



Horsham
District
Council

Housing and Homelessness Strategy



2021-2026

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1. Executive Summary

This Housing and Homelessness Strategy comes as we are beginning the long road to recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. The true impact of the global virus is not yet known, and in the housing sector the effects of the pandemic are expected to last for a long time yet. We are therefore living in new times, uncertain of the future, but with clear aspirations and commitment to improving the housing options of those living in Horsham district.

We have set ourselves clear objectives. We want to ensure that no-one needs to sleep rough in our District. We also want to make sure that residents can live independently in their homes for as long as it is safe and appropriate to do so. We need to keep delivering affordable housing ensuring it is the right size and in the right locations. Our housing register needs to be transparent, fair and accessible to all. And we want to prevent all forms of homelessness, not just rough sleeping, for our District's residents.

We know the objectives we want to achieve by the end of this Strategy period in 2026, and we are aware of some of the challenges that will stand in our way. But we also know we need to gather a bit more information before we can lay out our clear pathway to reaching our goals.

This Strategy is therefore taking a multi-stage approach. The first stage, for the first 18 months, will be an information gathering stage, taking stock, reviewing data and assessing what's working well in our Service and what we need to improve. The second stage will be producing an Interim Review of this Strategy, setting out the clear actions we will take to achieving our objectives. The third stage will be carrying out the hard work to deliver on these goals.

We are living in unprecedented times, but we are confident taking a person-centric and data-led approach is the best way to strengthen the Housing and Homelessness Service, achieve our objectives and deliver the aspirations and solutions the residents of Horsham District deserve.

2. Introduction

We are operating in an ever-changing environment where housing pressures and challenges are the result of both long-term issues and acute crises. Whilst there are enduring trends in society that continue to add pressure to the housing sector, in recent years the landscape of housing and homelessness has changed significantly. Radical overhauls of homelessness law and policy, wholesale reforms of the welfare system, increasing house prices, wage freezes, funding changes, Brexit and the COVID-19 pandemic have all changed the ways in which local authorities provide their services and the types and amount of pressures faced by those in need of housing support.

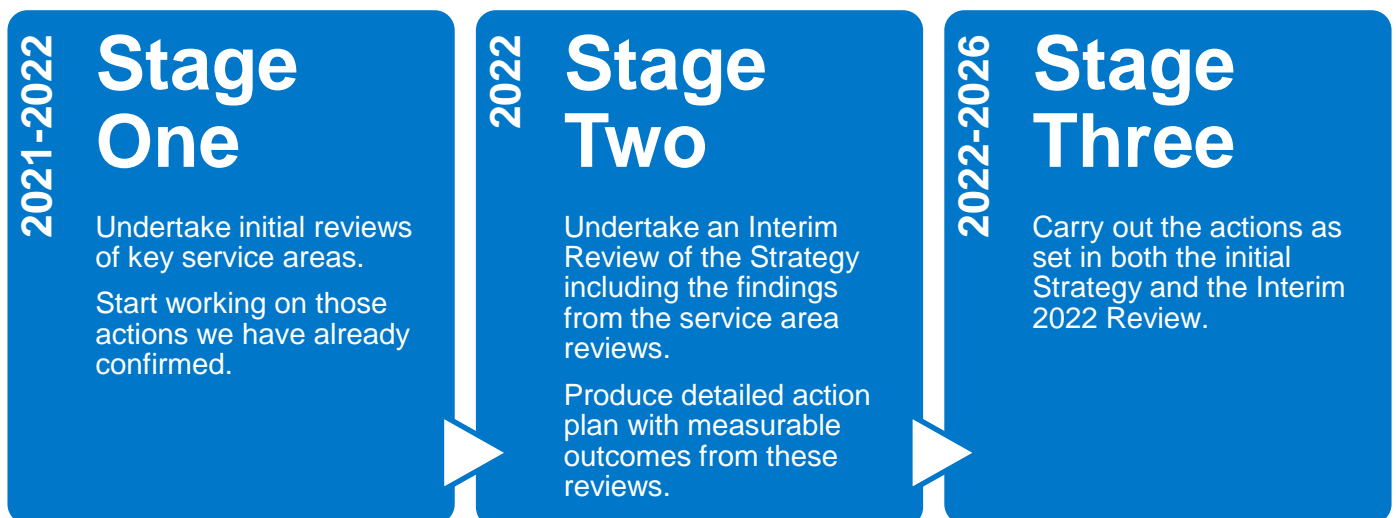
Despite these changes, there is one element that remains constant – the duty on local authorities to deliver safe, secure and affordable housing. The Council is proud of its strong history of innovation and partnership working to carry out its housing duties, yet in these times a forward-thinking approach is needed more than ever to address the biggest housing crisis in a generation. This Housing and Homelessness Strategy sets out how the Council intends to use its staff, partnerships, knowledge, ideas and passion to help as many residents into stable and secure accommodation as possible over the next five-year period between 2021 and 2026.

There are five overall objectives that guide the direction the Council will take in tackling the housing and homelessness crisis. By 2026 we aim to:

1. **Ensure no-one needs to sleep rough through having no other choice**
2. **Empower residents to live independently in their homes**
3. **Deliver the number and size of affordable homes that our communities and residents need in line with planning policies**
4. **Provide and maintain an accessible and fair housing register**
5. **Prevent all forms of homelessness for our District's residents**

We know the areas we want to make progress within this Strategy period in 2026, and we know some of the challenges we are likely to face. We also know that we want to take a person-centric approach to shaping our future, to put our residents' needs first and to be guided by the rich data our service has access to. So, we feel we need to take a bit of time to understand our Service as it currently stands before setting out a clear pathway to achieving our objectives. We want to know what's working well, what needs to be improved, and what we think the areas ripe for innovation are.

We are proposing a three stage Strategy:



The first stage, in the first eighteen months, will be an information gathering stage, taking stock, reviewing data and assessing what's working well in our Service and what we need to improve. The second stage will be producing a review of this Strategy over a four month period, setting out the clear actions we will take to achieving our objectives, taking a person-centric and data-led approach. The third stage will be carrying out the hard work to deliver on these goals over a three year period.

This current Strategy document forms part of Stage One, presenting an overview of the national and local housing policy context as well as painting a picture of the current housing situation in the District. It also sets out in more detail the overarching objectives that guide the whole strategy period, looking at the challenges associated with each one and what steps we have already taken to address the issues.

This document also contains an action plan for our next steps, split into two parts: firstly, those clear defined actions we already know we need to take, with measurable outcomes and deliverable goals. Secondly, the areas of service we know we need to review that will ultimately produce another set of actions for Stages Two and Three.

Based upon the rationale above we believe taking a person-centric and data-led approach is the best way to achieve our objectives and deliver the aspirations and solutions the residents of Horsham District deserve.

3. COVID-19 Pandemic

In Spring 2020, the global COVID-19 pandemic rapidly took hold across the world. In the UK, since the beginning of the pandemic, there have been a series of nationwide lockdowns and less strict restrictions, still presently ongoing. The pandemic has impacted on every area of life, not least housing.

In March 2020 local authorities were instructed by the current Government to accommodate all rough sleepers in their areas under the "Everyone In" initiative, to ensure safe isolation and protection from the virus. This led to more rough sleepers being assisted, and by working closely with Turning Tides, a local homelessness charity, a dedicated county-wide COVID-19 response group and the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG). The Council has assisted a total of 41 rough sleepers since the beginning of the pandemic. This number is much higher than our usual rough sleeper count, due in part to the fact the pandemic made other hidden homelessness such as "sofa surfing" unsafe, and so more people turned to the Council for support.

This presented local authorities with a unique set of challenges. There was an initial task of engaging the local rough sleeping population, followed by having to source suitable accommodation at short notice and provide floating support such as food parcels to sustain the accommodation. There was substantial funding made available to local authorities for both temporary accommodation as well as longer term strategic plans.

There will be further challenges in the aftermath of the pandemic such as returning the accommodation used for the rough sleepers to its previous use and ensuring that those individuals who have engaged well with local authorities maintain that relationship and do not disengage. During 2020/2021 there was a ban on evictions, but it is likely that, due to increasing level of rent arrears built up during the pandemic, the ending of the ban will prompt a rise in presentations to homeless departments. The furlough scheme, where employers are being given Government financial assistance to retain staff in businesses that have been unable to operate during the pandemic, is likely to end in the autumn of 2021. It is possible that redundancies are likely to increase at this point, and an increase in families and individuals needing more housing support is expected.

The pandemic has undoubtedly been a challenge for the Council's housing service, but it has also provided two key benefits. Firstly, it has allowed the Council to fully understand the nature of homelessness in Horsham district and we are now in a position where we know the local rough sleepers better than we ever have done. Relationships have been built and we have been able to assist individuals to access appropriate and much needed support whilst in suitable accommodation. Secondly, we have been required to find creative solutions to the issue of housing and have found longer term solutions that have not relied on short-term crisis relief such as winter night shelters.

4. National Housing Context

The direction that the Council's housing service will take over the next five years is governed by national as well as local trends, factors and policies. It is important to understand the wider political context in order to understand our objectives and the challenges we may face when trying to achieve them.

This section will consider the reasons why people all over the country struggle with their housing situation, why they may need housing support and why they may become homeless. It will then look at some major policy and legal changes that have happened in the last few years that further add to pressures residents may be facing across the United Kingdom.

Why do some people struggle with their housing situation?

Housing in the United Kingdom has increasingly become expensive and insecure over the last few decades, meaning that in general there are fewer options available to much of the population.

Firstly, there is a problem with the availability and supply of housing. The proportion of housing that is rented through local authorities and housing associations has continued to shrink¹, partly as more residents purchase their properties through the Right to Buy and partly because fewer social and affordable houses are being built².

Secondly, there is an issue with affordability. House prices across the UK are continuing to rise, and the national average is currently £294,299³, which in many places far exceeds the necessary income to obtain a mortgage, putting owning your own home out of reach for many residents. Private rent, an ever-increasing section of the housing market⁴, has also continued to increase, and the national average is £984pcm⁵. Even some housing associations and local authorities have introduced minimum income requirements for their affordable rented properties, restricting even further the housing options for those in low-paid, insecure or no employment.

¹ Lydia McMullan, Hilary Osborne, Garry Blight and Pamela Duncan, "UK housing crisis: how did owning a home become unaffordable?" *The Guardian*, March 31 2021, www.theguardian.com/business/ng-interactive/2021/mar/31/uk-housing-crisis-how-did-owning-a-home-become-unaffordable.

² As above.

³ "House Price Index", Rightmove, accessed March 2021, www.rightmove.co.uk/news/house-price-index. Accessed March 2021.

⁴ As note 1

⁵ "Rental Index", Homelet, accessed March 2021, <https://homelet.co.uk/homelet-rental-index>.

Thirdly there are problems with the short-term nature of living in rented accommodation. There are very few long-term secure tenancies in the private rented sector, and landlords can, subject to some minimal time constraints, give notice simply if they wish to find new tenants who would pay an increased rent. Tenants in these situations may not be able to afford or find alternative rental properties in their local area, or they may not have the necessary deposit and first month's rent in advance. For those in insecure employment or long-term unemployment, this is even harder.

Many residents may also simply find their properties are no longer suitable for their needs, for example if their family grows and they need more space or if they struggle with mobility needs and require level access accommodation. The lack of supply, increased demand and expensive rents may make it difficult to find adequate alternative accommodation.

As well as the impact on individual's well-being and their ability to make plans for their future, the lack of stability from not having genuinely affordable long-term tenancies, accessible home ownership or adequate local authority housing provision means communities become transient places, where residents are not able to invest in community activities, relationships and success.

Why do some people become homeless?

The image of a person sleeping rough on the streets is only one, visible, form of homelessness, but there are many other forms of more hidden homelessness, such as people staying on friends' sofas for months at a time, known as sofa surfing.

Many of us are only a few steps away from losing the security of our home. The charity Homeless Link found that there is often no one single reason why people become homeless⁶, it is usually a combination of personal reasons, often beyond the control of the individual, with wider economic and social factors at play.

For example, a sudden life change such as a breakdown of a relationship or a bereavement may be manageable with a financial cushion and family support, but without these in place, many people who are unable to keep up with the rent or arrears are evicted, often with no other housing options.

Individual reasons might be ongoing issues such as low pay or long-term unemployment, ongoing poverty and long-term health issues, but may also be sudden life changes such as redundancy, and relationship or family breakdowns. These sudden changes are particularly important, as they may impact on an individual's ability to continue in employment and can affect someone's resilience and ability to cope with other pressures such as housing.

Some people are more vulnerable to becoming homeless, and this is often related to the level of support needed by the individual or family. For example, victims of domestic abuse are sometimes required to move away from their settled accommodation to increase their safety from the perpetrator. Not only does this move effectively mean the individual or household is homeless, but such a relocation often involves moving away from support networks.

Individuals or households leaving institutions where there has been a higher than average level of support may also struggle with this change and can be at more risk of homelessness. For example, those leaving young people's accommodation, prison, the armed forces or the care system can struggle with a decrease in support or a move away from an area with social support.

⁶ "Causes of homelessness", Homeless Link, accessed March 2021, www.homeless.org.uk/facts/understanding-homelessness/causes-of-homelessness

Being dependent on drugs or alcohol or suffering from mental ill health can also impact on an individual's ability to secure and manage settled accommodation. Substance misuse can affect the financial abilities of a household or individual both in terms of whether they are able to maintain employment, but also on their spending patterns. Similarly, mental ill health can make sustaining employment difficult, and may lower an individual's resilience when facing other difficulties. There is an increasing number of people in insecure accommodation with both mental ill health and substance misuse, known as dual diagnosis, and maintaining settled accommodation for these individuals is very challenging.

What has happened in UK national policy recently?

In the years since the previous Housing and Homelessness Strategy, there have been significant changes and events in national policy that have changed the delivery of housing and homelessness services across the United Kingdom.

Finances and Welfare Reform

Financially, there continues to be a reduction in funding options and fiscal support for local authorities and Registered Providers involved in housing and homelessness. The Summer Budget of 2015 saw a 1% reduction in social housing rents for a four-year period ending 2019/2020⁷. In addition, despite the lifting of the Housing Revenue Account borrowing cap for local authorities with housing stock, Government grant funding for delivering new build affordable and social housing has decreased over time⁸.

There have continued to be financial implications for individuals and families too, with the Benefit Cap threshold being reduced in 2016 and the continuation of the restriction that under 35s can only claim a Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rate for shared accommodation. Universal Credit was introduced in 2013 and changed the frequency and breakdown of benefit payments. In the Spring Budget of 2021, it was announced the LHA rates have been frozen for at least the next financial year⁹. This means there could be an increase in the shortfall between rents and the maximum benefit available.

Right to Buy

The Housing and Planning Act in 2016 announced the extension of the Right to Buy policy to housing association tenants. Despite there not having been a significant uptake by housing associations to join the scheme, the lack of funding to replace any properties being sold means the likely further shrinking of the sector. This policy intervention signals the continued direction of the current Government to encourage owner occupation.

⁷ "Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016 - social rent reduction", Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government, accessed March 2021, www.gov.uk/guidance/welfare-reform-and-work-act-2016-social-rent-reduction.

⁸ "Increasing social housing supply", UK Parliament, accessed March 2021, <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm5801/cmselect/cmcomloc/173/17308.htm#footnote-136>.

⁹ "Universal Credit to be cut and Local Housing Allowance to be refrozen from April", Inside Housing, accessed March 2021, www.insidehousing.co.uk/news/news/universal-credit-to-be-cut-and-local-housing-allowance-to-be-refrozen-from-april-68750.

Grenfell Tower Fire

In 2017, the Grenfell Tower fire disaster not only brought into sharp relief the complex nature of the housing crisis but has also had wide ranging impacts on all areas of housing delivery. Discussions about building materials, fire regulations in temporary and bed and breakfast provision, and leaseholder responsibilities have rarely been out of the eye of the media, but more attention is now also being paid to the way local authorities allocate and manage their stock effectively.

Homeless Reduction Act

In April 2018, the biggest change to housing and homelessness policy since 1996 occurred when the Homeless Reduction Act 2017 (HRA) was introduced. This was a significant revision and extension of the statutory duties local authorities had in providing assistance to those in need, requiring homelessness teams to intervene earlier in the prevention of homelessness for all families and single people. This encompasses all households that are at risk of losing their home within the next 56 days, such as negotiating with a landlord for a tenant to remain in the property, and a responsibility to work with clients who are already homeless to relieve their homelessness, such as finding suitable accommodation for at least six months. The Council must also provide the client with an agreed Personalised Housing Plan, setting out the planned actions that both the Council and the client will undertake to address these issues. In October 2018 the Duty to Refer took effect as part of the Homelessness Reduction Act. This Duty requires public sector organisations such as prisons and hospitals to notify the local housing authority prior to the date that a client in their care will become homeless from their service. This is intended to allow local authorities to prevent homelessness by working with individuals who are at risk of becoming homeless, and to put solutions in place to avoid the situation worsening.

Rough Sleeping Strategy

The current Government updated their Rough Sleeping Strategy in 2019, where they committed to ending rough sleeping by 2024¹⁰. This is an ambitious target, especially combined with the added pressures put on local authorities as part of the Homelessness Reduction Act and in the context of the other national policy and society events and changes.

Domestic Abuse Bill 2021

In April 2021 a new Domestic Abuse Bill was signed into law, bringing with it a raft of changes that have impacted on the duties local authorities have in relation to victims of domestic abuse¹¹. In general, the Bill requires Tier 1 local authorities (e.g. West Sussex County Council) to appoint a multi-agency Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Board, which requires Tier 2 authorities such as Horsham District Council to co-operate with the lead authority. Regarding housing and homelessness, the Bill also demands Tier 1 authorities to provide support to victims of domestic abuse and their children in refuges or other safe accommodation. Crucially, bed and breakfast accommodation is no longer deemed safe or appropriate. In addition, the Bill removes the vulnerability test for victims of domestic abuse, which means victims are automatically conferred priority need status. These changes will likely have an impact on the demands on the homelessness relief and prevention team as well as the options they have for providing safe accommodation.

¹⁰ “The rough sleeping strategy”, Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government, accessed March 2021, www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-rough-sleeping-strategy.

¹¹ “Domestic Abuse Act 2021”, House of Commons, accessed August 2021, <https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/2709>

5. Local Housing Context

Horsham District

The district is rural, fairly large and relatively wealthy



Location

Horsham district is located between Crawley and Brighton in West Sussex



Size

The district is 205 square miles in total



Nature

There are large areas of open countryside as well as smaller town and villages and Horsham town itself



Wealth

Horsham District Council ranks 209/317 authorities in the British indices of deprivation, meaning there are very few areas of deprivation within the district compared to the rest of the UK.¹³

Horsham's Residents

The majority of the district's population are White British adults in employment¹⁴



Age

68%
18-64

17%
65+

14%
0-17



Ethnicity

92%
White British

4%
White Non-British

4%
Other



Employment

82.5%
Employed in Horsham

82%
Employed in South East

79%
Employed in the UK



UC Claims

4.1%
Claiming in Horsham

5.4%
Claiming in South East

6.5%
Claiming in the UK

¹² Office for National Statistics, Mapping income deprivation at a local authority level: 2019, accessed May 2021, www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/personalandhouseholdfinances/incomeandwealth/datasets/mappingincomeandwealthatlocalauthoritylevel.

¹³ Office for National Statistics, (2018), Subnational population projections for England: 2018-based, accessed March 2021, www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationprojections/bulletins/subnationalpopulationprojectionsforengland/2018based

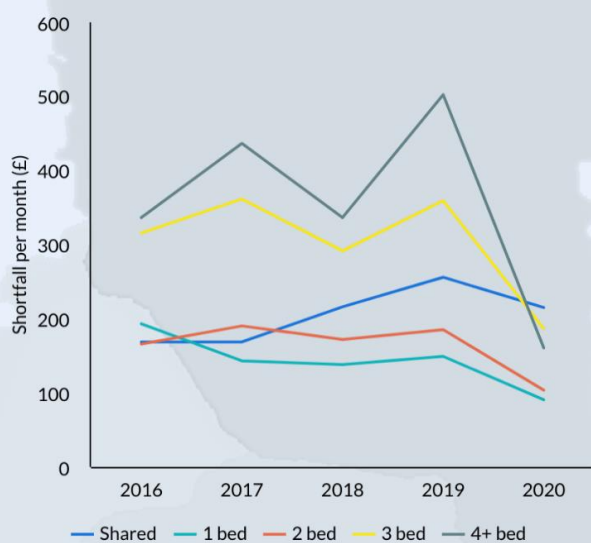
Private Housing in Horsham

The average house price and monthly private rent in the district are above the national average, and the majority of the district's residents own their own home ¹⁵



Local Housing Allowance Shortfall in Horsham

There is consistently a shortfall between average private rents and the maximum local housing allowance available ¹⁶

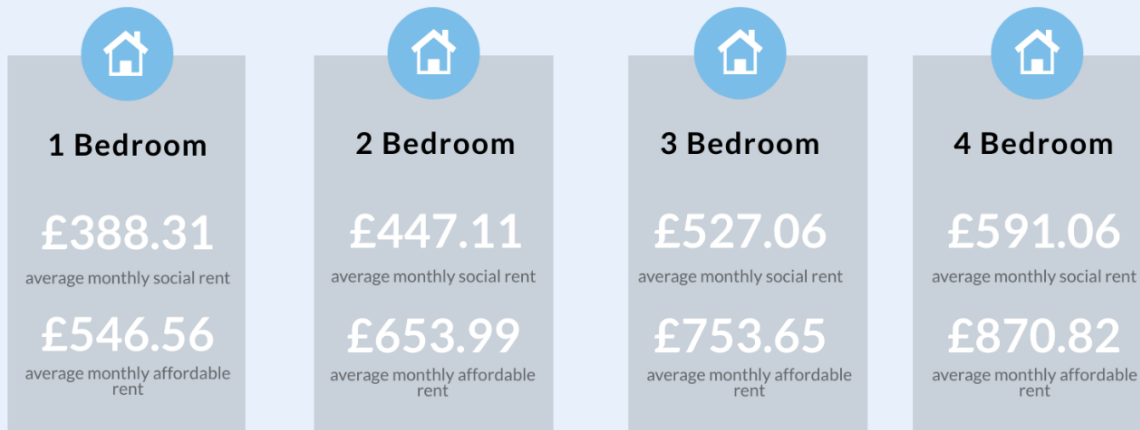


¹⁴ "House Price Index", Rightmove, accessed March 2021, www.rightmove.co.uk/news/house-price-index. "Rental Index", Homelet, accessed March 2021, <https://homelet.co.uk/homelet-rental-index>. "UK Property", Home, accessed March 2021, www.home.co.uk/asking_price_index.

¹⁵ Office for National Statistics, *Private Rental Market Statistics*, accessed March 2021, www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/housing/datasets/privaterentalmarketsummarystatisticsinengland

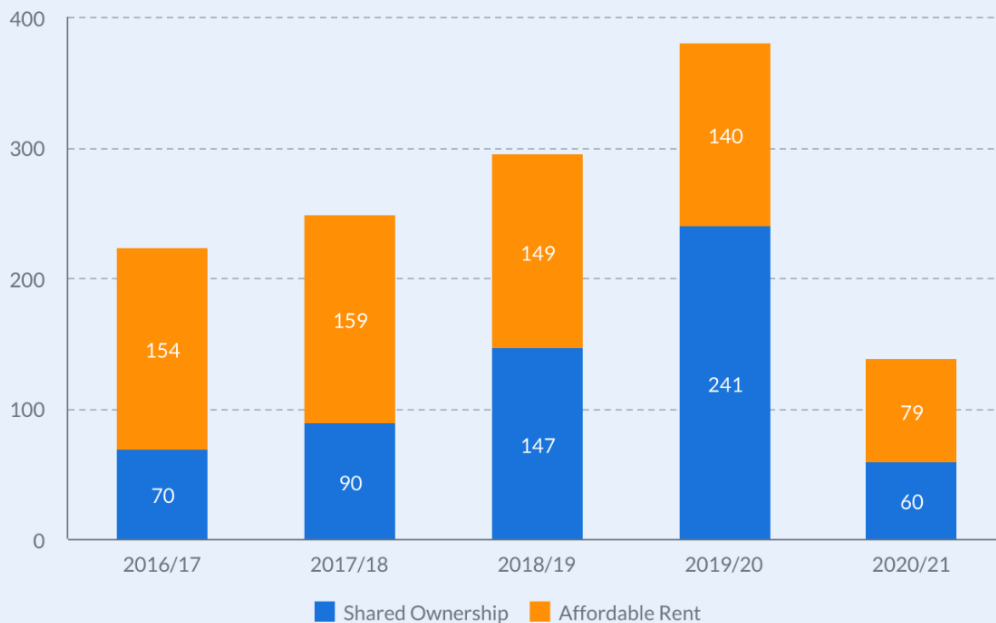
Affordable and Social Rent in Horsham

Affordable and social rents are considerably cheaper than private market rents, with some under the maximum LHA rates¹⁷



New-build Affordable Housing Delivery

There has been consistent (pre-pandemic) delivery of over 240 new affordable homes built per year p, the number estimated in the current Local Plan to keep up with demand on the Housing Register¹⁸

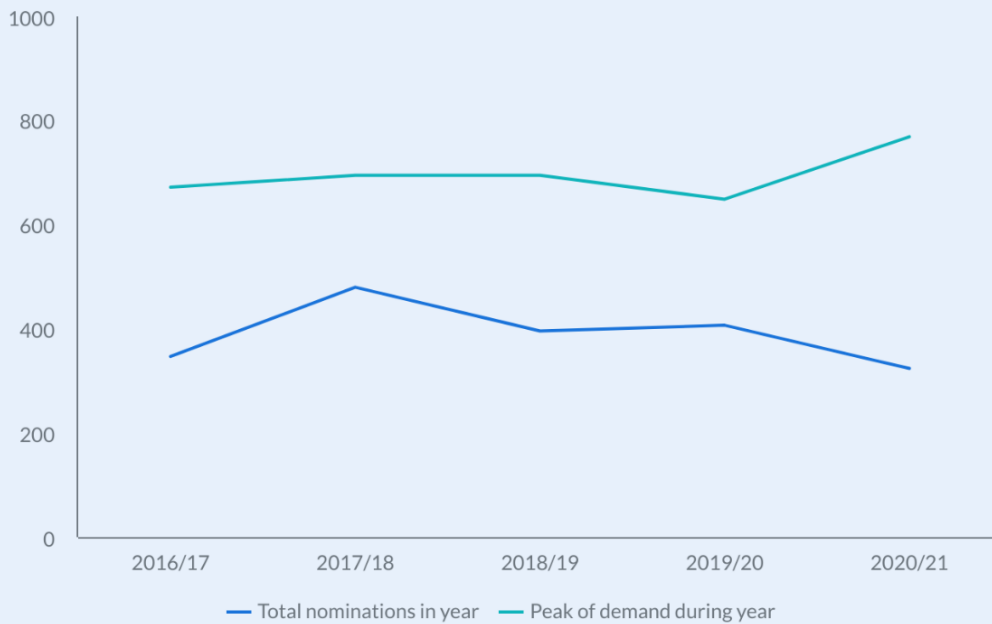


¹⁶ Saxon Weald, direct email correspondence to report author, April 2021.

¹⁷ Horsham District Council, internal departmental records, May 2021.

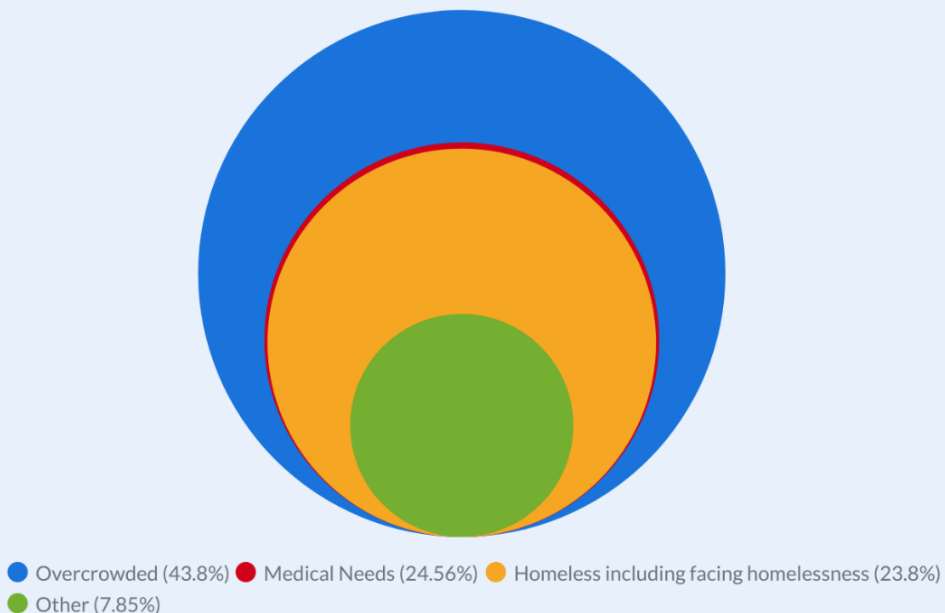
Horsham District Council's Housing Register Demand and Nominations

However, demand is still growing and is consistently higher than the number of nominations made, especially in the last two years ¹⁹



Housing Need in Horsham District

The main reasons people apply to the housing register is because of overcrowding, medical needs or homelessness ²⁰



¹⁸ As note 18.

¹⁹ As note 18.

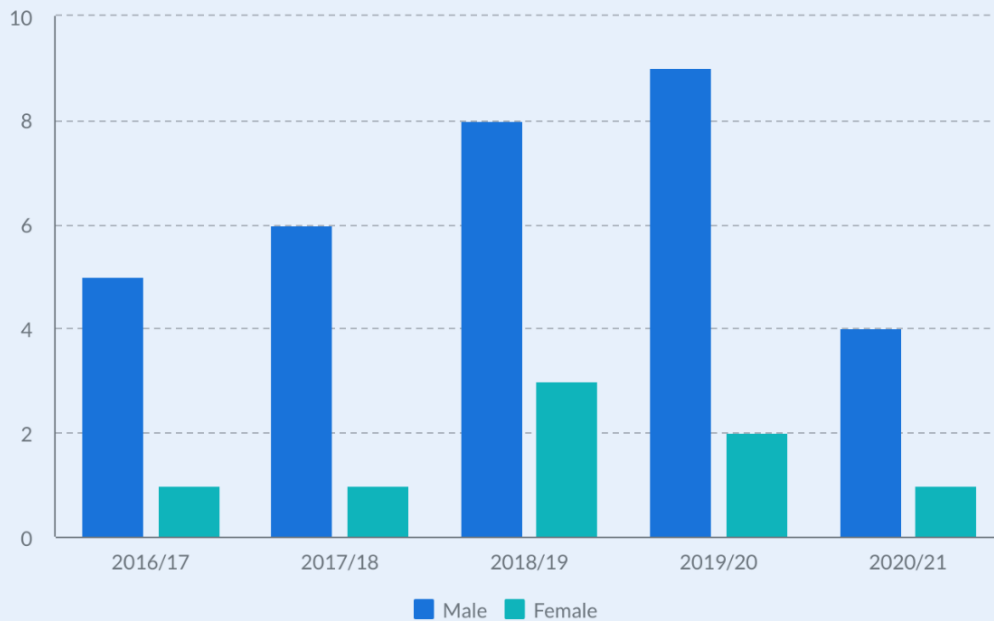
Homeless Service Approaches

Since the Homeless Reduction Act came into force in 2018, the number of approaches to our homeless teams has remained constant ²¹



Rough Sleepers in Horsham District

Our rough sleeping population remains small but consistent, with more men than women. The Everyone In initiative during the pandemic reduced these numbers ²²



²⁰ As note 18.

²¹ As note 18.

What is happening locally in housing policy and funding?

There have been a number of local consultations, policies and funding decisions that will also impact on the Council's ability to deliver the overarching Housing and Homelessness objectives.

Previous Housing Strategy 2013-15

The previous Horsham District Council Housing and Homeless Strategy was for the period 2013-15 and was reviewed in 2016. The Strategy set out four main objectives:

1. An increasing supply of homes that people in need can afford
2. Effective support for homeless households
3. Appropriate housing provision for vulnerable people
4. Thriving rural communities

The Council made significant progress in meeting these objectives, including:

- Working in partnership with Registered Provider partners to develop 1,202 affordable homes since the Annual Review of the previous Housing Strategy, completed in 2016/17
- A focus on homelessness prevention and tenancy sustainment
- Delivered 42 units of new build temporary accommodation through building and delivering 34 units and leasing 8 additional units
- Working in partnership with the charitable and voluntary sector to ensure support for vulnerable groups including older people with support needs, care leavers, clients with mental health issues and ex-offenders

Homelessness Consultation 2019

Local housing authorities are required by legislation to carry out periodic reviews of homelessness in their area, focusing on the extent and risk of current and future housing issues, what is being done to address them, and the available resources to prevent and relieve this homelessness.

The Council carried out a consultation in April 2019 as part of its review into homelessness in the District and in order to gauge the views of partners and stakeholders. The consultation was undertaken via an online survey, and over 90 individuals and partner organisations were invited to contribute their views and perceptions of homelessness within Horsham District. Partners included public sector agencies, local charities and homelessness groups, Registered Providers and other local West Sussex authorities.

The full consultation can be seen in Appendix 1, but the results of the survey reflected the continued demand for housing and highlights the lack of supply of affordable accommodation in the District, as well as shedding light on the client groups who are vulnerable to homelessness. The findings of the consultation have fed into the objectives and actions detailed in the second half of this current Strategy.

Funding

There is no guarantee of central Government funding for housing or homelessness. Local authorities are advised on an annual basis about the grants that will be provided by central Government. This can make it difficult to plan or commit to longer term strategic investment.

The Council's Housing and Homelessness services are financed by a range of funding sources, including the Homelessness Reduction Act New Burdens Grant, Rough Sleeping Initiative funding, Next Steps Accommodation Programme, Affordable Homes Programme and Section 106 commuted sums. We continue to bid for any additional sources of funding which become available, working in partnership with other local authorities in West Sussex and with other relevant organisations.

There have been a number of changes to Government funding including reduction in social care. The 2019 review by West Sussex County Council of Housing Related Support, the former Supporting People fund which typically funds the support element of supported accommodation services, saw the budget reduced from £4.6 million in 2019/20 to £2.3 million in 2020/21²². These changes resulted in a refocused relationship amongst District and Borough councils and renewed contracts with support providers.

The Council has a commuted sums fund, which are financial contributions from developers paid in lieu of on-site affordable housing provision. While some of the funds have been used to help establish a direct delivery company, Horsham District Homes, the remainder of the funds will be available for Registered Providers to assist with the delivery of affordable housing in the District. A new set of guidelines is forthcoming that will set out the priorities and restrictions attached to this funding.

Local Plan 2021

The Council is in the process of updating their Local Plan, an overarching planning document that sets out the planning priorities for the next 15 year minimum period. The Housing Service has been involved in setting the proposed quotas for affordable housing delivery over this time frame, and is keen to ensure as much well-designed, sustainable, suitably located and affordable housing is provided as possible. The adoption of the Local Plan has been delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, as is now expected for early 2022.

²² Ryan Walkley and Rachel Jevons, "Homelessness Needs Audit 2015/2016", *West Sussex Public Health And Social Research Unit*, 2016, <https://jsna.westsussex.gov.uk/assets/living-well/homeless-needs-audit-2016-final.pdf>

6. Objectives

Objective One: Ensure no-one needs to sleep rough through having no other choice

What does this mean?

The current Government has committed to ending rough sleeping by 2027. While this is an admirable goal, we believe that there will always be a small proportion of individuals who choose to sleep rough for a variety of reasons and despite any assistance offered. We are proposing instead to aim to end the need for anyone to sleep rough. This means that for anyone who does not wish to sleep on the streets or in parks, we should be able to help them into alternative safe and secure accommodation.

What are the challenges we are facing in achieving this goal?

There are challenges we will face in the way of achieving this goal, some of which have already been mentioned in this Strategy:

- Affordability of accommodation including the likely shortfall between LHA rates and rent.
- Lack of affordable housing provision for under 35's, especially as they are unable to claim more than a shared rate of LHA.
- The complex and chaotic life experiences of many people who sleep rough makes it hard to engage them and means sustaining any form of accommodation is challenging for the individuals and for homeless teams.
- Lack of move on accommodation which bridges a gap between emergency bed and breakfast accommodation and longer-term secure accommodation. There is a chronic shortage of accommodation with support, especially for those with mental health and substance misuse issues.

What have we already done to try and achieve this?

As a Council, addressing the issue of people sleeping rough on the streets is one of our core services. Our homelessness team were already successfully assisting rough sleepers so the change to legislation set out in the Homeless Reduction Act in 2018 was an exciting opportunity to formalise our existing processes. We have already taken the following steps to help us achieve this goal:

- We have re-profiled our existing staff structure to focus on the relief duties.
- We have continued to undertake the annual rough sleeper count to understand the population of rough sleepers in the District.
- The Council cannot tackle the problem of homelessness and rough sleeping alone, partnership working is key. We have been working hard with Turning Tides, formerly Worthing Churches Homeless Project, to expand services to rough sleepers in the District. Together we have recruited an Outreach and Rough Sleeping Coordinator, an Outreach Worker, a Community Inclusion Worker, a mental health Practice Lead, a Navigator, and a Housing First Worker.
- The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) have recognised the Council's efforts in addressing the rough sleeping issue in the area, and have awarded £83,910 in 2019/20, £317,717 in 2020/21 and £334,275 in 2021/22 from the Rough Sleeper Initiative Funding in which Horsham District Council have partnered with Mid Sussex District Council, as well as £72,151 from the COVID-19 Contingency Fund, Cold Weather, Protect Plus and the Next Steps Accommodation programme funding sources. This money is for us to build on our work to support rough sleepers and adopt Housing First pilots to provide entrenched long-term rough sleepers with much needed support.

- The Council continues to work with Turning Tides to deliver a limited Housing First service in the district, providing wrap around support to individuals in settled accommodation to prevent rough sleeping and begin a journey to independent living.

Objective Two: Empower residents to live independently in their homes

What does this mean?

We want people to be able to stay in their homes for as long as it is safe and appropriate to do so. We don't believe you should have to move if there are alternative options, whether this is increased wrap around support, or alterations to the property in the face of changing mobility needs.

What are the challenges we are facing in achieving this goal?

The challenges in relation to this goal are wide ranging, and there is some overlap with the previous set of challenges:

- Affordability of accommodation including the likely shortfall between LHA rates and rent means staying in a property despite life changes such as changes in income becomes difficult.
- Lack of adapted or easily adaptable housing, especially that which is affordable.
- Lack of support services in the District to enable someone with complex needs to live independently.
- The complex and chaotic life experiences of many people who need extra support means sustaining any form of accommodation is challenging for the individuals and for homeless teams.

What have we already done to try and achieve this?

The Council has already taken several steps to help us achieve this goal, including:

- The Council has recently joined with neighbouring local authorities, Southdown Housing and Turning Tides to provide a new Floating Support Service called Pathways Home. The service, replacing the former Independent Living Scheme, is aimed at adults who need housing support to sustain independent living or prevent homelessness.
- The Council currently provides mandatory financial assistance to help vulnerable and poorer homeowners and tenants with repairs and improvements such as through Disabled Facilities Grants. Assessment needs to be carried out by West Sussex County Council's Occupational Therapy team. These grants allow people to remain in their own homes, rather than approaching the Council for housing and homelessness support.
- In 2021 the Strategic Housing Group of colleagues from West Sussex District, Borough and County Councils were awarded combined funding for the COVID-19 Outbreak Mitigation Fund (COMF). This funding will help deliver new posts specifically aimed at providing support and facilitating engagement with our housing services with the aim to mitigate the negative impacts of the pandemic and prevent homelessness.

Objective Three: Deliver the number and size of homes that our communities and residents need in line with planning policies

What does this mean?

As a Council we have set ambitious targets of helping to deliver 280 new affordable homes every year for the duration of this Strategy, a total of 1400 by 2026. Working closely with the Council's Planning department as well as Registered Providers in the District, we aim to deliver the number and sizes of homes that are needed in different parts of the District. We also want to see exemplary homes being built, to enable communities and residents not just to live but to thrive.

What are the challenges we are facing in achieving this goal?

There are significant challenges in delivering this objective, some of which are outside of our control:

- Planning legislation is undergoing significant changes across the whole of the United Kingdom, and we cannot predict what restrictions or changes will make it harder for developers to deliver the necessary numbers of affordable housing over the next few years.
- There continues to be less funding available for Registered Providers to deliver affordable housing, and more assistance is being required to ensure a continued supply of rented properties.
- Exemplary design, such as sustainable developments and increased community facilities, often cost more to deliver than mass produced homes. However, our aspirations should not be lower for affordable housing, we expect the same standards of design and facilities across all tenures.
- We need to be mindful that we are not only building the right quantity of houses but also the right sizes of houses that are needed now and will be needed in years to come. Trying to predict what future need will look is difficult, even more so with global phenomena such as the pandemic, but future proofing affordable housing stock is critical to ensuring our supply meets demand.
- There are avenues open to us within planning policy that enable schemes to be delivered that offer 100% affordable housing, such as Rural Exception Sites. Despite these sites being limited in size and number, we will continue to work with partners to maximise appropriate development on sites such as these where possible.

What have we already done to try and achieve this?

The Council has made good progress with our goals to deliver much needed affordable housing in the District:

- An Affordable Housing Enabling and Projects Officer was recruited to the Housing Service in 2020 to work with Registered Providers and the Council's Planning and Legal Departments to ensure the developments coming forward in the District are what is needed in the right locations.
- We have continued to deliver a total over 1490 affordable homes over the last five years, an average of 298 per year.
- The Housing and Homelessness Service has worked with the Planning Department on updating the Local Plan, to ensure the targets for the next plan period are ambitious yet achievable.
- We have developed good working relationship with Registered Providers working in the District to bring forward appropriate developments and streamline our processes.
- We have enabled 99 units to be brought forwards as affordable rent, 1 of social rent and 17 of temporary accommodation using our Commuted Sums fund since 2017.

Objective Four: Provide and maintain an accessible and fair housing register

What does this mean?

This objective is about ensuring our Housing Allocations policy is implemented as best as possible, to ensure that anyone who has a housing need is able to join the Housing Register, is correctly banded and offered accommodation according to our criteria and timeframes.

What are the challenges we are facing in achieving this goal?

The main challenges associated with this objective are:

- The number of households on the Housing Register has grown considerably over the last few years, and we are expecting this trend to increase as the effects of the pandemic are felt.
- The needs of those on the Housing Register are changing, with greater need for middle and larger sized properties, space for home working and flexibility to ensure longevity in the properties.
- Trying to predict and forecast needs for the future is hard, but this is important to ensure that developers are building houses that will suit the needs of the current housing register but also the likely needs of the same population when the developments will be completed.
- There is likely to be a shortage of supply of new homes that does not keep up with the increase in demand.

What have we already done to try and achieve this?

In trying to ensure anyone in need has the opportunity for safe and secure housing, we have already done the following:

- Implemented a new housing system, Jigsaw, to speed up and make the process of applying to join the housing register easier.
- Worked to the timeframes set out in legal agreements to shortlist applicants for new vacancies.
- Continued to work to the criteria set out in the Housing Nominations Policy in terms of banding and eligibility.
- Continued to support the armed forces community in the Horsham area by awarding additional preference to eligible households applying for housing, as we committed to by signing the Armed Forces Covenant.
- Provide accurate reports to Registered Providers and developers of the level of demand for different types of affordable accommodation in specific areas within the District.

Objective Five: Prevent all forms of homelessness for our District's residents

What does this mean?

The final objective centres around helping people remain in their home instead of being made homeless. Due to the complex nature of homelessness, the creative proactive solutions in our toolkit are wide ranging, from negotiating with landlords and families to working with key partner agencies.

What are the challenges we are facing in achieving this goal?

The challenges associated with this objective are:

- The Homelessness Team have seen an increase in approaches for housing assistance from households that felt they were at threat of losing their home or in accommodation unsuitable for their needs. We anticipate this to increase as the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic are more severely felt.
- The benefit cap has resulted in reducing affordability in the private rented sector and therefore impacting on the number of homeless prevention successes.
- Landlords historically preferring to let to professionals whereby they can obtain a higher rent or sell their properties rather than rent to household who claim benefits. Again, we predict this pressure is likely to increase due to the pandemic.
- Managing the expectations of clients seeking housing assistance from the Council and educating Horsham District residents about the general housing circumstances within the District, for example the fact that the majority of properties are owner occupied and there is a lack of rented accommodation.

What have we already done to try and achieve this?

Since the HRA was implemented, the Council's Homelessness team has grown and thrived. We are confident that with strong joint working and innovative ideas we can continue to grow to support those who are homeless or facing homelessness. To date, we have:

- Developed an implementation programme to prepare for the new legislative duties of the HRA, including training for staff; introduction of a new IT system, Jigsaw; expanding the private rented service; and working with partner organisations to join up services.
- Expanded and restructured the Homeless team at the Council to add three new Homeless Prevention Advisors, a Homeless Case Officer and a Senior Homeless officer.
- Continued to provide Prevention duties as set out in the HRA. This includes preparing Personalised Housing Plans, providing a negotiating and mediation service to parents asking their children to leave and landlords looking to evict their tenants, and due to the ban on evictions during the pandemic, working intensively with applicants threatened with homelessness and in some cases resolve issues that led to the notice being served.
- Created a unique Integrated Prevention Earliest Help (IPEH) pilot with West Sussex County Council to prevent homelessness and reduce the number of intentionally homeless decisions being made. This included a Prevention Officer working across the organisations to support families at risk of homelessness and has successfully enabled many vulnerable families to stay in their own home. It also demonstrated the power of co-located working and partnership projects.

- Co-located the Prevention officer in the Job Centre plus in Horsham, Henfield Medical Centre and Horsham Court, in order to identify people facing homelessness earlier. This has also enabled the Council to fulfil the Duty to Refer, which requires all public services to notify a housing authority of anyone homeless or likely become homeless with 56 days. Working more closely with prisons, probation units, social services and medical teams has enabled us to identify even more vulnerable people.
- Implemented the Southdown Pathways Project, as detailed in Objective Two.
- Continued supporting applicants into alternate housing in the privately rented sector, supported housing and social housing. Where possible we have tried to keep applicants in their preferred area of the District and we have recognised the concerns for households threatened with homelessness, such as losing their support network or changing children's schools. We have nonetheless been honest and transparent on first contact with applicants about the housing circumstances within the District.
- Continued to provide Tenancy Deposit Loans to those who need it. These are an affordable repayment plan for those in rent arrears to ensure a tenant can remain in their home. For those on a very low-income, alternative funding can be used to prevent homelessness that is not required to be repaid.
- We have continued to work with vulnerable client groups, such as those suffering from domestic abuse, to ensure that they have 'priority need' for homelessness assistance.
- We have continued to identify and work with those vulnerable individuals who are at risk of exploitation, such as cuckooing.

7. Action Plan

We are taking a person-centric data-led approach to overcoming these challenges. As set out at the beginning of this document, we are only setting a few immediate actions at this point in time, set out in the first table, and committing to reviewing many areas of our Service which will in turn lead to more actions set out in the Review of this Strategy in 2022.

Immediate Actions

Action	Outcomes	Relevant Objectives	Lead	Target Date	
1	Working with Property Services to undertake a stock condition survey and site appraisals of our temporary accommodation stock and implement findings if possible	Understand whether our current TA stock meets the needs of clients and whether we need to carry out refurbishments and/or look at increasing our supply. This will ensure we can meet demand with safe, secure and appropriate temporary accommodation for those who need it. Actions resulting from this review will be presented in the Interim Report in 2022.	1, 3, 5	PS	End of 2021
2	Roll out the Customer Portal on Housing Jigsaw to all applicants on the Housing Register	By enabling all applicants on the Housing Register to amend and review their applications online, we can ensure our housing register is as up to date as possible, as well as relieving some pressure on the allocations team	4	KB	2022 Interim Review
3	Produce guidelines for the spending of our commuted sums budget	Develop a set of guidelines, application form and scoring criteria for how we will allocate our s106 commuted sums. Engage a wider pool of Registered Providers to approach the Council for financial support to maximise the delivery of good quality appropriate affordable rented accommodation in areas of greatest demand across the District	3	RJ	End of 2021
4	Upscale our Housing First model	Work with Turning Tides to identify issues preventing us from increasing our housing First offering and overcome these issues to upscale this scheme	2, 5	KB / RJ	2022 Interim Review

Action	Outcomes	Relevant Objectives	Lead	Target Date	
5	Maintain the homeless outreach services developed through the COVID-19 pandemic	The outreach services that were implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic meant we had improved engagement and understanding of our rough sleeper and homeless cohort. Maintaining the outreach service will ensure we continue those the relationships, meaning we can deliver effective support to those who need it	1	KB	Ongoing
6	Review the allocations policy annually	Conduct an annual review of the housing allocations policy to ensure it is up to date with national policy changes and remains equal for all and transparent	4	KB	Ongoing
7	Develop stronger relationships between Registered Providers and the allocations team	Encourage more Registered Providers to have regular meetings with the housing allocations teams to ensure good communication, problem solving and seamless working	3, 4	RJ	Ongoing
8	Establish better partnership working with different departments within the Council and with other key external agencies	To facilitate stronger working with other departments within the Council such as Environmental Health (DFGs, private sector standards, empty homes, housing standards) and the Health and Wellbeing Team. Similarly, to establish regular meetings with key agencies such as the Probation Service, Change Grow Live and Domestic Abuse services. Stronger partnership working will enable us to identify customers with housing needs where joint working could alleviate this need, or improve the housing pathway for the customer. It will help to ensure all clients of our housing service are correctly and adequately supported, with the appropriate duty on the Council	ALL	ALL	Ongoing

Action	Outcomes	Relevant Objectives	Lead	Target Date
9	Continue working closely with Turning Tides on local housing matters	Turning Tides are a valuable partner agency working in the District and continuing to work closely with them is important to our housing and homelessness service. Providing support for projects like their Mobile Homeless Advice Provision help to foster this relationship and recognise the good work they are doing	ALL	Ongoing
10	Maintain close partnership working with other District, Borough and County Council colleagues	Maintaining the good relationships we have developed with neighbouring districts, boroughs, parishes and the County as a whole will ensure we are a key player in delivering housing services in the area	ALL	Ongoing

Reviews to Undertake

Action	Outcomes	Relevant Objectives	Lead	Target Date
1	<p>Explore the viability of a Housing Pathways post/role that would provide alternative housing options and support</p> <p>Explore the possibility of creating a role that provides applicants on the housing register, including those with a main homeless duty accepted but long-term residing in temporary accommodation, with alternative housing options advice. This could include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • providing a personalised housing plan for applicants on the housing register • conducting early interventions around areas such as health, debt, adaptations • thinking creatively and holistically about accommodation solutions <p>By providing support for alternative solutions, this work could help to change or remove the housing need of some applicants, as well as managing residents' expectations of timeframes and likely outcomes of using the housing register for accommodation.</p> <p>Publicising this role and the reasons for it through a social media campaign would also help to communicate the realities of affordable housing to applicants and encourage the exploration of alternative options, reducing the demand on the Council.</p>	2, 4, 5	RJ / KB	Start Spring 2022, end Interim Review 2022

Action	Outcomes	Relevant Objectives	Lead	Target Date	
2	Explore the idea of establishing a Registered Provider Charter	Research and explore the possibility of setting up a charter that Registered Providers would sign up to. By committing to delivering housing to a set standard, agreeing to participate in a cross-Registered Provider transfer incentive scheme, pre-emption protocols and strong partnership working, Registered Providers may be able to be our preferred delivery partners for affordable housing and may have preferential access to financial support through s106 grant funding. This would strengthen working relationships between Registered Providers and the Council, as well as creating as much movement as possible within housing stock in District and reducing housing need	2, 3	RJ	Start Winter 2021, end Interim Review 2022
3	Review and enhance our current private rented sector offer	Provide a multi-optioned offer including a reviewed and renewed private landlord offer and private sector leasing scheme. This will encourage help to encourage greater use of this service and help more residents into private renting	1, 5	HW	Start Summer 2021, end Interim Review 2022
4	Review the need for a specialist rough sleeper's accommodation project in the District and implement findings if necessary	Carry out a review of whether there is a need for a specialist rough sleeper's accommodation project in the District, and if so in what form this might take, and how it can be delivered	1	KB	Start Summer 2021, end Interim Review 2022
5	Review young people's accommodation in the District and implement findings where possible	A review will help us to understand whether the young people's accommodation in the District currently meets the needs of the clients. It will additionally indicate whether any improvements to quality or service or an increase in supply are needed. This review will help us to ensure our young people's accommodation is a desirable and appropriate housing option	1, 2, 5	KB / RJ / PDV	Start Autumn 2021, end Interim Review 2022

Action	Outcomes	Relevant Objectives	Lead	Target Date	
6	Review the housing register and implement findings where possible	Review the housing register to better understand our applicants and their needs, and to forecast some of the likely future pressures on the register. From this review we will also be able to identify any areas of potential movement i.e. downsizing opportunities and identify applicants suitable for our tenant placement service. All of this will help to increase some movement within stock in the District and ensure that the housing register is accurate and truly reflective of housing need in the District. This review will also provide the opportunity to understand our population more comprehensively, capturing the range of family types that exist within the District so we can ensure any additional needs beyond housing are identified.	4	KB	Start Summer 2021, end Interim Review 2022
7	Review the housing application process and implement any necessary changes	Evaluate the housing application process to ensure we gather the most relevant information at the right points in the process e.g. introducing a light touch financial assessment at the point of application. This will help us to identify applicants who may need alternative housing options advice or support, as well as streamline the housing application process	4	KB	Start Autumn 2021, end Interim Review 2022

8. Housing Service Area Reviews Timeline

Task Name	Summer 2021	Autumn 2021	Winter 2021	Spring 2022	Summer 2022	Autumn 2022 (Interim Review Produced)	Winter 2022
Review One							
Housing Pathways role							
Review Two							
Registered Provider Charter							
Review Three							
Private rented sector offer							
Review Four							
Specialist rough sleeper's accommodation							
Review Five							
Young people's accommodation							
Review Six							
Housing Register							
Review Seven							
Housing application process							

9. Delivering the Strategy

Who will help us deliver this Strategy?

The Council cannot achieve these objectives on our own, and we will need to build on the strong partnerships we have developed with local charities, stakeholders and Registered Providers working in the District.

Key partners in delivering this Strategy will be:

- Horsham Matters
- Turning Tides
- The Salvation Army
- The Integrated help and Earliest prevention (IPEH) team
- Registered Providers such as Saxon Weald, Raven and Stonewater

How will we know whether we are delivering the Strategy?

As we are taking a multi-staged approach to the entire Strategy period, our delivery will therefore fall in different ways. Some of the defined actions we have set out in the action plan in this initial stage of the Strategy will have deliverable outcomes. These will be our benchmarks, and how we will know how well we are achieving our overall objectives.

The remaining actions of the first stage of the Strategy are the service reviews. These reviews will likely direct the actions we need to take in ways we may not even know yet. Additionally, the time in which this Strategy is launched is full of uncertainty, both at a local, national and global scale. The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have not yet been truly felt or understood, and housing services up and down the country are bracing themselves for increased pressure over the next few years. Consequently, the Interim Review will contain a summary of the findings of the service reviews as well as new action plan, full of actions intended to respond to the service reviews and the impact of the pandemic. This fluid approach allows us to be as responsive and flexible as possible to deal with such an ever-changing situation.

The delivery of the Strategy will be led by the Head of Housing and Community Services and his management team, coordinating with other relevant Council departments and external partner agencies.

10. Conclusion

This Strategy sets out the housing and homelessness challenges which will be faced by the Council in the provision of services for its residents and customers from 2021 to 2026.

The Strategy is an ambitious overarching direction in tackling some critical issues in the housing and homelessness sector. We as a Council are committed to ending the need for people to sleep rough, to providing safe and secure accommodation to anyone who needs it, to delivering the houses and communities our residents need to thrive and preventing homelessness for our District's residents. We have a lot of work ahead of us, but we are excited to be making a real difference to the residents of Horsham district.

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12. APPENDIX 1 – Homelessness Consultation 2017

Consultation - Questions and Responses:

1. Horsham's new corporate objectives are:

- A great place to live
- A thriving economy
- A strong, safe & healthy community
- A cared-for environment
- A modern and flexible council

Do you agree with these objectives as the main aims of the Housing & Homelessness Strategy?

Yes: 62.5%

No: 37.5%

2. Are there other aims and objectives that you think are important for Horsham District Council to focus on in its Housing & Homelessness Strategy?

Suggestions included: affordable and secure housing; more partnership working; to eradicate street homelessness; a client-centred approach; a clear & fair Strategy.

3. Do you think there is enough affordable housing in Horsham district?

No: 100%

4. What do you think Horsham District Council could do (in addition to existing services) to further assist local people to retain their affordability of accommodation?

Suggestions included: build smaller, more affordable housing; affordable social housing at social rents; ensure developers provide their social housing quota; prevent homelessness with budgeting and money advice.

5. The Government has set a target to significantly reduce rough sleeping by 2022 and end rough sleeping nationally by 2027. Do you think this is achievable in Horsham district?

Yes: 42.9%

No: 57.1%

6. Horsham District Council have a range of options to engage with rough sleepers. Do you feel that there is anything that the Council could do to further address rough sleeping in the district?

Suggestions included: temporary and supported housing; partnership with charities; support for rough sleepers to get back to independence; education for local people about ways to help rough sleepers rather than give cash.

7. In your experience, what do you think are the main causes of homelessness in the Horsham district?
- Family eviction
 - Relationship breakdown
 - Assured shorthold tenancy eviction (Section 21 notices being served)
 - Registered Provider evictions
 - Other (please specify below)

Responses: Assured Shorthold Tenancy eviction; high rents; affordability issues leading to eviction.

8. Homeless households in Horsham district may wait some time in temporary accommodation before obtaining a permanent home. Do you have any views on solutions to reduce this waiting time?

Suggestions included: encourage longer private rented tenancies; use empty properties; build more low-cost temporary accommodation; more social housing; increase emergency accommodation and faster move-on to create more vacancies.

9. Do you have any suggestions about ways to ensure housing conditions are safe and healthy for Horsham residents?

Suggestions included: regular inspections; monitor housing standards; good relationships with local landlords; sensible planning regulations; increased powers for community wardens.

10. Finally, what contribution could be made by partners or other agencies to help Horsham District Council to reduce homelessness, including rough sleeping, in our district?

Suggestions included: Working in partnership; more social housing; teach budgeting in schools; establish a local homelessness reduction steering group; grants to replace the WSCC cuts.