service which, although commissioned for all adults who engage in sex work irrespective of gender, supports a service user group comprising almost entirely females.

This Review reports that in 2023, around 15% of the rough sleeping population (on a given night) nationally were female. In Stoke-on-Trent, women account for almost 30% of the rough sleeper caseload, which is almost twice the representation from 2019.

Reports from Crisis, Homeless Link and St Mungo’s highlight the need for specialist women’s sector services to collaborate more closely with the rough sleeping sector to deliver a more gender specific approach to rough sleeping that is responsive to the differing routes into and out of homelessness and it is this objective, which the local authority and its partner agencies need to focus on in the future.

8.1.3 Entrenched Rough Sleepers:

As at May 2024, there were 44 people active on the rough sleeper caseload, of which 30 (68%) were deemed to be “entrenched” in rough sleeping. It is widely accepted that a

⁶¹ Source: St Mungo’s: [Keeping us Safer](#) (2022)

prolonged period of rough sleeping has a profound negative impact on a person's mental and physical health, as well as increasing their likelihood of coming into contact with the criminal justice system and developing substance misuse issues.

The previous Conservative Government announced its "Ending Rough Sleeping for Good" Strategy, bringing with it a £2.4 billion investment into rough sleeping across the country. This Review highlights the many initiatives which are currently underway within Stoke-on-Trent, but the challenge for the local authority will undoubtedly be how to sustain those investments in the longer term.

9. Conclusions and Next Steps:

Homelessness is a devastating and multi-faceted phenomenon, which can often be predicted, but should never be inevitable.

Homelessness and rough sleeping have increased both nationally and locally since the completion of the last review in 2020, despite significant investment by the previous Government and ongoing investment by the Council, although some notable and positive outcomes have been delivered.

This Review highlights just some of the many complexities associated with homelessness, including the vast array of factors which can lead to homelessness in the first place, the impact on people's physical and mental health when they experience any form of homelessness, the challenging housing situation, with shortages of appropriate, affordable accommodation and insufficient levels of local housing allowance and the economic crisis which exists currently. Each of these issues combines to make it increasingly difficult for individual local authorities to find useful resolutions to the problem.

Whilst there is a plethora of data on rising homelessness, much of this relates solely to people who are known to services because they have made an application to their local authority for assistance. As a result, much of the information on the numbers of people/households that are homeless, is likely to be an underestimation of the true scale of the issue as it does not capture those 'hidden homeless' who sofa surf.

The cause of a person's homelessness is much broader than the loss of a tenancy and the information within this review suggests that indicators like this are simply a measure of the event immediately preceding the person becoming homeless, rather than the root cause. There is evidence to suggest that the true cause of homelessness actually lies in a much more complex mix of adverse experiences, often but not exclusively from the person's childhood, financial hardship and national policy.

Stoke-on-Trent has been recognised as having an extremely strong multi-agency approach to tackling homelessness and rough sleeping and the next strategy will need to build on this and continue to develop innovative approaches to preventing and relieving homelessness

that focuses on prevention and support for those at risk of experiencing the most harmful outcomes.

It remains to be seen how the new Government will tackle the issues, but early moves to continue with proposals to end no fault evictions through the Renters Rights Bill and to accelerate new house building, including new affordable homes are welcome.

9.1 Government Agenda

In line with the previous Government's Rough Sleeping agenda, the three central themes remain pertinent to Stoke-on-Trent and are therefore critical to modelling homelessness service provision over the coming years.

9.1.1 Prevention:

The prevention of homelessness is centred around an understanding of the issues that lead to homelessness and rough sleeping and providing timely support for those at risk. Evidence within this Review indicates that a whole system approach is needed in order to address the issue.

This Review indicates that people who are already facing levels of poverty are predicted to be more significantly affected as the cost of living and housing crises continue to manifest.

There is a wealth of data available to be able to predict when homelessness will occur and there is a lot of prevention activity already undertaken within the city as outlined in section 6 of this Review.

The loss of a private rented sector tenancy remains the most common "cause" of homelessness, although as we have discussed, there are often several other factors at play in the lead up to a crisis point, including financial hardship, traumatic experiences and / or substance misuse.

The concept of preventing homelessness is well developed across the country, but gaps still exist that stop some people getting the help they need when they need it most. The costs of homelessness are well documented and as such, investment in effective homelessness prevention services is a cost effective as well as humanitarian opportunity.

9.1.2 Intervention:

The provision of effective intervention services is key to ensuring that for those people who have to experience homelessness, their crisis is dealt with swiftly, effectively and with options that are tailored to their individual circumstances.

There is currently significant investment within Stoke-on-Trent from central Government via the Rough Sleeping Initiatives into effective interventions for people who are street sleeping. However, this investment is time-limited.

This Review reveals the need for appropriate and affordable accommodation and support services for people experiencing all forms of homelessness

9.1.3 Recovery:

Supporting people, who have experienced a crisis like homelessness, to find a new home and rebuild their lives is a critical element of recovery. There are often also many other facets to a recovery process including financial stability and physical or mental health and wellbeing.

Investment in an effective recovery process is paramount and can lead to the prevention of repeat homelessness. In addition, there is evidence within this review to suggest that an effective pathway is required for those people with multiple needs and longer-term health conditions, particularly when requiring hospital care.

Integrated, community-based models of support are often an effective mechanism to break the cycle of homelessness. The success of provision like this in Stoke-on-Trent will require robust working partnerships across all sectors.

9.2 Next Steps:

The next significant step during the Review process is for this information document to be presented for public consultation. This is scheduled to take place during October and November 2024.

This stage of the consultation process will focus on the information and findings from the Review to gather public perception on the overall picture being presented within the document, together with an opinion on where the local authority should focus its priorities in this field over the next 5-year period.

The findings from this Review, combined with feedback gained during the initial consultation process, will ultimately feed into the production of the Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy 2025-2030. Once the Strategy has been drafted, there will follow a further and final period of public consultation, which will seek to ascertain whether the local authority has reflected the evidence base available and has listened to the public voice when determining future priorities for the city.

The new Strategy is scheduled for approval by Cabinet in June 2025.