

# WATFORD'S HOMELESSNESS AND ROUGH SLEEPING STRATEGY 2020-25



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## Foreword by elected Mayor of Watford

**Welcome to Watford's Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy for 2020-25 which sets out the council's plans for assisting households in the borough who are threatened with or actually homeless.**

Since becoming Mayor in 2018, ending rough sleeping in Watford has been a key priority for me. I have brought together and worked with a wide range of stakeholders in the town over the last year or so to discuss and formulate ways to assist rough sleepers off the streets. We can do very little without sufficient resources so I welcome very much central government's role in providing funding to Watford to undertake effective work with rough sleepers in the town which will be set out later in this Strategy document.

The Council can't prevent and assist homeless households without the involvement of most council departments (housing, revenues and benefits, legal, community protection, planning and property) and most importantly the assistance of voluntary and statutory sector partners, housing associations, Hertfordshire County Council, health and community safety services and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government in delivering key homelessness services. A coordinated approach is essential if we are to help the most vulnerable people and those with complex needs.

The council's relationship with the homelessness voluntary sector in Watford is very strong, as well as with its main housing association partner, Watford Community Housing, and other housing associations with homes in the borough. That relationship is grounded in the multi-agency Watford Strategic Homelessness Forum which first began its work in 2016. As a result, this Homelessness and Rough Sleeping strategy is as much the Homelessness Forum's document as it is the council's.

The Action Plan at the end of this strategy document contains an ambitious agenda for ourselves and our partners to achieve over the next five years. Working together we want to prevent homelessness and provide even more effective services for homeless households.

### **Peter Taylor**

The elected Mayor of Watford



## Foreword from Portfolio Holder for Housing and Property

Watford's 2020-25 Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy has been formulated within a context of a lack of affordable housing locally and the impact of national welfare reform and austerity policies. In its most stark form, these factors have resulted in an increased level of street homelessness plainly evident to local Watford residents. This strategy sets out how preventing homelessness is one of the key priorities for the council and how various initiatives will reduce the number of rough sleepers on our streets. Nonetheless this strategy is not just about rough sleepers: also paramount to the council, and its partners, is safeguarding the health and well-being of children in the homeless households the council assists, enabling a stable future for them through helping them access sustainable, affordable, and good quality accommodation.

None of what the council hopes to achieve over the next five years can be realised without the range of stakeholders the Mayor has highlighted above who provide such a valuable and imperative role in tackling homelessness in the borough. I want to take the opportunity of thanking them for all they do now and will do with us over the next five years.

**Cllr Stephen Johnson**  
Portfolio Holder, Property and Housing

June 2020



## Introduction

This Strategy document sets out how the council, together with its wide range of external and internal partners, intends to prevent and relieve homelessness in Watford over the period 2020-2025. Those who need prevention and relief of homelessness services range from individuals who are rough sleeping and have no roof over their heads to households with children forced to leave their current accommodation for a wide range of reasons.

The Strategy reflects the findings and aspirations developed through a number of sources. These include workshops held during 2018 with the Watford Strategic Homelessness Forum and with council elected Members through the council's Housing Advisory Policy Group, the 2020 Homelessness Review and consultation with a wide range of internal and external stakeholders during February and March 2020. The document also contains brief information on the legal, social and economic policy context in which homelessness services are delivered in the town. An extensive Action Plan is also included setting out the initiatives that will continue over the next five years with improved delivery and new initiatives that will be implemented over the timeframe which deliver the Strategy's mission and key priorities on preventing and relieving homelessness.

The Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy is part of a suite of council housing-related strategies headed by the overarching [Housing Strategy 2015-2020](#). This strategy also contributes to fulfilling a number of the council's current [corporate priorities](#), primarily the priority to "Manage the borough's housing needs".

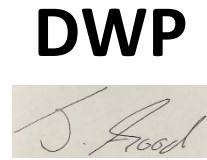
Over the last few years strong working relationships have been established between the council and its partners resulting in considerable collective work responding to the needs of homeless people in the borough. Out of that collective work some key shared values have also been developed. A principal value is the need for respect and sensitivity when engaging with anyone who needs our services because they are or are threatened with homelessness as well as safeguarding their privacy, safety and dignity, the latter being particularly important for rough sleepers. In addition, the council is committed to delivering homelessness services which are not just about assisting people to access a roof over their heads but also enabling their independence in the future and support for their health and social well-being. Lastly, the council, together with its partners, is willing to take opportunities and be innovative in designing services which assist the wide range of support needs found among homeless households in the town.

This strategy is deliberately concise, concentrating on what we need to get done in the next five years. The detail, such as statistical and definitions information and the services available to homeless households can be found in the [2020 Homelessness Review](#).



# Watford Strategic Homelessness Forum Support for this Strategy

The following organisations support Watford’s Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020-25:



Anthony David Campbell



## Mission and key priorities

### Mission

The mission of the Homelessness Forum and the council in relation to carrying out the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020-25 is the following:

**Watford will be a place where no-one needs to sleep rough and there is support available for everyone threatened with being or is actually homeless**

### Key Priorities

Key priorities for the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020-25 are:

#### Key Priority 1: Preventing homelessness

- **Objective 1:** Tackling the causes of homelessness and rough sleeping and improving the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act
- **Objective 2:** Improving access to affordable and sustainable housing options

#### Key Priority 2: Providing services to homeless households and homeless vulnerable adults relevant to their needs

- **Objective 1:** Responding to rough sleeping
- **Objective 2:** Providing individualised support for families with children and vulnerable adults

The Action Plan at the end of this strategy document sets out the key activities that will deliver the mission and key priorities.



# Summary of findings from the Homelessness Review 2020

- Changes in national government housing and welfare policy encompassed by austerity have led to the significant rise of homelessness nationally which has also been seen in Watford.
- The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 (HRA17), brought into force in April 2018, was a welcomed piece of legislation which brought about the biggest change in a generation in the approach councils took in assisting households threatened with homelessness or actually homeless. The Act's focus is on early intervention to prevent homelessness if at all possible and if not, then relief, that is assistance with accommodation. The Act meant that instead of only considering whether the council had a duty to house, it is now required to put in place a personal housing plan which takes a more holistic understanding of a household's housing and support needs. This places responsibilities for resolving a household's housing needs on both the household and the council. Regrettably, the new legislation was not accompanied with an increase in the supply of affordable housing to assist with the larger number of homeless households councils have been required to deal with.
- At a regional level, Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) set up its Families First Homeless Prevention Team to respond to the needs of homeless households found intentionally homeless by district and borough authorities. It has also undertaken a comprehensive review of housing related support funding which provides a significant contribution to services for single homeless people in the county.
- At a local level, the levels of affordable homes owned by housing associations have remained static over the last 5 years whilst housing in the private sector has increased. Census data, although rather outdated now, indicated a significant increase in the private rented sector (from 9% of all tenures in 2001 to 19% of all tenures in 2011 and an 11% reduction in owner-occupation).
- Partnership working on homelessness is very strong in Watford through forums such as the Watford Strategic Homelessness Forum and the Town Centre Task Group both of which bring together a wide range of voluntary and statutory bodies working in the town. The Town Centre Task Group also includes local businesses. Both have Mayoral and Member support.
- The top reasons for homelessness in Watford until the HRA17 were loss of a private rented tenancy, parental eviction, family or friend eviction and relationship breakdown (non- and violent). Data collection since the HRA17 came into force appears to indicate that the top reason for homelessness during 2018/19 was family or friends no longer able to accommodate, followed by loss of a private rented tenancy.
- The predominant group to whom the council owes a homelessness duty has been families with children headed by single women. The second largest group is couples with dependent children.
- The number of single homeless applicants being assisted has grown significantly particularly during 2018/19 in line with predictions and shows the new legislation is enabling a better housing outcome for this group. The number of women the council assisted under the homeless legislation has been much smaller than the number of men.

- Black / African / Caribbean / Black British<sup>1</sup> households are over-represented in the homeless cohort compared with their representation in the Watford population as a whole, whilst White households are under-represented.
- In terms of support needs for households to whom the council owes a homelessness duty, a history of mental health problems are by far the most predominant issue, followed by physical ill-health and disability and alcohol dependence.
- The largest age group in the homeless cohort is those aged between 25 and 44. They are significantly over-represented (at 63%) when compared with 2011 census data (34%).
- The council has been able to significantly decrease the number of households in temporary accommodation from a maximum of 233 in 2016/17 to 110 in 2018/19. This has been achieved through actively working with households to minimise the time they spend in temporary accommodation before moving on to settled accommodation.
- Levels of rough sleeping have varied over time, with a high of 22 found at the rough sleeping count in November 2014 to a low of 6 in 2017. In 2018, the level of rough sleeping increased to 14 and then to 19 in November 2019. In reality, the cohort of rough sleepers is much larger. In November 2018 the cohort of known and verified rough sleepers was 46 whilst in November 2019 there were 36 known and verified rough sleepers with a further 46 who were self-defined as rough sleeping.
- Working together with New Hope, CGL Spectrum, Herts Young Homeless and Watford Citizens Advice, the council has been successful in securing £1,063,000 in government funding since late 2016 for working with rough sleepers to get them off the street. A multi-agency, multi-disciplinary Intervention team has operated since April 2017 comprising expertise in substance mis-use recovery, legal and financial support and mental health recovery. Since July 2019 a multi-agency proactive street outreach service has also operated comprising workers with mental health and substance misuse recovery expertise, engaging with rough sleepers where they are on the streets.
- Health services, such as Meadowell Clinic, the local GP clinic working with rough sleepers and other vulnerable people, are now members of the Watford Strategic Homelessness Forum and working very closely with the council and other partners on providing a holistic service to this part of Watford's community.
- Housing-related support funding from Hertfordshire County Council which currently contributes to rough sleeping activities in the borough delivered by the voluntary sector is under review and will be subject to a tender process during 2020/21
- A winter night shelter was started in Watford in December 2018, which for the first time gave shelter to 105 individuals over the period to the end of March 2019. Based initially at two local churches and then at One YMCA premises at Charter House, central Watford, the shelter was run by three paid staff and over 60 volunteers. The second winter night shelter started in December 2019.
- As part of Watford Strategic Homelessness Forum's vision for setting up a robust pathway for single people with complex needs, which breaks the cycle of frequent return to the streets, several initiatives are being pursued:

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<sup>1</sup> In line with government guidance on collecting data about ethnic groups, two of the five broad ethnic groups are referred to in this paragraph (<https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/style-guide/ethnic-groups>). Full information on the ethnic breakdown of homeless households can be found in the [Homelessness Review 2020](#) and [the Equalities Impact Assessment](#) which accompany this strategy document

- A housing scheme aimed at rough sleepers to whom the council has a duty under the HRA17 and other vulnerable single homeless people engaged with by the Street Outreach Service. The scheme will provide support and access to mental health and substance misuse recovery. Currently the council places those with complex needs in temporary accommodation without support; these placements often break down.
- Providing accommodation to move-on to, for example, from the complex needs housing scheme
- A Housing First scheme: aimed at entrenched rough sleepers, providing a home and extensive long-term support
- Enabling access to private rented homes
- The concept of a Single Homeless Hub is being explored, spearheaded by New Hope, which would provide a one stop shop offering rough sleepers access to essential support emergency accommodation, health care and other services under one roof.
- The Watford Strategic Homelessness Forum adopted an important document, "[Working with rough sleepers in Watford – services available and best practice guidelines](#)" in May 2019
- The prospects for rough sleepers achieving a settled home are particularly difficult due to the combination of unemployment, mental health and substance mis-use support issues, high rents in supported accommodation and the private rented sector, as well as housing associations' reservation about accepting this cohort as tenants. A truly sustainable pathway for rough sleepers off the streets is one:
  - that recognises flexibility, enabling rough sleeper users to move back and forth in the single pathway reflecting progress and then support if and when relapse with mental health or substance mis-use occurs
  - where medium term move-on and long-term settled accommodation is affordable by being within Universal Credit limits
- The incidence of cuckooing has increased in Watford over 2019. Working with partners to create a pathway to safety is an area of development for the council and the Homelessness Forum.
- Homeless 16/17 year olds are a small proportion of the households facing homelessness. Work with Herts Young Homeless has been successful in preventing 93% of this age group from having to make a homeless applications to local authorities in Hertfordshire.
- Demand for housing association homes let on social or affordable rents far outstrips supply:
  - The number of applicants wanting studios and homes with one bedroom outstrips the supply by a ratio of 2.5:1
  - for homes with two bedrooms the ratio is 2:1
  - for homes with three bedrooms the ratio is 5:1
  - for homes with 4 bedrooms the ratio is 11:1. The average number of homes with 4 bedrooms becoming available to let is just two per year.
- The number of housing association homes of all sizes becoming available to let over the last five years has ranged between 217 and 267. Lettings have halved when compared to 2012/13 when 471 homes became available to let.
- Homeless households on the Housing Register are the biggest group housed each year with more than half of all housing association lettings going to this group.

- Under occupation in homes owned by Watford Community Housing (WCH) is estimated to be 40%. The council will work in partnership with WCH to make best use of these homes by implementing a rightsizing policy which includes financial incentives and support to help free up around 50 much needed family-sized homes.
- The private rented sector is a key source of settled homes for homeless households. Together with social rented homes, these are used to discharge the council's duties to prevent, relieve and where it has accepted a duty to house. The number of private rented homes used to assist homeless households increased from 36 during 2014/15 to 66 in 2018/19. Private rented homes accessed through the scheme have been located all over the country including Bradford, Birmingham and Norwich as well as closer to home in London, St Albans, Hemel Hempstead and of course Watford. Whilst other issues such as work or family may take households away from Watford, affordability of private rented homes is a major issue. Moves outside Watford are always voluntary.
- Affordability of housing is a major issue for homeless households, many of whom are on low incomes and/or dependent on benefits.
- For someone earning the net monthly median<sup>2</sup> income in Watford £1,967 per month (that is, after tax and national insurance) it was found that only a room or a home with one bedroom was affordable. Homes with two or more bedrooms are more likely to be occupied by families which means that, without the assistance of Local Housing Allowance or a second adequate income, a home charging a median private rent is not affordable by a Watford resident working full-time and earning a median net income for the borough.
- Welfare benefit reform has had a significant impact:
  - Local Housing Allowance (LHA) has been frozen since 2016. There is an average gap between LHA rates and median private rents in Watford of 32% across all sizes of homes. On average less than a handful of vacant private rented homes advertised every month have rents at the LHA level. The government has announced the freeze on LHA rates will end from April 2020. Whilst this is welcomed, in practice it will make little difference as rates will only be increased by CPI<sup>3</sup>, an average of £10 per month per household
  - Benefit capping – the limiting of welfare benefits to specific levels – means that households do not receive enough money to fully cover their rent and service charges. Any gap has to be paid out of money households have for food and bills. Any household with two or more children will be benefit capped: this affects households renting in both the private sector and the housing association sector. In the latter sector homes can be available at a social rent or an affordable rent. Social rents are around 50% of market rents whilst affordable rents can be up to up to 80% of market rents.
    - A two bedroom housing association home let on an affordable rent is not affordable in Watford to households on a median income
    - Whilst households paying a social rent also face benefit capping like those paying affordable rent or private rent, the big difference is that households paying social rents have more disposable income and therefore a significantly better quality of life.
    - Getting a job enables households to escape the benefit cap and can make a big difference to disposable income. However, many jobs available are at minimum

<sup>2</sup> That is, the half way point of the range of incomes earned by local residents

<sup>3</sup> Consumer Price Index

wage, not long term and on zero hours terms, making budgeting and financial planning for households difficult

- In September 2019, the council had over 50 households in temporary accommodation with two or more children that were already benefit capped or would be if they moved into settled accommodation. On the Housing Register there were just under 200 households needing homes with 3 more bedrooms, who if not working would be benefit capped.
- Key homelessness issues identified by Watford Strategic Homelessness Forum were:
  - A lack of affordable housing in the town for families and single people
  - A lack of supported accommodation for those still using drink and drugs and/or with complex needs
  - A lack of accommodation to move on to from supported housing
  - The residence requirement for accessing social and affordable housing excludes single people. This is because they are less likely to stay and build up the required residence locally due to affordability issues in the private rented sector
  - More prevention of homelessness was needed rather than crisis intervention
  - Benefit issues were contributing to homelessness, particularly the benefit cap and Universal Credit
  - Services for supporting complex needs was needed (drugs, alcohol and mental health issues), although funding for this was uncertain
  - Increased communication was needed between agencies in Watford

# National, regional and local context and policy issues

## The national context and policy picture

The country as a whole has seen a considerable rise in homelessness since 2009/10: rough sleeping for example has increased by 165% since 2010; the number of homeless households in temporary accommodation has also been steadily increasing each year since 2011 standing at 83,700 as at December 2018. London households make up two thirds (68%) of all households in England in temporary accommodation<sup>4</sup>. The rise in homelessness has been linked to changes in central government policy, particularly around welfare reform, reduced investment in affordable housing, cuts to local authority budgets, and reduced investment in health services, particularly around mental health and support services. The largest group of homeless households is single women with children who are also affected most by welfare reforms undertaken.

The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, a much welcomed and the most significant reform of homelessness legislation in a generation, came into force in April 2018. It introduced two new duties for all local authorities in England, a prevention of homelessness duty and a relief of homelessness duty together with personal housing plans setting out the support and housing needs of households facing homelessness or actually homeless. Whilst welcomed, local authorities were not sufficiently resourced to implement the act to enable it to reach its full potential; for example, there is no concurrent increase in housing supply which is affordable to homeless households on low incomes and/or dependent on benefits.

Also welcomed was the government's Rough Sleeping Strategy 2018 which commits to halving rough sleeping in England by 2022 and to end it by the end of the current Parliament in 2024, three years earlier than set out in its previous commitment<sup>5</sup>. The council has benefited from significant additional funding for initiatives to tackle rough sleeping in Watford.

The role of housing associations is also incredibly important, particularly for local authorities like Watford which does not have its own stock of affordable homes. Partner housing associations in Watford thus have a crucial role to play in tackling homelessness in the borough. A national initiative, "Homes for Cathy", comprises a group of housing associations set up in the 1960/70s to mark the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the drama documentary "Cathy Come Home" aired on BBC TV in November 1966. The aims for Homes for Cathy<sup>6</sup> include:

- Highlighting the history of housing associations and their original aims and culture.
- Raising awareness about continuing homelessness
- Promoting the need for more housing at a price people can afford<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Wilson W. & Barton C., (2019), "Briefing Paper: Households in temporary accommodation (England), House of Commons Library, Pg 9

<sup>5</sup> MHCLG (23/12/2019) Prime Minister pledges new action to eliminate homelessness and rough sleeping, Press release Accessed: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/prime-minister-pledges-new-action-to-eliminate-homelessness-and-rough-sleeping>.

<sup>6</sup> <https://homesforcathy.org.uk/>

<sup>7</sup> Bogle, D., (xxxx), Homes for Cathy, Hightown Housing Association

Member housing associations sign up to a series of nine commitments, known as the Cathy Commitments<sup>8</sup>. Housing associations with homes in Watford who have signed up to the Cathy Commitments are:

- Catalyst HA
- Hightown HA
- Origin Housing
- Watford Community Housing

## The regional context and policy picture

WBC works in a two tier local authority setting with some key services run by Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) which are relevant for WBC in delivering its homelessness services.

HCC strategies relevant to WBC's homelessness services include:

- **Health and Well-being Strategy 2016-2020**
  - Includes seeking to tackle homelessness and housing issues and their underlying causes, achieving good mental health and well-being for working-age adults
  - It identifies "housing and the living environment" as one of the six social determinants influencing individuals' health and well-being
- **Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA)** and related JSNA briefings such as [Housing-related Support – Adults with a Complexity of Needs](#).
  - The JSNA looks at the health and social care needs of Hertfordshire's residents, highlights areas of inequality and helps public bodies decide what type of local services to commission.
- **Joint Housing Protocol**

This protocol between HCC and the ten local district and borough councils in Hertfordshire covers homeless 16 and 17 year olds, care leavers and homeless households found intentionally homeless or with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF). A revised protocol draft is expected in 2020. In the meantime, HCC has set up a Families First Homeless Prevention Team within Children's Services to assist homeless households found intentionally homeless or without recourse to public funds which will work closely with all ten lower tier councils in Hertfordshire to put in place in sustainable move-on plans for these households.
- **Hertfordshire Supporting Adults with Complex Needs Strategy**

HCC uses **housing related support** (HRS) funding to commission local voluntary sector partners in the county to deliver support services to rough sleepers and single homeless people with complex needs. Some £1.2m in HRS funding is currently granted to three voluntary agencies in Watford:

  - One YMCA to support 150 units of accommodation, accessible by all single homeless people in Hertfordshire, not just Watford
  - New Hope for supported housing and floating support (Watford connection)

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<sup>8</sup> <https://homesforcathy.org.uk/commitments/sign-up-to-the-commitments/>



- GROW for supported housing (Watford connection)

The current level of HRS funding will continue until March 2021.

Contractually, HRS funding requires measurement of the progress of service users to independence and stability using tools like Outcome Star with move-on plans put in place. It is also time limited to providing service users with support for no more than 18 months.

A new draft strategy supporting adults with complex needs and how this will be financed through housing related support funding is being consulted on in early 2020. The strategy's vision is "Working together. Delivering prevention focused services to enable vulnerable adults to live independently". It intends to redesign services for vulnerable adults with complex needs from April 2021 through the application of four strategic aims:

- Fair access to services
- Prevention and crisis intervention through joint working and pathways
- Housing provision
- Transformation and innovation

## The local context and policy picture

### The local context

Watford is located 17 miles north west of central London and is adjacent to the Greater London area. The borough is small with an area of 2,142 hectares (8.3 square miles) and is the only non-metropolitan borough wholly within the M25. The borough is the largest urban area in south west Hertfordshire and has the highest population density. It also has a strong concentration of services and facilities with considerable employment, retail and leisure opportunities. Formerly a market town, it has grown significantly over time with its core being Watford town centre.

Watford is strongly influenced by London which provides good access to services and facilities and opportunities for employment. However, coinciding with these benefits are increased growth pressures on the borough which create fundamental challenges for the borough in the years ahead. The council is currently consulting on a draft Local Plan which in terms of housing will enable local residents to live in the types of housing they need<sup>9</sup>. Housing tenure in the town has changed over the years with the proportion of homes owned through mortgage or loans or owned outright reducing by 11% between 2001 and 2011 whilst the private rented sector grew by 10%. By 2017, the private rented sector is estimated to have increased to 28% of all homes in Watford<sup>10</sup>. There is a lack of affordable housing in the borough and rough sleeping has increased significantly in the last two years.

### Partnership working

Considerable partnership working takes place in Watford on resolving homelessness in the town:

<sup>9</sup> Watford Borough Council (2019), "First Draft Watford Local Plan 2020-2036", Pg 17

<sup>10</sup> WBC, (2018), Private Sector Renewal Policy, Pg 4

## **Watford Strategic Homelessness Forum**

In operation since 2016, this well-attended forum meets seven times a year on a 6-8 weekly basis. Its purpose is “To reduce homelessness and improve services and provision for people and households at risk of or actually homeless within the Watford Borough Council area” and its aims and responsibilities are:

- To reduce rough sleeping in the Watford area
- To reduce the numbers of households in temporary accommodation
- To develop effective pathways to settled accommodation for homeless households
- To ensure greater joined up working between Watford Borough Council and all homelessness agencies in the borough

### **The role of the forum is to work in partnership to**

- Take a strategic and holistic overview of homelessness in the area
- Agree, prioritise and achieve practical outcomes for reducing homelessness in the area and improve standards of homelessness service and provision

Membership of the forum is wide-ranging and includes key voluntary agencies delivering services to single homeless people (New Hope, One YMCA, GROW, Herts Young Homeless), health agencies, such as Hertfordshire Partnership University Foundation Trust, CGL Spectrum (substance misuse agency) and Meadowell Clinic (a GP surgery aimed at the single homeless and other vulnerable people) Watford Citizens Advice, several housing associations including Watford Community Housing, Catalyst, Origin and Hightown, and WBC (including Housing Services, Community Safety and Revenues and Benefits). The Forum is also attended by the elected Mayor and the Portfolio Holder for Housing.

A peer review of Watford’s homelessness services found that the Homelessness Forum was “positive with good buy-in from partners” and the “Homeless Forum takes (the) lead on rough sleeping and is an example of good joint working with partners, including community safety, police, HB, mental health, YMCA”<sup>11</sup>.

Meetings have discussed a wide range of topics over the last two years including:

- Presentations from member agencies on their work and services for with homeless households in Watford
- Presentations from external agencies on topics of interest to the Forum, such as from Fulfilling Lives in Islington & Camden and Homelessness Link on Housing First.
- Consideration of government funding opportunities and consultation on government policy changes
- Regular reflection on council housing and homelessness statistics

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<sup>11</sup> NPSS Diagnostic Peer Review Feedback, December 2017

- Consideration of future ways of working such as setting up a Single Homeless Pathway or local policy changes such as the council’s Nominations Policy or the outcomes needed from this Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy
- Regular report backs and input from Hertfordshire County Council on key funding issues such as Housing-related support funding
- Setting up sub groups on particular issues, for example, drafting a best practice guidelines document for working with rough sleepers in the town ([published](#) in May 2019) and a Housing First group examining whether such a scheme can be set up in Watford

### ***Rough Sleeper Initiative and Rapid Rehousing Pathway Co-ordination***

With the support of voluntary homelessness partners, the council successfully applied to two streams of MHCLG funding during 2018/19: Rough Sleeper Initiative (RSI) and Rapid Rehousing Pathway (RRP). This funding lasting for one year has enabled a proactive Street Outreach Service to be put in place from July 2019 and the continuation of the existing Intervention (Navigator) Team from April 2019. In January 2020, a further £413,000 in Rough Sleepers Initiative funding was secured which has enabled these two vital services to continue their work for a further year.

The two services adopted the successful multi-agency, multi-disciplinary model established by the original Rough Sleeper Grant-funded Intervention Team with the agencies involved, New Hope, CGL Spectrum, Herts Young Homeless and Watford Citizens Advice agreeing a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) and a Data Sharing Agreement. WBC commissioned New Hope to lead on distributing funding to partner organisations and the overall management of both teams.

Regular monthly operational meetings take place to discuss data collection and analysis whilst bi-monthly partner meetings look at strategic and service planning issues arising out of the data collection.

It is hoped an additional partner, Hertfordshire Partnership University Foundation Trust (HPFT), will join once the recruitment to a mental health practitioner post is completed.

## *Watford's Winter Shelter*

Another highly successful initiative in Watford involving a range of stakeholders working in partnership is Watford's Winter Shelter (WWS). WWS ran as a pilot from 1 December 2018, initially to 31 January 2019 and then extended to 31 March 2019. New Hope took the lead in setting up the shelter working with two local churches (St Mary's and Wellspring) and One YMCA providing space for the shelter; funding came from WBC and the government via the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG). Support also came from over 60 volunteers from the local communities who helped staff the shelter every night it ran. A review of the shelter in May 2019 agreed it had been a highly successful humanitarian project which undoubtedly saved lives. Some 105 unique individuals benefited from the shelter, with 33 (31.5%) moving into various forms of settled or supported accommodation instead of returning to rough sleeping.

A further Winter Night Shelter, again co-ordinated by New Hope and with space provided by One YMCA, ran again from 1 December 2019 for 4 months offering up to 19 bed spaces per night. Most of last year's volunteers agreed to volunteer in the shelter again. The Street Outreach Service and WBC will play a key role in actively engaging with WWS users and together with the Intervention/Navigator Team will hopefully increase the proportion of users who are successfully moved off the streets during 2019/20.

## *Town Centre Task Group*

A key concern for Watford businesses and other local stakeholders has been the increase in rough sleeping, illicit drug activity and associated anti-social behaviour (ASB) in the town which reached worrying levels in the summer of 2018. There was particular concern about the impact on businesses and perception of the town. A year-long Town Centre Task Group, led by the elected Mayor, began work in autumn 2018. Key stakeholders include the voluntary sector working with rough sleepers, the police, representatives from the council's housing, community safety and communications departments, the health sector, Watford BID (see above) and the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Property. The Task Group has put an Action Plan in place that is working towards:

1. No street begging in the town centre
2. No visible drug dealing/taking in the town centre
3. Reducing rough sleeping in the town centre
4. Tackling persistent ASB (such as street drinking) by identified individuals in the town centre
5. Increasing the engagement of those who are rough sleeping with appropriate services, focusing particularly on the entrenched, hard to engage rough sleepers
6. Identifying a hard core of offenders causing the most harm and proactively target them to make the town centre an uncomfortable place to be
7. Influencing and work with the courts to gain support to secure Criminal Behaviour Orders to effectively deal with the impact the ASB has on the town centre
8. Improving perception of the town centre and encourage behaviour change that supports positive solutions

9. Identifying any displacement that arises from the Action Plan and proactively target these locations
10. Encouraging businesses/individuals to report ASB and rough sleeping to 101 (Police) and the Streetlink App respectively
11. Ensuring service provision is targeted to prevent attracting homeless people to Watford
12. Ensuring there are agreed structures and processes in place to respond and deal with any future ASB in the town centre as soon as it arises to achieve a sustainable approach for the future

Measures of success for the Task Group are:

- An increase of 50% of those rough sleepers positively engaging with relevant agencies
- An increase in the positive perception of the town centre from baseline in early 2018 to completion of Action Plan (baseline autumn 2019)
- A reduction in the number of complaints received by the Mayor’s office for anti-social, criminal and intimidating behaviour in the town centre compared to the summer of 2018 (baseline of 22 during June-Sept)

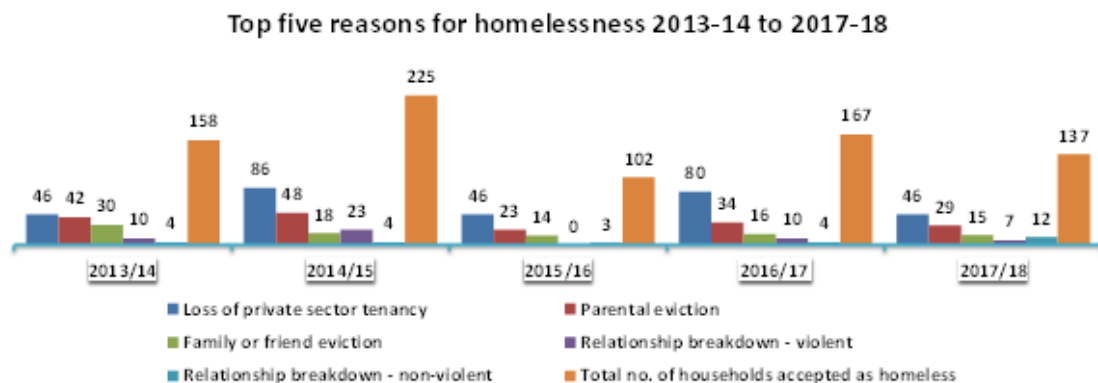
Key outcomes for the Task Group so far include much improved partnership work across the agencies involved and a more co-ordinated approach to the issues the group was set up to tackle.

### The main reasons for homelessness in Watford

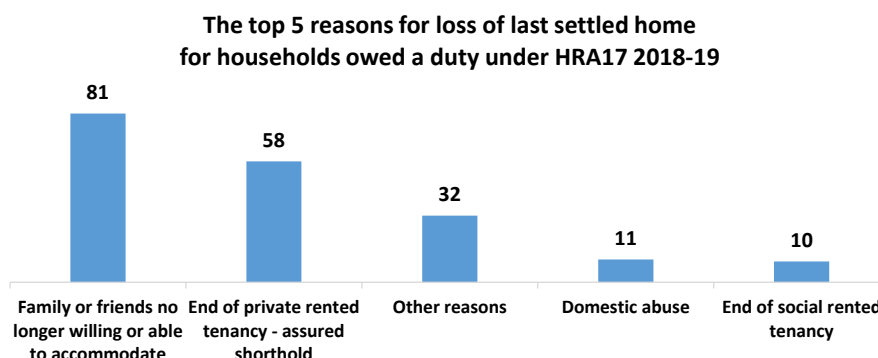
**Important to note:** any data about homelessness has to be set out in terms of what happened pre-Homelessness Reduction Act (HRA) and then since its introduction in April 2018. Different types of data are being collected so it is not always straightforward to compare pre and current HRA data. In addition, the data collected since the implementation of the HRA is purely experimental and cannot yet be relied on to provide an accurate picture of the homelessness situation in Watford. This is because the government has required local authorities to collect a great deal more information about homeless households assisted under the HRA whilst IT systems to cope with this are still being calibrated.

The two graphs below, pre and post HRA introduction, give an idea of the main reasons for homelessness in Watford:

**Chart A: pre-HRA - top reasons for homelessness**



**Chart B: since HRA introduction – top five mean reasons for homelessness 2018/19**



The HRA17 data for 2018/19 (Chart B) indicates that the largest reason for the loss of the last settled home was “Family or friends no longer willing or able to accommodate”. In previous years by comparison and aggregating “Family or friend eviction” and “Parental eviction” (see table below), the loss of a private rented tenancy was the main reason for homelessness, except in 2013/14.

Year	Family/friend/parental eviction	End of private rented tenancy
2013/14	72	46
2014/15	66	86
2015/16	37	46
2016/17	50	80
2017/18	44	46
2018/19	81	58

It is not yet understood why the main reason for homelessness changed for 2018/19 and may not be accurate given the experimental nature of the data. However, one speculation is that households are unable to afford the private rented sector in Watford and move straight to homelessness rather than entering the private rented sector first. Data in subsequent years may bear this out.

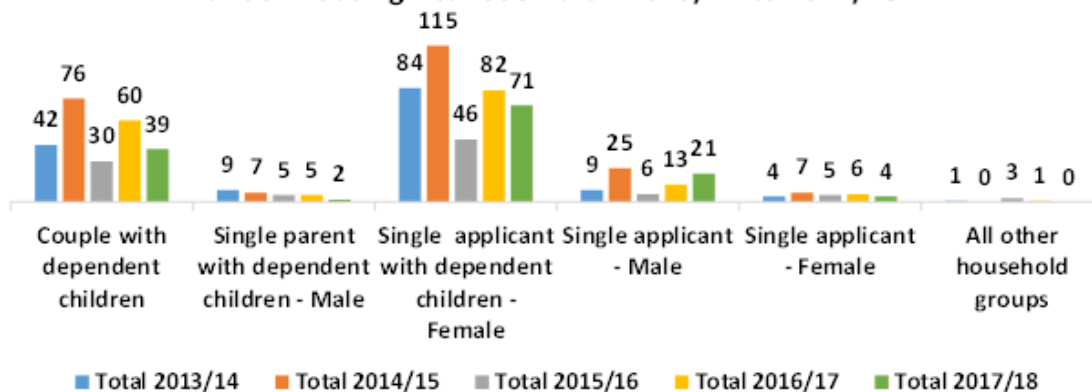
### **Types of household becoming homeless**

NB: Again the data shown is split between pre and post HRA introduction.

The data for the period 2013/14 to 2017/18<sup>12</sup> covers households where the council agreed a duty to house under the Housing Act 1996, Part 7 (the Main Duty) whilst the 2018/19 data looks at household types of those owed a Prevention Duty and a Relief Duty under the HRA17 – these are the two duties before a duty to house, or the Part 7 Main Duty, is considered if either prevention and/or relief activities have not succeeded in the household finding an alternative home. The first chart below shows the types of households for whom the council agreed a duty to house under the Housing Act 1996, Part 7 over the period 2013/14 to 2017/18.

<sup>12</sup> Source: P1E data

### Types of households for whom WBC agreed a duty to house under Housing Act 1998 Part 7 2013/14 to 2017/18

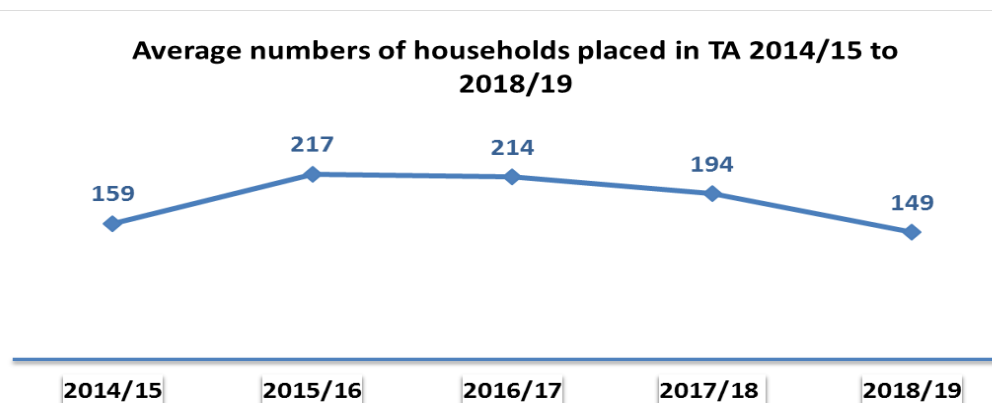


As can be seen the most predominant household for whom the council agreed a duty to house (a Main Duty decision) is female single parents with dependent children, with the second largest group being couples with dependent children. The number of single female applicants for whom the council agreed a duty is much lower than the number for single male applicants.

Where the council owed a Prevention or Relief duty, households with children headed by a single female are again the predominant group. However, a big change from HA96 is that under HRA17 single homeless applicants are a larger group within the homeless cohort than ever before and larger than the group of couples with dependent children. Within single applicants, male applicants are a larger group than female applicants which follows a similar pattern as under HA96. That more single applicants would be assisted via HRA17 was predicted and shows the new legislation is enabling a better housing outcome for this group of people.

### Temporary accommodation

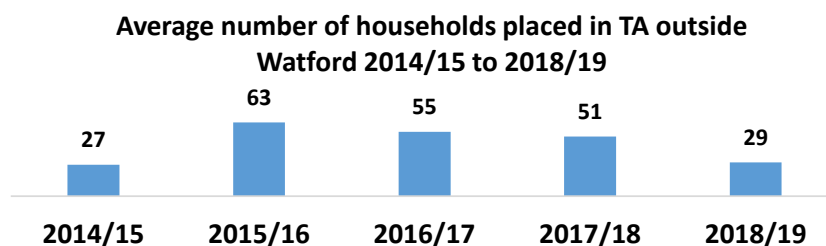
The council has been successful in reducing the numbers of households in TA over the years as the following chart shows:



During 2019, the number of households placed in TA reduced to just under 100.



The council has worked hard on reducing the number of households located in TA outside the borough. The following chart shows progress on this over the last 5 years:



In 2018/19 households in TA outside the borough returned to 2014/15 levels. In 2019/20 so far there has been an average of 12 households in TA outside the borough and these are mostly located in one facility in Harrow.

The council put in place a Temporary Accommodation Strategy for the period 2019-2024. The Strategy's aim is to plan in advance for the replacement of a number of TA units in the next 1-3 years due to leases ending, develop plans for TA units no longer fit for purpose and provide for the complex needs of some homeless households. Fundamentally the council is concerned about:

- ensuring homeless households are placed in good quality, affordable temporary accommodation which is conducive to their well-being.
- mitigating against reverting to the situation where the council was spending over £1m a year from its General Fund on provision of TA as done in past years.

In January 2019 The Corporate Management Team and Portfolio Holders endorsed the following eight principles governing the council's approach to acquisition, control, quality and management of its TA portfolio:

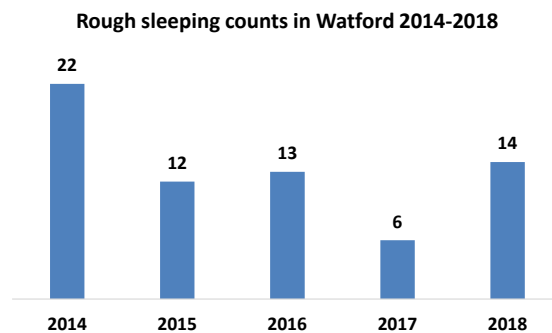
1. An optimum number of TA units is in place at any one time with minimum voids
2. The council controls any new housing acquired for TA to ensure availability of stock and effective management, the latter being outsourced
3. The council does not assume overcrowding in TA unless no other suitable units are available.
4. Replacement TA homes will need to take account of high turnover and sometimes overcrowding. Consequently TA units must be good quality, have suitable space standards (particularly storage) and robust fixtures and fittings.
5. Most replacement units should be self-contained apart from one hostel with shared facilities for families and one hostel for single people with complex needs.
6. Hostel facilities for singles and families should be separate.
7. Self-contained units should be convertible to social housing if needed or sold.
8. TA is responsive to people with complex needs

The all Members group, the Housing Policy Advisory Group, also endorsed these principles at its meeting in February 2019.

The TA strategy is deliberately flexible in its approach because even as it was written the number and mix<sup>13</sup> of TA units required has reduced considerably over the last few months. That said, decision-making can be slow around developing new TA units on council land and redeveloping council-owned TA to meet current needs. There is therefore no guarantee that the council could avoid using expensive spot purchase, lease and nightly paid accommodation in the future.

### Rough sleeping in Watford

Levels of rough sleeping in Watford have varied over the years as can be seen in the following chart showing the outcomes of annual rough sleeping counts in the years 2014-2018:

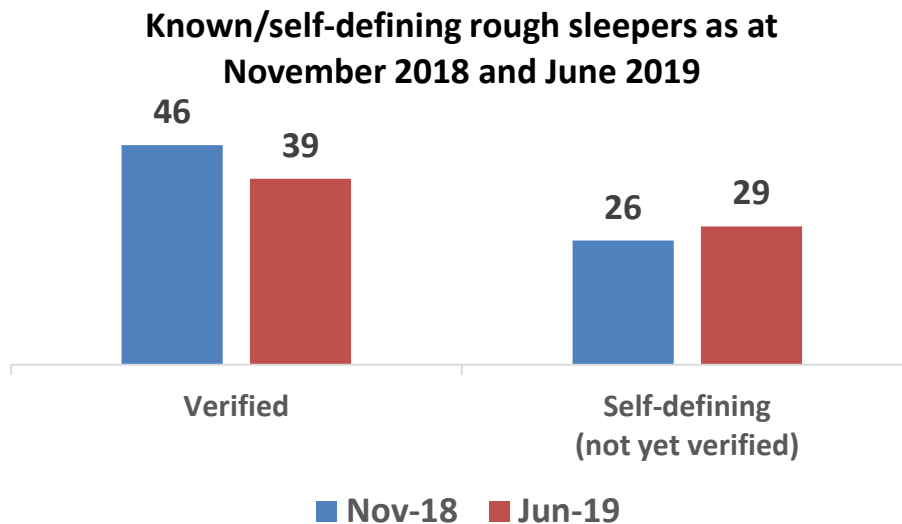


Apart from 2014, when the rough sleeper count was particularly high in Watford – and the highest in Hertfordshire – other Hertfordshire districts have found more rough sleepers at their counts than Watford.

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<sup>13</sup> In terms of sizes and number of bedrooms

The experience and evidence gathering of one of Watford’s rough sleeper agencies, New Hope, demonstrates that the number of rough sleepers identified at a count is usually a quarter to a third of the number known to be rough sleeping: so where 14 people were found sleeping rough in Watford in 2018, there were some 40-60 people actually rough sleeping within Watford on the streets, in its parks, in encampments and other, usually hidden, places. This is demonstrated in the chart below showing data from New Hope on the number of their service users they have verified as rough sleeping and those self-defining as rough sleepers at two points in time, November 2018 and June 2019:



More recent data for September 2019 estimates there were just under 90 rough sleepers in Watford of which 58 had been directly engaged with by the Street Outreach Service during September. Of these 14 were women rough sleepers and 44 men. In addition, of this number:

- 23 were regular rough sleepers in Watford,
- 25 were known previously to New Hope services and had returned recently to the area
- 1 was a newcomer
- 9 had no recourse to public funds

In 2019, Watford Strategic Homelessness Forum adopted the document "[Working with rough sleepers in Watford – services available and best practice guidelines](#)".

Aimed at charities, voluntary and statutory agencies working with rough sleepers as well as individuals who want to support them, the document does a number of things:

- Defines what a rough sleeper is
- Provides information about the services available for rough sleepers in Watford, who provides them and how to access them
- Shares advice on working with rough sleepers safely and avoiding helping to keep them on the streets
- Sets out the three best things people can do to help rough sleepers in Watford, namely:
  - Refer rough sleepers they are concerned about to services who can help
  - Volunteer with existing agencies in the town who provide a wide range of services for rough sleepers already
  - Donate to an established organisation rather than supporting begging

### ***A joined up pathway for rough sleepers and single homeless people with complex needs***

The action plan accompanying this strategy sets out a number of plans to create a joined up, flexible pathway which aims to reduce the number of rough sleepers on the streets and assist single homeless households with complex needs. Plans include:

- A complex needs housing scheme for single homeless people prioritising those to whom the council has a duty under HRA17 and rough sleepers
- Provision of more move-on accommodation to enable service users to move out of supported hostel places in the town and into semi-independent, low support move-on units. This will free up more hostel spaces to offer to existing rough sleepers and support a No Second Night Out approach
- A Housing First project: provision of accommodation with intensive support to rough sleepers who have repeatedly and unsuccessfully cycled through voluntary and statutory homelessness services
- Exploring the concept of a Single Homeless Hub. The idea of a Single Homeless Hub would be to bring together New Hope's existing staff, the multi-agency staff delivering the Intervention Team and Street Outreach Services as well as a range of other partners including the council HRA and local health services.

### **New homelessness issues – cuckooing**

Cuckooing, the process whereby a vulnerable person is befriended by a drug dealer involved in county lines activities who then takes over their home and exploits the home and the resident for their own purposes. As in the rest of the UK, cuckooing is increasingly an issue in Watford fuelled by county lines activities.

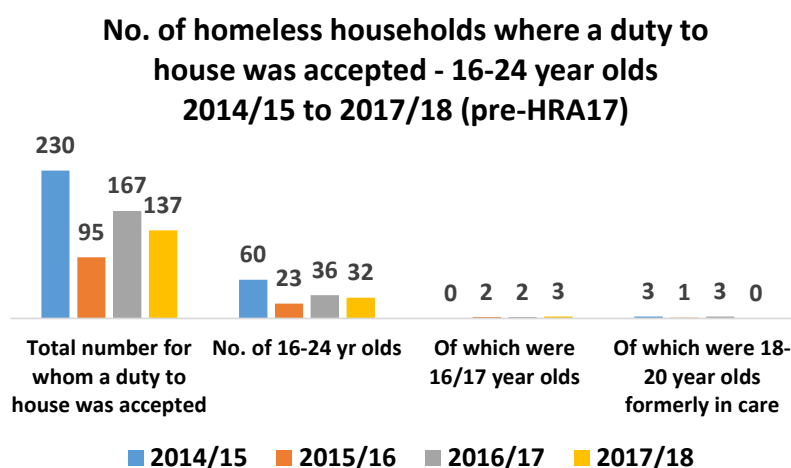
In Watford there have been six cases of cuckooing the homes of vulnerable people recorded since March 2019, most of whom are social housing tenants. There is some evidence that rough sleepers in Watford may be involved in cuckooing and drugs activities. Others are also at risk if they have been witnesses to violence in or near a cuckooed home. Those cuckooed are often unable to remain living in Watford as their lives are in danger. However, moving out of the borough can be particularly difficult for vulnerable people who may lose important networks that sustain their lives including to health services they need.

The links between cuckooing and homelessness are clear and partnership working between the council, other local authorities, housing associations, the police and the voluntary sector to tackle it and prevent the homelessness of cuckooed victims as well as create a pathway to safety is an area of development for the council.

### Youth homelessness

Data over the last 5 years shows that 16/17 year olds and those leaving care have been a very small proportion of the households facing homelessness that the council has assisted. The first chart includes data for the last four years before the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 came into force<sup>14</sup> and shows data for which a duty to house was accepted. In the case of 16/17 year olds and those leaving care who were homeless, the duty to house was mostly automatic.

Source: P1E data

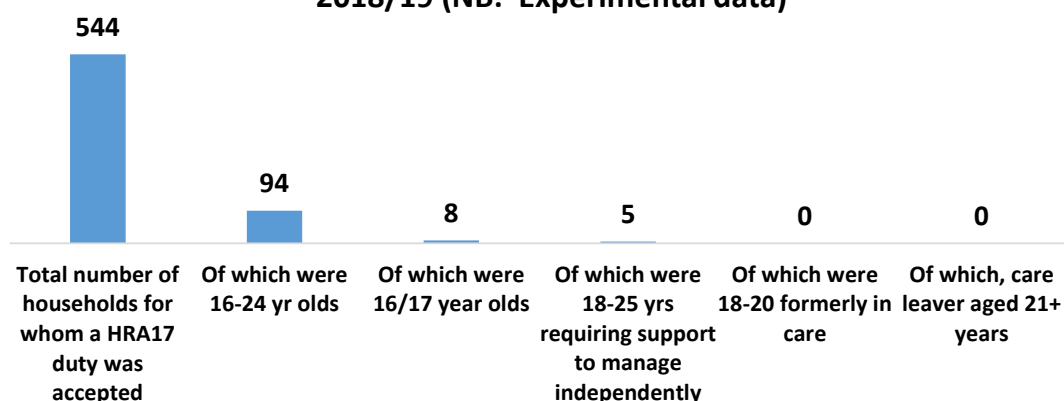


<sup>14</sup> From 3 April 2018

The table below shows the number of households aged 16-24 assisted under the Homelessness Reduction Act during 2018/19. It is difficult to compare the two sets of data because the duties under the Homelessness Reduction Act are more extensive than under the Housing Act 1996<sup>15</sup>. As pointed out earlier, the data collected during 2018/19 must be regarded as indicative only because a new data collection system was introduced by the government which has been difficult to implement for most local authorities.

Source: H-CLIC data

**Homeless households aged 16-24 with support needs to whom the council owed a duty under the HRA17 2018/19 (NB: Experimental data)**



A key change is that the number of 16/17 year olds recorded as being assisted by the council appears to have increased, whilst there were no ex-care leavers assisted.

The Hertfordshire Joint Housing Protocol<sup>16</sup> between Hertfordshire County Council and the ten district and borough councils in Hertfordshire sets out how they will work together to prevent youth homelessness and support families with children who are at risk of homelessness or have been deemed intentionally homeless. A revised Protocol is currently being drafted and will be published in early 2020. The current protocol enables 16/17 year olds, who are a priority under homelessness law, to present as homeless to a local authority in Hertfordshire, HCC's Children's Services or to Herts Young Homeless (yh)<sup>17</sup>. All parties to the protocol have agreed that where emergency accommodation is needed, 16/17 year olds should not be placed in bed and breakfast accommodation.

Herts Young Homeless works in partnership with One YMCA to deliver a Homeless Hub which provides advice and support to young people on preventing homelessness. The Hub prioritises 16 and 17 year olds and works with their families/carers to help them stay together. As a result of this approach, across Hertfordshire, some 95% of young people requesting support were prevented from needing access to Children's Services and 93% were prevented from needing to make a homeless application.

<sup>15</sup> For further explanation, see section on the council's duties in relation to homelessness

<sup>16</sup> Hertfordshire Joint Housing Protocol, May 2015

<sup>17</sup> A charity in Hertfordshire providing service to support vulnerable people, preventing homelessness from education in schools and family mediation through to supporting 16-24 year olds in their first homes or caring for adults of all ages who have mental health issues and housing needs.

In terms of assistance to Watford-connected young people: during 2018-19, of 469 young people aged 18-25 years old calling the Homeless Hub's 18+ Advice Line, 57 were from Watford. During that year also, Herts Young Homeless's floating support service worked with 23 young people from Watford of whom:

- 17 were care leavers
- 4 were leaving supported accommodation
- 2 were in a tenancy but at risk of eviction

Lastly, there were 44 referrals from Watford to the Homeless Hub's support for 16-17 year olds from a total of 559 for Hertfordshire as a whole.

Housing options for young people under 24, other than remaining with parents/carers are particularly challenging because of the low incomes and/or Universal Credit entitlements which apply to this age group. The council intends to explore the possibility of cheaper housing options that are affordable within 40%-45% of the Universal Credit applicable for this age group.

The council contributes funding to Herts Young Homeless to run training sessions called "Home Truths" which raise awareness of the realities of homelessness and what support is available. These sessions are aimed at 16-18 year olds in local schools and colleges.

### **Housing options for homeless households**

The two main housing options for homeless households are housing associations homes and private rented homes.

### **Demand and supply of housing association homes**

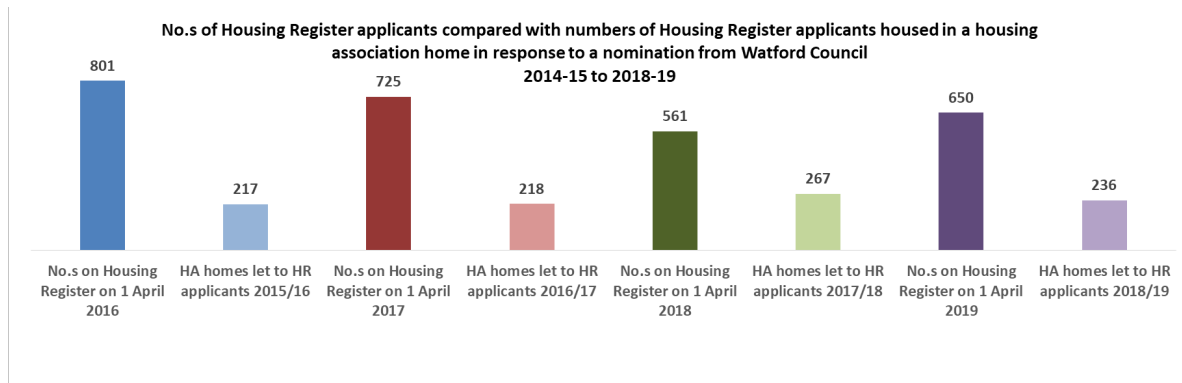
WBC does not own any social rented homes having transferred ownership of its former stock to Watford Community Housing in 2007. The council therefore depends on partner housing associations to put forward vacancies for Housing Register applicants, which includes homeless households, to bid for through the choice based lettings system (CBL). Demand for housing association homes far outstrips supply: for example, the demand for

- The number of housing register applicants needing studios and homes with one bedroom outstrips their supply by a ratio of 2.5:1
- for homes with two bedrooms demand outstrips supply by a ratio of 2:1,
- for homes with three bedrooms demand outstrips supply by a ratio of 5:1
- for homes with 4 bedrooms demand outstrips supply by a ratio of 11:1.



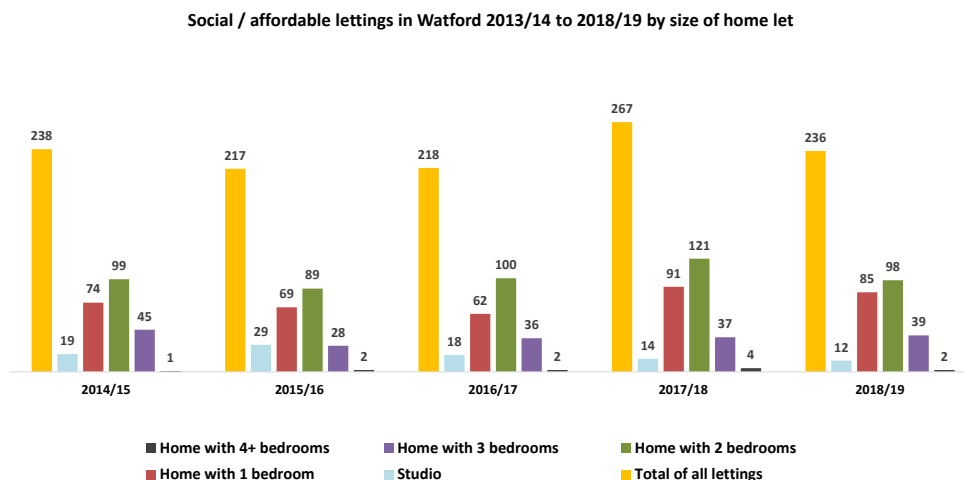
The larger the home required the longer the wait for a suitable home: households who need a home with 3 bedrooms can wait more than 2 years to be housed.

The following chart, showing the number of homes let each year compared to the number of applicants on the council’s Housing Register at 1 April, demonstrates the mismatch between demand and supply:



The next chart shows the number of lettings of social and affordable rented homes owned by housing associations in Watford over the period 2014/15 to 2018/19.

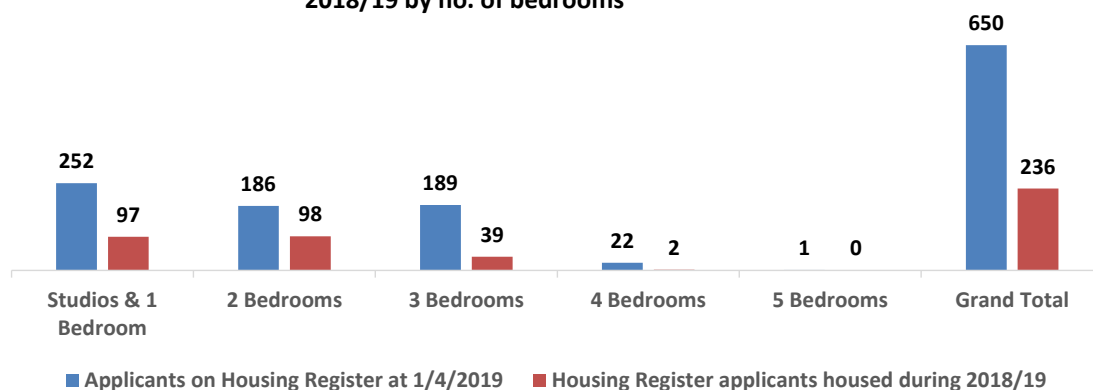
Lettings of homes with 3 and 4 bedrooms remain low throughout the 5 year period, particularly 4 bedrooms with an average of 2 becoming available to let per year. The highest number of lettings consistently across the period are homes with two bedrooms and then those with one bedroom. In addition, over the five year period, lettings of newly built affordable rent homes with 3+ bedrooms was very low with only 12 homes with three bedrooms and eight with four bedrooms newly built homes becoming available for letting<sup>18</sup>.



<sup>18</sup> CDPSmart HCC data, Annual Completions by Size, Type and Provider 2014-15 to 2019-19

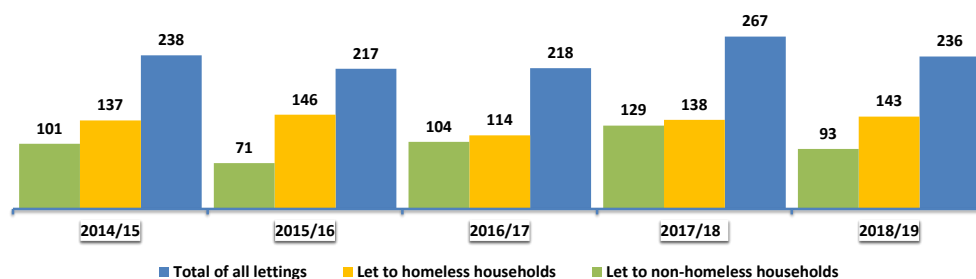
The chart below shows the number of lettings by number of bedrooms in 2018/19 compared with the number of Housing Register applicants requiring them as at 1 April 2019.

**Housing Register applicants as at 1/4/2019 compared with no.s housed during 2018/19 by no. of bedrooms**



Homeless households are the biggest group housed each year from the Housing Register as shown in the chart below.

**Social / affordable lettings 2013/14 to 2018/19 by total lettings, homeless and non-homeless**



In terms of all housing register applicants housed, homeless applicants made up the following proportions:

Year	Proportion of all Housing Register applicants housed who were homeless <sup>19</sup> (%)
2014/15	58%
2015/16	67%
2016/17	52%
2017/18	52%
2018/19	61%

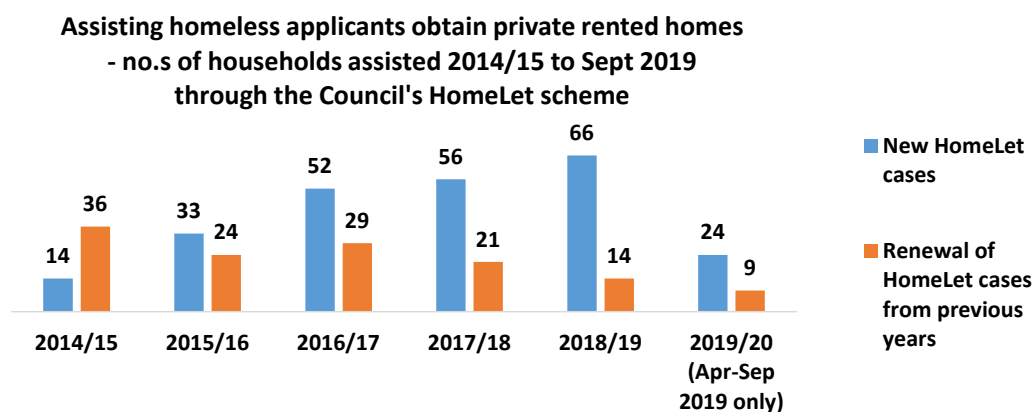
<sup>19</sup> The council had accepted a duty to house under the homelessness legislation

## Assisting homeless households into the private rented sector

The other key source of homes for homeless households is the private rented sector. The council runs its own free of charge private renting incentive scheme which matches landlords who have available homes with prospective tenants looking for a private rented home. The council can assist with covering some of the costs for landlords and for tenants.

Priority for consideration is:

1. Those placed by WBC in temporary accommodation
2. Those who are threatened with homelessness who would otherwise be placed in temporary accommodation by WBC
3. Those in high need on WBC's Housing Register



HomeLet financial assistance will only be paid where the assured shorthold tenancy (AST) is at least 12 months long and, preferably, AST lengths of two years are often obtained. Private rented homes accessed through the scheme have been located all over the country including Bradford, Birmingham and Norwich as well as closer to home in London, St Albans, Hemel Hempstead and of course Watford. Moves outside Watford are always voluntary. Whilst other issues such as work or family may take households away from Watford, affordability of private rented homes locally is a major concern and a key factor in why access to private lettings via the Homelet scheme is going to be lower in 2019/20 than in previous years. The next section explores the issue of affordability in more detail.

## Affordability of housing options

### Affordability of private rented homes

The council carried out an exercise in August 2018 looking at median private rents for different sizes of homes and assessing which were affordable for a full-time worker resident in Watford earning by the net monthly median income £1,967 pm (that is after tax and national insurance). A widely accepted measure of affordability is 35% of net income<sup>20</sup> spent on housing costs and this proportion was used in the exercise carried out. It was found (see table below) that only a room was affordable at this level of income and a one bedroom home was just about affordable. Homes with more bedrooms were not affordable.

Homes with two or more bedrooms are more likely to be occupied by families which means, that without the assistance of Local Housing allowance, or a second adequate income, a median private rented home is not affordable by a Watford resident working full-time and earning a median net income for the borough.

Size of home	Median rent as at August 2018	Difference between net monthly income and rent	% of net income spent on housing	Affordable?
Room	£ 650	£ 1,317	33%	Yes
One bedroom	£ 897	£ 1,070	46%	Possible
Two bedrooms	£ 1,200	£ 767	61%	No
Three bedrooms	£ 1,499	£ 468	76%	No
Four bedrooms	£ 2,149	-£ 182	109%	No
Five bedrooms	£ 2,776	-£ 809	141%	No

### The gap between Local Housing Allowance and private rents

Local Housing Allowance (LHA) helps households on low incomes afford private (and housing association) rents. LHA rates were frozen from 2016 for a period of 4 years, ending in March 2020. LHA rates have been tweaked slightly upwards over the course of the last 4 years but have not kept pace with advertised private rents. The table below shows the gap between LHA and median private rents in 2016 and in 2019:

<sup>20</sup> Eg, see Shelter <https://blog.shelter.org.uk/2015/08/what-is-affordable-housing/>

	LHA rate @ September 2016 pw	LHA rate @ April 2019 pw	Increase in LHA pw over the period	Median Private Rent* at October 2016 pw	Median Private Rent at September 2019 pw	Increase in median private rent pw	Gap between LHA and private rents
Room in shared accommodation	£78.50	£83.29	£4.79	£137	£150	£13.79	43-45%
One bedroom	£156	£165.50	£9.50	£201	£216	£15.00	22-23%
Two bedrooms	£196.96	£208.96	£12	£273	£273	£0	23-28%
Three bedrooms	£247.20	£262.26	£15.06	£350	£357	£7	27-29%
Four+ bedrooms	£358.80	£358.80	£0	£473	£508	£35	29-30%

\*Source of median private rents [Home.co.uk](http://Home.co.uk)

Over the course of the last 3 years the council has mapped the average gap between LHA rates and median private rents: the gap is around 32% across all sizes of homes in the private sector. This places low income households in a position of having to cut back on eating, heating and other essentials in order to afford their rent and/or accumulate rent arrears and face eviction.

The council examines monthly how many homes are advertised for rent in Watford at the LHA level. The following table shows the outcome of that investigation over just the last year:

No. of properties available at LHA rate within 3 mile radius of centre of Watford	Sep 18	Oct 18	Nov 18	Jan 19	Feb 19	Mar 19	Apr 19	May 19	Jun 19	Jul 19	Aug 19	Total for the year	Average no. of private rented homes available at LHA rate per month	Average no. of all private rented homes advertised monthly
No. of homes with one bedroom	2	1	0	0	0	1	0	2	1	2	1	10	1	124
No. of homes with two bedrooms	1	0	0	0	2	1	1	2	1	2	3	13	1	184
No. of homes with three bedrooms	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	4	0	34
No. of homes with 4+ bedrooms	1	1	1	1	7	4	1	0	1	0	0	17	2	10

- On average less than a handful of homes advertised have rents at the LHA level.
- Only 10 (8%) out of the average 124 one bedroom homes advertised had rents at the LHA rate
- Only 13 (7%) out of the average 184 two bedroom homes advertised had rents at the LHA rate
- No three bedroom homes were advertised at the LHA rate
- Ironically, there is more likelihood of a four bedroom home being advertised at LHA rate but only 2 (20%) out of an average of 10 per month advertised

There is growing pressure on the government to restore some parity between LHA rents and at least the 30<sup>th</sup> percentile of market rents<sup>21</sup>, especially where there is a severe lack of social housing. However, the government has only agreed to increase current LHA rates by CPI<sup>22</sup>. This will result in an average of £10 per month increase for support with rent payments for the most households. Revised LHA rates are therefore unlikely to help households access more private rented homes.

### *The impact of the Benefit Cap*

The Benefit Cap is another issue making the affordability of homes very difficult for many households dependent on Universal Credit (UC). If living outside London, households with children are not allowed to receive more than £20,000 per year or £384.62 per week in benefits and for single people the benefit cap is £13,400 pa or £257.69 pw. UC covers a standard living allowance, plus additional amounts for children, housing and other needs as relevant. Being benefit capped means a household's UC is limited and usually this means they do not receive enough money to fully cover their rent and service charge. Any gap between the amount of UC they are given to pay for their rent and their actual rent has to be paid for out of the rest of the money they have for food and bills. Any household with two or more children will be benefit capped and this affects households renting homes in both the private rented and the housing association sector.

Affordability of housing association rents is a key issue, particularly for those affected by the Benefit Cap. Housing associations can charge social or affordable rents. The difference between the two types of rent is that:

- Affordable rents should be set at no more than 80% of the local market rent or the Local Housing Allowance rate whichever is the cheaper
- Social rents are usually 20-30% cheaper than Affordable rents

The following graph shows a comparison between homes of different sizes with local median private rents, affordable rents and social rents against the local housing allowance in Watford. The social and affordable rents were taken from housing association lettings made to Watford Housing Register applicants over the last year:

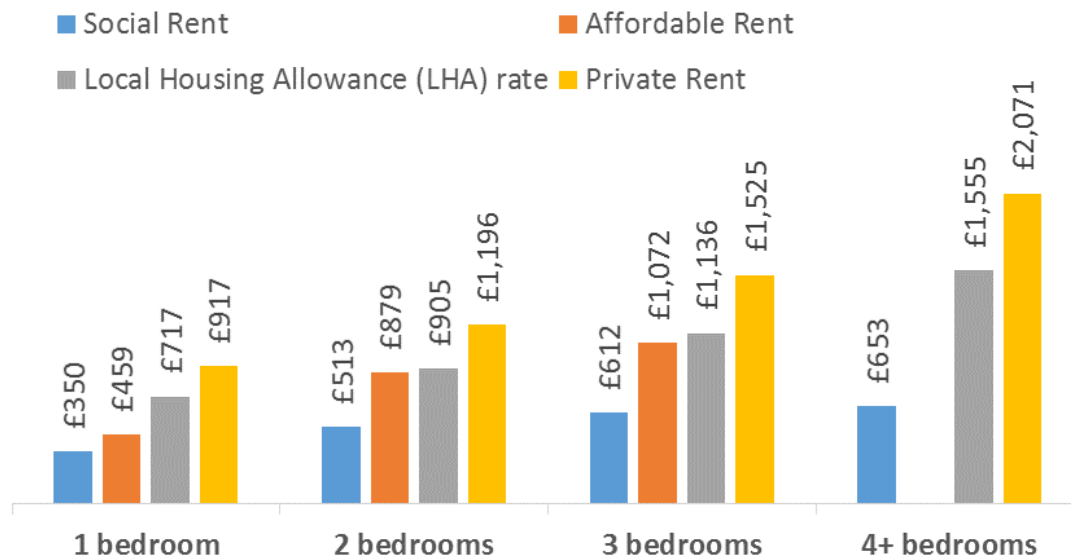
- All median private rents are higher than the local housing allowance (as seen above)
- Affordable rents for homes with two and three bedrooms are quite close to the LHA rate (no affordable rent rate was available for homes with 4+ bedrooms)
- Social rents are considerably below LHA rates in all sizes of homes

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<sup>21</sup> Tanner, B, (2019) "DWP pitches £800m cost to restore LHA rates to 30<sup>th</sup> percentile" 24 Housing, <https://www.24housing.co.uk/news/dwp-pitches-800m-cost-to-restore-lha-rates-to-30th-percentile/> accessed 24/10/19

<sup>22</sup> Quince, W (MP), "Welfare Update: Written statement – HCWS29", Parliament Written Statements, 13 January 2020, <https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-statement/Commons/2020-01-13/HCWS29/>

## Social, Affordable, LHA & Private Rents in Watford compared (per month)



Households paying a social rent also face benefit capping like those paying affordable rent or private rent. The big difference is that households paying social rents have more disposable income and therefore a significantly better quality of life. For example, for a couple with three children in receipt of UC and living in a home with three bedrooms, if the household were paying:

- a social rent they would have £259 UC income left to live on per week
- an affordable rent they would have £157.19 left to live on per week
- a private rent they would have just £67.42 pw left to live on per week

The impact of getting a job for households on UC does make a big difference to the amount of income they have left to live on. For example, a household working 30 hours per week at £8.21 per hour (the minimum wage), who pays for childcare at £209 pw, does not have a car, and has their income topped up by UC, their disposable income would increase considerably if they were paying a *social* rent. But this is not straightforward. The reality faced by most low income households is that:

- Jobs at minimum wage levels are precarious: they are not long-term, zero hours contracts are common with enough working hours not guaranteed
- It is incredibly difficult for households in this situation to budget adequately no matter how careful they are. Where working income is reduced, the DWP can be slow to move, payment errors and variations are an issue<sup>23</sup> and UC is paid in arrears. A loan from the DWP is possible but this becomes an added debt to be repaid within 12 months
- The prospects of increasing hours or the hourly rate is minimal for those on low wages

<sup>23</sup> An example is the CPAG report on the impact of UC on families in Tower Hamlets (October 2019), <https://cpag.org.uk/file/4576/download?token=cQ9GCFxo>



- The likelihood of accruing significant arrears, leading to homelessness, increases where rents are higher

In September 2019, the council investigated how many households in temporary accommodation and on the Housing Register are affected by the benefit cap now or would be if they moved into settled accommodation. It was found that of 101 households then placed in temporary accommodation, 54 had two or more children and were either benefit capped then or would be if they moved to settled accommodation. On the Housing Register, there were just under 200 households needing homes with 3 or more bedrooms (not including those in temporary accommodation) because they had two or more children. These households, if not working, will definitely be benefit capped. This makes the housing options for these households severely limited, particularly in Watford. Households in this situation are encouraged to consider homes outside Watford which are more affordable for them and financial assistance through the council's HomeLet scheme is offered (see section above on assistance to access private rented homes).

### The local policy context

The Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy is part of a suite of council housing-related strategies headed by the overarching [Housing Strategy 2015-2020](#). The current Housing Strategy points out that, as at 2015:

- Demand for housing greatly exceeded supply
- Housing for market sale or rent in the town was mostly unaffordable to people on low to medium incomes
- The delivery of affordable housing was becoming more challenging
- There were competing demands for the development of land in Watford
- Watford's existing housing stock required a range of improvements to ensure it continues to offer suitable, safe, warm and healthy homes.

The policy approach adopted for the Housing Strategy is:

- To adopt a whole housing market approach, not focus just on housing for those in highest need
- To be open to the merits of introducing a range of new housing tenures
- To focus on optimising the supply of new housing and improve the condition of existing housing
- To empower property owners and tenants to take action to improve their housing circumstances, assisting with informed choices and raising aspirations

Complementing the Housing Strategy is the council's 2006-2031 [Core Strategy and Local Plan](#) for Watford which contains the overarching planning vision and spatial strategy for the borough. This document sets out policy requirements on a wide range of issues including, in terms of the production of new homes in the town, requiring 35% affordable housing in planning applications for

ten residential units and above or sites of more 0.5 hectare<sup>24</sup>. The council is drafting a revised Local Plan for 2020-2036 which sets out a 40% affordable housing requirement (in terms of habitable rooms) for developments of 10 homes or more of which 30% should be affordable housing for rent (social rent or affordable rent). The other 10% is affordable homes for sale, such as low cost home ownership homes. The revised formula is based on evidence from the draft Local Housing Needs Assessment which “notes that the majority of household growth for Watford is for homes with one and two dependent children”<sup>25</sup> which requires a need for more homes with two and three bedrooms.

This strategy also contributes to fulfilling a number of the council’s current [corporate priorities](#), primarily the priority to “Manage the borough’s housing needs”.

A key housing-related policy is the council’s Nominations<sup>26</sup> (Allocations) Policy which seeks to:

- Meet local housing need through providing access to affordable housing
- Offer choice
- Give good quality information to Housing Register applicants
- Provide a simple system for applying to the Housing Register and expressing an interest in vacant affordable homes through the choice based letting system
- Meet the council’s legal duties on nominations and homelessness
- Prevent homelessness where possible and minimising the use of bed and breakfast accommodation for homeless households
- Promote opportunities for people to move within social housing to meet housing needs
- Build sustainable communities
- Ensure swift nomination of Housing Register applicants to vacant housing association homes in the borough

The council consulted in September 2019 on revisions to the Nominations Policy which are planned to be implemented by the end of March 2021. Planned changes include:

- Reducing the number of bands from five to three
- Reducing the number of offers for non-homeless applicants per year from three to two
- Amend the bedroom entitlement so that it aligns with the housing benefit/local housing allowance bedroom entitlement
- Introduce quotas to share the limited supply of housing amongst different groups of Housing Register applicants which are reviewed annually
- Change the residence requirement from being required to live in Watford for the last five out of 6 years to 5 out of 7 years

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<sup>24</sup> Policy HS 3 – Affordable Housing, Local Plan 2006-2031, page 73

<sup>25</sup> First Draft Local Plan Watford 2020-2036, page 61

<sup>26</sup> Call the Nominations Policy, rather than the statutory term “Allocations Policy” because as the council does not own any affordable housing stock, it nominates Housing Register applicants who have successfully bid for vacant housing association-owned homes

The council also has a Temporary Accommodation Placement Policy which sets out the Council's placement of households in temporary accommodation both inside and outside the borough. It requires updating as a result of the HRA17 coming into force.

Finally, the Private Rented Sector Discharge Policy sets out the factors the council will take into account when discharging its main duty to house to homeless households.

## How this Strategy was put together

The contents of this Strategy has been informed by a variety of sources. The Homelessness Review 2020<sup>27</sup> has provided the context and the data. Work with members of the Watford Strategic Homelessness Forum and council Members has influenced the content of the Action Plan.

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<sup>27</sup> [Hyperlink to document be inserted when available](#)

## Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020-25 – Action Plan

The Action Plan is in two parts:

- **Part A**, which contains measures (actions) under each of the Key Priorities that are already happening but significant improvement in their delivery is wanted over the coming years;
- **Part B**, containing new initiatives under each of the Key Priorities.

Circumstances can change rapidly so annual reviews will take place via the Watford Strategic Homelessness Forum to monitor achievements and review actions intended, modifying them where needed. Reviews will include evidence-based evaluation of projects undertaken to understand what works well in achieving the key priorities of this Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy. The Action Plan and annual reviews will be published on the council's website.

Part A: Initiatives that will continue with improved delivery

Key Priority 1: Preventing homelessness

<i>Objective 1: Tackling the causes of homelessness and rough sleeping and improving the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act</i>					
<i>Action No.</i>	<i>Action Description</i>	<i>Who is leading on this action?</i>	<i>Who and what resources are needed to achieve this action</i>	<i>How will success be measured?</i>	<i>By when will success be achieved?</i>
<b>Action 1</b> (AKP1/1.1)	Ensure quality, timely and accessible information is available to all homeless households which prevents homelessness: on the council's web pages as well as face to face through the council's HRA services, through housing association tenancy sustainment teams and for single people through New Hope's Tenancy Sustainment Team and the multi-agency Intervention Team	Watford Borough Council (WBC)	<p>WBC</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Housing Strategy Officer</li> <li>Housing Options Team</li> <li>Caseworker Team</li> </ul> <p>New Hope</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tenancy Sustainment Team</li> <li>Multi-agency Intervention Team</li> </ul> <p>Housing Associations with homes in Watford</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tenancy sustainment teams</li> </ul>	<p>WBC</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Housing options and homelessness information web pages on the council's website are up to date</li> <li>Year on year there are less households moving from the prevention duty to the relief duty compared with equivalent data in the previous year</li> </ul>	<p>December 2020</p> <p>March 2021</p> <p>March 2022</p> <p>March 2023</p> <p>March 2024</p> <p>March 2025</p>

<i>Objective 1: Tackling the causes of homelessness and rough sleeping and improving the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act</i>					
<i>Action No.</i>	<i>Action Description</i>	<i>Who is leading on this action?</i>	<i>Who and what resources are needed to achieve this action</i>	<i>How will success be measured?</i>	<i>By when will success be achieved?</i>
<b>Action 2</b> (AKP1/1.2)	Work with key public authorities with Duty to Refer responsibilities to ensure hospital and prison discharges are planned and homelessness prevented	WBC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• WBC Housing Solutions Team Leader</li> <li>• WBC Housing Solutions Team Manager</li> <li>• Watford General Hospital</li> <li>• Probation Service</li> <li>• Prison Service</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 100% hospital and prison discharges are planned</li> </ul>	December 2020
<b>Action 3</b> (AKP1/1.3)	Continue housing and homelessness education work in local schools to prevent future homelessness amongst young people in the borough	Herts Young Homeless	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Herts Young Homeless</li> </ul>	Using the Home Truths programme: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sessions are held with all Year 11-13 students in local secondary schools where more than 50% of</li> </ul>	March 2021 March 2022 March 2023 March 2024 March 2025

*Objective 1: Tackling the causes of homelessness and rough sleeping and improving the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act*

<i>Action No.</i>	<i>Action Description</i>	<i>Who is leading on this action?</i>	<i>Who and what resources are needed to achieve this action</i>	<i>How will success be measured?</i>	<i>By when will success be achieved?</i>
				<p>the students live in Watford</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sessions are held with all students in their first year at West Herts College, Watford Campus through the Home Truths programme</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Action 4</b> (AKP1/1.4)</p>	<p>Continue information sharing and partnership working through the Watford Strategic Homelessness Forum and look at new ways of sharing information between Forum members, eg, revisiting information sharing protocols, through LinkedIn, newsletters, email bulletins, Homelessness Forum website, etc.</p>	<p>WBC</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Housing Strategy Officer</li> <li>• Communications and Engagement Manager</li> </ul>	<p>A Watford Strategy Homelessness Forum website is set up</p>	<p>March 2021</p>

<i>Objective 1: Tackling the causes of homelessness and rough sleeping and improving the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act</i>					
<i>Action No.</i>	<i>Action Description</i>	<i>Who is leading on this action?</i>	<i>Who and what resources are needed to achieve this action</i>	<i>How will success be measured?</i>	<i>By when will success be achieved?</i>
<b>Action 5</b> (AKP1/1.5)	Continue lobbying for effective long-term financial support from central government for preventing and relieving homelessness	WBC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Head of Housing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Long-term funding (two years plus) is secured from government</li> </ul>	March 2021 March 2022 March 2023 March 2024 March 2025

<i>Objective 2: Improving access to affordable and sustainable housing options</i>					
<i>Action No.</i>	<i>Action Description</i>	<i>Who is leading on this action?</i>	<i>Who and what resources are needed to achieve this action</i>	<i>How will success be measured?</i>	<i>By when will success be achieved?</i>
<b>Action 1</b> (AKP1/2.1)	HomeLet – review the council’s financial assistance scheme to enable homeless households to access private rented homes	WBC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Housing Property Manager and Team Leader</li> <li>Housing Strategy Officer</li> </ul>	A revised HomeLet policy and procedure and updated website information are in place	December 2021
<b>Action 2</b> (AKP1/2.2)	Work with private sector landlords to provide good quality, affordable private rented homes for homeless households within Watford and beyond	WBC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Housing Property Team Manager and Team Leader</li> <li>Environmental Health Officers</li> </ul>	There is a year on year increase in the number of landlords providing accommodation for homeless households compared to the current number worked with	December 2021 December 2022 December 2023 December 2024



<i>Objective 2: Improving access to affordable and sustainable housing options</i>					
<i>Action No.</i>	<i>Action Description</i>	<i>Who is leading on this action?</i>	<i>Who and what resources are needed to achieve this action</i>	<i>How will success be measured?</i>	<i>By when will success be achieved?</i>
<b>Action 3</b> (AKP1/2.3)	Work with housing association partners and developers to build more family-size (3+ bedrooms) homes in Watford at social rents to assist those families affected by the benefit cap and/or are on low incomes	WBC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Head of Housing and Housing Property Team Manager</li> <li>• Property Team</li> <li>• Planning (Policy and Development Control</li> <li>• Commuted Sums</li> <li>• Homes England</li> </ul>	There is a year on year increase in the number of family-sized housing associations homes let at social rents each year	March 2021 March 2022 March 2023 March 2024 March 2025
<b>Action 4</b> (AKP1/2.4)	Work with housing association partners on making best use of their existing stock in the borough through developing right-sizing options attractive to under occupiers which are modern and fit for purpose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• WBC</li> <li>• Watford Community Housing (WCH)</li> </ul>	WCH under-occupation resources and right-sizing policy	Under-occupation in Watford Community Housing homes is reduced year on year	March 2021 March 2022 March 2023 March 2024 March 2025
<b>Action 5</b> (AKP1/2.5)	Enable a single persons' pathway from supported accommodation to medium-term move-on to settled housing association or private rented homes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Watford Strategic Homelessness Forum</li> </ul>	WSHF Working Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A clear pathway that all agencies support is in place</li> </ul>	March 2021



<i>Objective 1: Preventing and responding to rough sleeping</i>					
<i>Action No.</i>	<i>Action Descriptions</i>	<i>Who is leading on this action?</i>	<i>Who and what resources are needed to achieve this action</i>	<i>How will success be measured?</i>	<i>By when will success be achieved?</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explore and develop mental health provision through the WBC's Healthy Hub</li> <li>• Explore extending the service to enable referrals from other agencies in the borough</li> </ul>				
<b>Action 2</b> (AKP2/1.2)	Continuing the Street Outreach Service – again multi-agency, multi-disciplinary approach to working with rough sleepers where they are on the street	New Hope/WBC	New Hope <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Director of Services</li> <li>• Intervention Team Manager</li> </ul> WBC <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rough Sleepers Co-ordinator</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All rough sleepers are recorded, support plans put in place which detail how support will be provided including moving off the street</li> </ul>	December 2020
<i>NB: Both the above initiatives depend on government funding continuing at current levels for the duration of the government's Rough Sleeping Strategy</i>					
<b>Action 3</b> (AKP2/1.3)	Work with Hertfordshire County Council on the best use of housing-related support funding in Watford for rough sleepers with complex needs	WBC	Head of Housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• HCC HRS funding primarily supports the needs of rough sleepers with complex needs</li> </ul>	March 2021

*Objective 2: Providing individualised support for families with children and vulnerable adults*

<i>Action No.</i>	<i>Action Description</i>	<i>Who is leading on this action?</i>	<i>Who and what resources are needed to achieve this action</i>	<i>How will success be measured?</i>	<i>By when will success be achieved?</i>
<b>Action 1</b> (AKP2/2.1)	Ensure the prevention and relief duties of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 (HRA17) are carried out to their fullest extent including ensuring council interview facilities meet psychologically informed environment principles and staff training continues to embed motivational and coaching interview techniques. Extend this to sharing information, learning and training opportunities with internal and external partners.	WBC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Housing Solutions Manager</li> <li>Head of Customer Services</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Interview facilities which meet Psychologically Informed Environment (PIE) principles are in place</li> <li>Motivational and coaching interview techniques training completed by all officers in Housing Solutions, Caseworkers and Housing Property Teams</li> <li>The above shared with internal and external partners</li> </ul>	<p>March 2021</p> <p>March 2021</p> <p>September 2021</p>
<b>Action 2</b> (AKP2/2.2)	Ensure all households access all benefits they are entitled to	WBC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Housing Department</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All applicant households who are threatened</li> </ul>	<p>March 2021</p> <p>March 2022</p>

<i>Objective 2: Providing individualised support for families with children and vulnerable adults</i>					
<i>Action No.</i>	<i>Action Description</i>	<i>Who is leading on this action?</i>	<i>Who and what resources are needed to achieve this action</i>	<i>How will success be measured?</i>	<i>By when will success be achieved?</i>
	including using Discretionary Housing Payments to prevent homelessness			with homelessness are able to access DHPs where they are entitled to them.	March 2023 March 2024 March 2025
<b>Action 3</b> (AKP2/2.3)	Continue the current offer for veterans of UK's armed and reserve forces	WBC	Housing Solutions Manager and Team Leader via the Nominations Policy for social and affordable rented homes	UK Armed and reserve forces veterans are prioritised and assisted via the Nominations Policy, accommodation supply permitting	March 2021 March 2022 March 2023 March 2024 March 2025
<b>Action 4</b> (AKP2/2.4)	Ensure alternative settled accommodation for homeless households is of good quality, suitable, affordable and within reach of the services and networks they may rely on, especially where they are vulnerable	WBC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Housing Solutions Manager and Team Leader via the Nominations Policy</li> <li>Nominations Policy for social and affordable rented homes</li> <li>Housing Property Team for private rented homes</li> </ul>	All of settled accommodation found for homeless households meets their needs including their support needs	March 2021 March 2022 March 2023 March 2024 March 2025

<i>Objective 2: Providing individualised support for families with children and vulnerable adults</i>					
<i>Action No.</i>	<i>Action Description</i>	<i>Who is leading on this action?</i>	<i>Who and what resources are needed to achieve this action</i>	<i>How will success be measured?</i>	<i>By when will success be achieved?</i>
<b>Action 5</b> (AKP2/2.5)	Achieve full certification of the council's homelessness service through the National Practitioners Support Service (NPSS) Self-Assessment Homeless Reduction Act Portal	WBC	Housing Strategy Officer	Full Self-assessment Homeless Reduction Act certification achieved	December 2022

## Part B: New activities for the next 5 years

Working with key homelessness stakeholders in the borough, WBC will:

### Key Priority 1: Preventing homelessness

<i>Objective 1: Tackling the causes of homelessness and rough sleeping and improving the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act</i>					
<i>Action No.</i>	<i>Action Description</i>	<i>Who is leading on this action?</i>	<i>Who and what resources are needed to achieve this action</i>	<i>How will success be measured?</i>	<i>By when will success be achieved?</i>
<b>Action 1</b> (BKP1/1.1)	Review the experience of dealing with all forms of homelessness during the Covid-19 pandemic, draw out lessons learned and recommend follow-up actions required	WBC	WBC <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Head of Housing</li> <li>• Housing Strategy Officer</li> <li>• Community Protection</li> </ul> Watford Strategic Homelessness Forum <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All members</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Report on lessons learned</li> <li>• The Homelessness &amp; Rough Sleeping Strategy Action Plan is updated to reflect recommended actions</li> </ul>	September 2020
<b>Action 2</b> (BKP1/1.2)	Work with partners to consider the concept of a Single Homeless Hub in Watford which integrates services for single homeless people.	WBC	WBC <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Head of Housing</li> </ul> Watford Strategic Homelessness Forum <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All members</li> </ul>	A recommendation is made on the concept of a Single Homeless Hub in Watford	December 2020

<i>Objective 1: Tackling the causes of homelessness and rough sleeping and improving the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act</i>					
<i>Action No.</i>	<i>Action Description</i>	<i>Who is leading on this action?</i>	<i>Who and what resources are needed to achieve this action</i>	<i>How will success be measured?</i>	<i>By when will success be achieved?</i>
<b>Action 3</b> (BKP1/1.3)	Put in place a communications plan, utilising all channels of communication, promoting the Council's Homelessness Reduction Act Prevention duty to all stakeholders, including understanding local connection rules	WBC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Housing Strategy Officer</li> <li>Housing Solutions Manager</li> <li>Communications &amp; Engagement Manager</li> </ul>	A communications plan is devised and delivered	March 2021
<b>Action 4</b> (BKP1/1.4)	Review and simplify the online system to access council homelessness prevention services to make it easier for homeless households to access the advice and support they need	WBC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Housing Solutions Team</li> </ul>	A simplified, online housing and homelessness advice form is available.	September 2020
<b>Action 5</b> (BKP1/1.5)	Together with internal and external stakeholders, including other local authorities, identify and develop timely responses to housing situations that may lead to homelessness, including cuckooing, gangs, domestic violence, and modern slavery	Watford Strategic Homelessness Forum	WBC <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Housing Department</li> <li>Community Safety Team</li> <li>Legal Team</li> </ul> Watford Strategic Homelessness Forum <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All members</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pathways are formalised for responding to cuckooing, gang-related incidents, domestic violence and modern slavery</li> </ul>	March 2021



<i>Objective 1: Tackling the causes of homelessness and rough sleeping and improving the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act</i>					
<i>Action No.</i>	<i>Action Description</i>	<i>Who is leading on this action?</i>	<i>Who and what resources are needed to achieve this action</i>	<i>How will success be measured?</i>	<i>By when will success be achieved?</i>
	including challenging and tackling illegal evictions			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Resources for challenging and tackling illegal evictions are identified</li> </ul>	
<b>Action 6</b> (BKP1/1.6)	Identify upstream avenues of preventing homelessness, eg, through work with stakeholders such GPs and other health services, Revenues & Benefits, JobCentre+, prisons and others; carry out research with homeless households to discover factors which may indicate how homelessness could have been prevented at an earlier stage and apply the lessons learned	WBC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Housing Solutions Team</li> <li>Revenues &amp; Benefits</li> <li>Legal Services</li> <li>Watford single homeless support providers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Information on likely indicators of homelessness and avenues of information on potentially homeless households established</li> </ul>	March 2021
<b>Action 7</b> (BKP1/1.7)	Capture the extent to which upstream homelessness prevention activities enable cost savings to health, community protection and other mainstream services and promotes individual and family	WBC	Housing Strategy Officer	Cost savings established	December 2021

<i>Objective 1: Tackling the causes of homelessness and rough sleeping and improving the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act</i>					
<i>Action No.</i>	<i>Action Description</i>	<i>Who is leading on this action?</i>	<i>Who and what resources are needed to achieve this action</i>	<i>How will success be measured?</i>	<i>By when will success be achieved?</i>
	well-being including health and educational attainment				
<b>Action 8</b> (BKP1/1.8)	Integrate the activities of local stakeholders in preventing homelessness through secondment, training and shared learning, or working in each other's offices	Watford Strategic Homelessness Forum		Information shared on training, secondment and shared learning opportunities provided at WHSF meetings	July 2020
<b>Action 9</b> (BKP1/1.9)	Develop a homelessness prevention package aimed at individual households which prioritises education, training and employment, understanding how to access the private rented sector, knowing where to find help and so on.	WBC	Housing Solutions and Housing Property Teams	Online training course developed and made available on the council's website	December 2021

**Objective 2: Improving access to affordable and sustainable housing options**

Action No	Action Description	Who is leading on this action?	Who and what resources are needed to achieve this action	How will success be measured?	By when will success be achieved?
<b>Action 1</b> (BKP1/2.1)	Complete the programme of 55 new social rented homes in Watford	Watford Community Housing / WBC	Watford Community Housing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Development Team</li> </ul> WBC <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Housing Team</li> <li>• Property Team</li> </ul>	55 homes with social rents completed	August 2021
<b>Action 2</b> (BKP1/2.2)	Work towards a centralised bed space system within the hostel network in Watford to enable the most efficient supported lettings system which meets the needs of single homeless service users	Watford Strategic Homelessness Forum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rough Sleepers Co-ordinator</li> </ul>	A system is in place which enables all providers with hostel bed spaces in Watford to report voids and receive nominations of individuals who meet the support levels offered	March 2022
<b>Action 3</b> (BKP1/2.3)	Develop a Floating support offer in the town to work with those in medium-term move-on homes and those that have moved to settled accommodation	Watford Strategic Homelessness Forum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rough Sleepers Co-ordinator</li> </ul>	A decision is made on whether a floating support offer is possible	December 2021
<b>Action 4</b> (BKP1/2.4)	Develop a Private Rented Sector Housing Strategy which includes	WBC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Housing Strategy Officer</li> </ul>	A Private Rented Sector Housing	March 2022

<i>Objective 2: Improving access to affordable and sustainable housing options</i>					
<i>Action No</i>	<i>Action Description</i>	<i>Who is leading on this action?</i>	<i>Who and what resources are needed to achieve this action</i>	<i>How will success be measured?</i>	<i>By when will success be achieved?</i>
	a review of the council's offer to private landlords and which meets the affordability and suitability needs of a wide range of homeless households, including rough sleepers		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Housing Property Team</li> <li>Housing Solutions Team</li> </ul>	Strategy is agreed by Cabinet	
<b>Action 5</b> (BKP1/2.5)	Develop a consultation and communications plan with private landlords, including involving them in the Watford Strategic Homelessness Forum, to enable a better understanding of their needs and for them to better understand the needs of homeless households, often on benefits, and the support available to them	WBC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Housing Strategy Officer</li> <li>Communications &amp; Engagement Manager</li> <li>Housing Property Manager/Team Leader</li> <li>Environmental Health Team</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Private landlords are represented at the Watford Strategic Homelessness Forum</li> <li>The number of private landlords providing homes for homeless households increases year on year</li> </ul>	March 2021 March 2022 March 2023 March 2024 March 2025
<b>Action 6</b> (BKP1/2.6)	Ensure the single homeless pathway is supported through the Nominations Policy, eg, through direct lets, and investigate the impact of local connection requirements for	WBC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Housing Strategic Officer</li> <li>Nominations Policy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Nominations Policy ratified by Cabinet</li> </ul>	March 2021

<i>Objective 2: Improving access to affordable and sustainable housing options</i>					
<i>Action No</i>	<i>Action Description</i>	<i>Who is leading on this action?</i>	<i>Who and what resources are needed to achieve this action</i>	<i>How will success be measured?</i>	<i>By when will success be achieved?</i>
	single homeless people in Watford				
<b>Action 7</b> (BKP1/2.7)	Consider a pilot project to put empty homes in the borough back into use	WBC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Housing Strategy Officer</li> <li>Council Tax Team</li> <li>Housing Property Team</li> <li>Environmental Health Team</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop project and identify resources</li> <li>Year on year increase in empty homes being put back into use</li> </ul>	March 2021  March 2022 March 2023 March 2024 March 2025

**Key Priority 2: Providing services to homeless households and homeless vulnerable adults relevant to their needs**

<i>Objective 1: Responding to rough sleeping</i>					
<i>Action No.</i>	<i>Action Description</i>	<i>Who is leading on this action?</i>	<i>Who and what resources are needed to achieve this action</i>	<i>How will success be measured?</i>	<i>By when will success be achieved?</i>
<b>Action 1</b> (BKP2/1.1)	Achieve and maintain zero rough sleepers on the streets of Watford	WBC	WBC <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Rough Sleeper Co-ordinator</li> </ul> New Hope <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Street Outreach Service</li> <li>Intervention (Navigator) Team</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Annual counts confirm the level of rough sleeping</li> <li>Bi-monthly RSI counts</li> <li>Street Outreach Service records</li> </ul>	November 2020 November 2021 November 2022 November 2023 November 2024 Bi-monthly during 2020/21 Monthly reviews

<i>Objective 1: Responding to rough sleeping</i>					
<i>Action No.</i>	<i>Action Description</i>	<i>Who is leading on this action?</i>	<i>Who and what resources are needed to achieve this action</i>	<i>How will success be measured?</i>	<i>By when will success be achieved?</i>
<b>Action 2</b> (BKP2/1.2)	Open a complex needs housing scheme in Watford for single people and couples without children who have been homeless and/or rough sleeping and have enduring physical and/or mental health issues and/or substance misuse issues, including putting in place information sharing protocols	WBC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Head of Housing</li> <li>• Resources identified</li> </ul>	A 40 bed complex needs housing scheme is opened in Watford	September 2021
<b>Action 3</b> (BKP2/1.3)	Work with Homes England and housing association partners to deliver move-on accommodation in the town for people who no longer need supported hostel accommodation	WBC	Head of Housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An application for 20 units of self-contained move-on accommodation is submitted</li> <li>• Units acquired</li> </ul>	30 September 2020  March 2021
<b>Action 4</b> (BKP2/1.4)	Develop a Housing First scheme in Watford aimed at entrenched rough sleepers	WBC Housing associations with homes in Watford	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Housing First Worker</li> <li>• Self-contained homes owned by housing associations</li> </ul>	• 5 Housing First homes in management	March 2022
<b>Action 5</b> (BKP2/1.5)	Consider emergency shelter provision for rough sleepers	WBC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Head of Housing</li> </ul>	A recommendation is made on emergency	September 2020

<i>Objective 1: Responding to rough sleeping</i>					
<i>Action No.</i>	<i>Action Description</i>	<i>Who is leading on this action?</i>	<i>Who and what resources are needed to achieve this action</i>	<i>How will success be measured?</i>	<i>By when will success be achieved?</i>
	during the winter months or longer in the town		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Housing Strategy Officer</li> </ul>	shelter provision for rough sleepers	

<i>Objective 2: Providing individualised support for families with children and vulnerable adults</i>					
<i>Action No.</i>	<i>Action Description</i>	<i>Who is leading on this action?</i>	<i>Who and what resources are needed to achieve this action</i>	<i>How will success be measured?</i>	<i>By when will success be achieved?</i>
<b>Action 1</b> (BKP2/2.1)	Implement the council's Temporary Accommodation Strategy to ensure it is a proactive, not reactive, service in which the agreed principles are followed (including the needs of children in homeless families in TA), the right mix and number of TA properties is available at all times in the most cost-efficient way for the council that is also affordable for TA occupants.	WBC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Housing Property Team</li> <li>Property Team</li> <li>Planning (Policy &amp; Development Control)</li> <li>Commuted Sums</li> <li>Capital sums</li> </ul>	Sufficient numbers of temporary accommodation units will be available which meet the principles set out in the Temporary Accommodation Strategy	December 2021
<b>Action 2</b> (BKP2/2.2)	Address the housing needs of young people under 35, whose housing options are extremely limited through co-housing or similar schemes	Watford Strategic Homelessness Forum	WSHF Working group / WBC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recommendations on co-housing schemes</li> <li>Scheme worked up</li> <li>Scheme delivered</li> </ul>	December 2020  March 2021

<i>Objective 2: Providing individualised support for families with children and vulnerable adults</i>					
<i>Action No.</i>	<i>Action Description</i>	<i>Who is leading on this action?</i>	<i>Who and what resources are needed to achieve this action</i>	<i>How will success be measured?</i>	<i>By when will success be achieved?</i>
					December 2021
<b>Action 3</b> (BKP2/2.3)	Work with agencies delivering health services in Watford to enable relevant health services to be delivered to households that need such support, particularly around mental health.	WBC / Hertfordshire Partnership University Foundation Trust (HPFT) / Watford Health Centre (Meadowell)	To be identified	Homeless households, including those in temporary accommodation and sleeping rough, have access to mental health support when needed	December 2020
<b>Action 4</b> (BKP2/2.4)	For households affected by the benefit cap, explore the possibility of a local emergency grant system to top up benefits	WBC	Housing Strategy Officer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recommendations on way forward</li> </ul>	December 2020
<b>Action 5</b> (BKP2/2.5)	Embed the council's homelessness services within local children's and women's services, health services, JobCentre+ and community protection/justice services	WBC	Housing Solutions Manager	Caseworkers are regularly based at key organisations within the town to provide face to face support on homelessness	December 2020
<b>Action 6</b> (BKP2/2.6)	Work with HCC's Families First Homeless Prevention Team to enable the smooth transition to their care of families found	WBC	Housing Solutions Manager / HCC's Families First Homeless Prevention Team	An agreed pathway is established between WBC and HCC for homeless households for whom WBC does	September 2020



<i>Objective 2: Providing individualised support for families with children and vulnerable adults</i>					
<i>Action No.</i>	<i>Action Description</i>	<i>Who is leading on this action?</i>	<i>Who and what resources are needed to achieve this action</i>	<i>How will success be measured?</i>	<i>By when will success be achieved?</i>
	intentionally homeless under the homelessness legislation			not have a duty to house	
<b>Action 7</b> (BKP2/2.7)	Develop an offer for households with pets in temporary or complex needs accommodation	WBC	Housing Property Manager / Team Leader	A scheme to house pets of homeless households is established	December 2020
<b>Action 8</b> (BKP2/2.8)	Develop a tenant ready training programme for homeless households	WBC	Housing Solutions Manager / Housing Property Manager / Team Leader	A training course for households placed in temporary accommodation is established	March 2021
<b>Action 9</b> (BKP2/2.9)	Work with JobCentre+, the Hope Academy and West Herts College to enable more homeless households, including rough sleepers, to be job ready, and have access to available job vacancies with a view to escaping the benefit cap	WBC	Housing Solutions Manager / Housing Welfare Advice Officer / JobCentre+ / New Hope / West Herts College	Actions on accessing training and job vacancies are reflected in personal housing plans for homeless households placed in temporary accommodation	March 2021

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