



Report of:	Meeting	Date
Councillor Roger Berry, Neighbourhood Services and Community Safety Portfolio Holder and Marianne Hesketh, Corporate Director Communities	Council	9 January 2020

Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy and Action Plan 2020 – 2024

1. Purpose of report

- 1.1 To seek approval of the draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy 2020-2024.

2. Outcomes

- 2.1 The approval of the Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy 2020-2024 will fulfil the council's duties under the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 and direct our work in preventing homelessness across the Borough.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1. That the Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy 2020 – 2024 is approved.

4. Background

- 4.1 The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 fundamentally changed the way Local Authorities work to support homeless people in their areas. It has introduced new prevention and relief duties towards an increased number of people. In August 2018 the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) published its Rough Sleeping Strategy which stated that government is committed to halving rough sleeping by 2023 and ending it by 2027.

- 4.2 Local housing authorities are required to carry out a review of homelessness in their area and to produce a strategy which sets out how they will prevent and reduce homelessness and provide support to people affected by it. It is expected that these strategies will be reviewed

every five years and that they are now renamed as homelessness and rough sleeping strategies. It is expected that local authorities will have reviewed and updated their strategies by winter 2019.

- 4.3** The draft Wyre Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy 2020 – 2024 sets out how we will address the challenges of homelessness in the Borough. The strategy gives an overview of local homelessness. It describes relevant legislative and policy development and gives some key facts, figures and trend data at a local level to inform the evidence base to our strategic intentions.

5. Key issues and proposals

- 5.1** The draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy is a response to a period of unprecedented change. This change has included the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, which came into force in April 2018, public services facing significant financial challenges and social housing and welfare reforms.
- 5.2** A review of our recent homelessness figures and trend data has been completed and this provided the basis for formulating the strategy.
- 5.3** The review of our homelessness trends highlights increasing demand for homelessness services. We have seen approaches increase from 371 in 2016/17 to 536 in 2018/19. However a steadfast and continued emphasis on prevention has ensured our use of temporary accommodation has continued to decrease and the number of full homeless applications dropped significantly in 2018/19 to just two.
- 5.4** Section 3 of the Homelessness Act 2002 states that before adopting a homelessness strategy local authorities shall consult such public or local authorities, voluntary organisations or other persons as they consider appropriate. To be robust it is recommended that participation is sought from a wide range of partner agencies (statutory and voluntary sector), stakeholders, elected members, service users, and staff within the local authority itself.
- 5.5** During the formulation of this strategy we consulted with our many partner agencies including: Adult and Children's Services, Registered Housing Providers, supported accommodation providers, neighbouring local authorities, Police, Probation Services, Citizens Advice Bureau, Department for Work and Pensions and Fylde Coast Women's Aid.
- 5.6** A five week public consultation period on the draft strategy took place between 16 September and 21 October 2019. Member consultation has taken place with the Portfolio Holder, Cabinet Members and the draft strategy was also presented to Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 21 October 2019 for discussion.

5.7 Feedback from the consultation has helped to inform and shape the strategy throughout its development. Overall, feedback strongly supported the three key objectives. The main feedback that came through from the consultation with the public and Members was that we should ensure appropriate support and assistance for those from the borough, we should increase affordable housing provision for local people and engage at every opportunity with charities and third sector partners to identify and tackle hidden homelessness.

5.8 Following our homelessness review and with regard to national, regional and local context, policy and strategies the strategy sets out three key objectives:

1. Prevent Homelessness
2. Provide pathways to short and long term accommodation for those homeless and at risk of homelessness
3. Contribute to the improvement of the health and wellbeing of those homeless and at risk of homelessness

5.9 The strategy sets out the context, challenges for each priority and sets out the councils approach to achieving them via the action plan.

5.10 The strategy takes a collaborative and enabling approach. It is recognised that the council cannot achieve its ambitions and outcomes on its own and that preventing homelessness requires the support, input and resources of a cross section of partners. This is set out in the strategy and will be further reflected as we continue our engagement with partners to deliver against the action plan.

Financial and legal implications	
Finance	There are none directly arising from this report. Activities will be funded from within the existing revenue budget using the Flexible Housing Support Grant and Homelessness Reduction Act New Burdens allocations where necessary.
Legal	The strategy has been developed to comply with the council's legal obligations including under housing legislation.

Other risks/implications: checklist

If there are significant implications arising from this report on any issues marked with a ✓ below, the report author will have consulted with the appropriate specialist officers on those implications and addressed them in the body of the report. There are no significant implications arising directly from this report, for those issues marked with a x.

risks/implications	✓ / x
community safety	✓
equality and diversity	✓
sustainability	x
health and safety	x

risks/implications	✓ / x
asset management	x
climate change	x
ICT	x
data protection	x

Processing Personal Data

In addition to considering data protection along with the other risks/ implications, the report author will need to decide if a 'privacy impact assessment (PIA)' is also required. If the decision(s) recommended in this report will result in the collection and processing of personal data for the first time (i.e. purchase of a new system, a new working arrangement with a third party) a PIA will need to have been completed and signed off by Data Protection Officer before the decision is taken in compliance with the Data Protection Act 2018.

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List of background papers:		
name of document	date	where available for inspection
None		

List of appendices

Appendix 1 – Draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy 2020 – 2024

dems/cou/cr/20/0901mb1

Draft Wyre Council Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy 2020 – 2024

Date:	December 2019
Version:	6.0 Post-Consultation Draft
Review Date:	January 2024

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1. Introduction

The Homelessness Strategy sets out the Council's plans to tackle homelessness for the next five years. The strategy has been developed against a backdrop of unprecedented change in national policy including fundamental reforms to welfare benefits.

The purpose of the strategy is to provide prevention measures and services primarily for those living in or with a local connection to Wyre.

In order to inform this strategy, a review of homelessness was carried out in 2018. The purpose of the review was to:

- Review the current and likely future levels of homelessness
- Identify the people likely to be most at risk of homelessness
- Identify the main causes of homelessness
- Review the homelessness prevention measures carried out by the Council
- Review the accommodation and support options available for those who are homeless or threatened with homelessness

The data used to carry out the homelessness review and in turn inform this strategy is from a number of sources:

- Wyre Council's Homelessness Database
- H Click Returns (Government statistical return completed by local authorities)
- Office for National Statistics
- UK House Price Index
- Shelter Databank

In developing this strategy the Council has also consulted with partners and stakeholders to ensure that their views are represented.

The strategy also reflects the Council's business plan objectives.

2. Background

In Wyre a very small number of homeless people are rough sleeping on the streets; the majority of homeless households are "hidden" in that they may have access to some form of accommodation (for example "sofa surfing" at a friends) but lack a safe, stable, long term, settled home.

It is widely accepted that homelessness is often a consequence of a range of issues and many people who are at risk of homelessness are often struggling with a range of problems that come to a head,

and some get into the cycle of falling in and out of accommodation. It is widely acknowledged that the effect that homelessness can have on health can be devastating.

Individuals or families who are homeless or threatened with becoming homeless can present themselves to the local authority where they have a local connection. Local Authorities assess each case and for those applicants who are homeless, eligible for assistance, in priority need and not intentionally homeless the local authority has a main housing duty to secure suitable accommodation for that person/s.

3. National Context

The Government's main policy initiatives in relation to homelessness were issued in 2012. The No Second Night Out campaign aimed to end rough sleeping whilst Making Every Contact Count focussed on tackling the underlying causes of homelessness and preventing homelessness at an early age.

Both initiatives remain Government policy, however, a Select Committee Inquiry led to the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 which changed the way homelessness advice and assistance is provided by local authorities.

The majority of the provisions of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 came into force in April 2018. The aim of the Act was to reform the current homelessness duties to ensure that local authorities provide meaningful advice and assistance to those people who do not fall into a priority need category or who have been found to be intentionally homeless.

The principle implications of the Act are:

- The definition of being threatened with homelessness has been extended from 28 days to 56 days;
- Local authorities must accept a valid S.21 notice (a "no-fault" possession notice) as evidence that the tenant is threatened with homelessness;
- The creation of a stronger advice and information duty;
- An introduction on certain public authorities to refer service users who they think may be homeless or threatened with homeless;
- The creation of a stronger prevention duty for anyone threatened with homelessness and eligible for assistance;
- The introduction of a new relief duty for all eligible applicants who have a local connection meaning local authorities must take reasonable steps to secure accommodation regardless of priority need status;
- The introduction of a new duty to prepare personal housing plans for every person who approaches the council threatened with homelessness. The plans must be reviewed regularly until the relevant duty ends;

- Additional incentives to ensure people engage in prevention and relief work by allowing local authorities to discharge their prevention and relief duties if an applicant unreasonably refuses to cooperate with the course of action proposed;
- The introduction of a right to judicial review at the prevention, relief and main duty stages to ensure local authorities are held to account;
- Increased data collection in order to monitor the overall effectiveness of the new legislation; and
- The exploration of options for further enforcement such as through the creation of a regulator of housing and homelessness services.

4. Local Context

Wyre's geographical location in the North West of England is unique. The borough comprises a mix of urban towns, market towns and rural villages. The majority of people live in the borough's four main towns of Fleetwood, Thornton-Cleveleys, Poulton-le-Fylde, and Garstang, although a large number of smaller villages are located in the rural areas between Poulton-le-Fylde and Garstang and beyond.

Wyre has operated a successful prevention based approach to homelessness for many years and this fits in with the new provisions of the Homelessness Reduction Act. Although acceptances have remained consistent over the last few years, presentations have increased recently as a consequence of the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act. There has also been a significant increase in the number of clients approaching the authority about homelessness who have one or more complex needs and in a number of cases at more advanced stages of homelessness.

Rough Sleeping

Rough sleeping has not previously been seen as a significant problem in Wyre and levels remain low. Estimates are taken annually and submitted to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG). There is no doubt however, that the number of reports is on the increase, and this mirrors national trends. The Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP) ensures any rough sleepers have accommodation for those nights with excessive low temperatures, although again the numbers of people who need to be provided with accommodation under SWEP in Wyre is also very low.

In 2017/18 there were 29 reports of rough sleepers in Wyre, with 13 of these being located and identified by the Housing Options Team. In 2018/19 there were 23 reports of rough sleepers in Wyre and 17 located and identified by the Housing Options Team. From April 2019 to the end November 2019 there have been 34 reports of rough sleepers in Wyre with 25 being located by the team. It is clear that whilst rough sleeping figures are not high, the numbers are on the increase, and this will be reflected in the action plan for the strategy with a clear objective to reduce the number of rough sleepers. We have adopted the national pledge of "No Second Night Out" (NSNO), which is a pledge that we will do all we can to ensure that anyone sleeping rough for the first time will not have to spend a second night on the streets. The pledge is part of our commitment to end rough sleeping.

5. Homelessness and Council Duties

Homelessness is a term that is used to describe various situations of housing need and it is important to be clear about the different circumstances in which people are considered to be homeless. **Statutory homelessness** refers to those people who have made a homeless application and have met the criteria in legislation (Housing Act 1996, Homelessness Act 2002) to be accepted by the Council as eligible for assistance, homeless and in **priority need**. This includes families, pregnant women and single people who are particularly vulnerable. A household may be accepted as 'homeless' because they are going to be evicted or are living in accommodation so unsuitable that it is not 'reasonable' for them to remain there. The Council has a duty to provide temporary accommodation to statutory homeless households.

Non-statutory/non-priority homeless people are primarily single people/childless couples who are not assessed as being in 'priority need' and are therefore only entitled to 'advice and assistance' if homeless. However, the Council may exercise its "powers" to provide additional support if it chooses to do so.

Rough sleepers are people who are literally roofless and are bedded down on the streets, parks or other places where they may or may not be seen by the public. This group are normally a minority of the much larger group of non-priority homeless people, with a larger proportion of single homeless people sofa surfing (often described as the 'hidden homeless' because we have no means to calculate their numbers). Housing legislation does not set out specific statutory duties to people sleeping rough, but there is a strong policy focus on this group.

6. How We Respond to Homelessness in Wyre

A range of services are currently available from our Housing Options Team which effectively creates a "one stop shop" for anyone in housing need. This includes services relating to:

Statutory Responsibilities including:

- The provision of housing advice to all
- The determination of homelessness applications within a statutory framework
- The provision of temporary accommodation to those owed a duty
- The provision of long term housing to those owed a duty
- The assessment and processing of applications for Social Housing within a statutory framework (Allocations Policy)
- The provision of statutory returns relating to homelessness and prevention (H Click) to Central Government
- The investigation and prosecution of landlords where appropriate (e.g. illegal evictions)

Homelessness prevention including the provision of:

- Mediation for all persons who may have been excluded from the family home
- Support in dealing with landlords and negotiation where appropriate
- Mortgage, debt and benefit advice
- Support with welfare benefit issues
- Tenancy sustainment support
- Assistance with court paperwork and intervention where necessary
- Interventions within supported, social and private sector housing to prevent evictions

Accommodation options including:

- Access to supported housing (via a range of providers)
- Facilitation of temporary accommodation
- Support regarding the single point of access for all social housing in Wyre (Blackpool and Fylde) via the sub regional housing register MyHomeChoiceFyldeCoast
- Support on accessing good quality affordable private rented housing

Other innovative prevention focussed services including:

- A hospital /health link worker
- Responsibility for the Council's Severe Weather Emergency Protocol and No Second Night Out Policy
- Strong multi agency working, referrals, and signposting
- Homeless prevention awareness raising/training for professionals
- Enforcement of the Council's local connection policy and provision of a re-connection offer to home area for those with no local connection
- Tenancy training provision
- Access to employment advisors
- The provision of a rent bond scheme

Partnership Working

In order to alleviate the pressure on the system and increase the supportive factors, strong partnership working is critical. The Council cannot tackle homelessness alone and homelessness itself is rarely just a "housing issue".

The issues that lead to homelessness in Wyre are often issues and problems shared by a number of services and agencies – homelessness is often just one symptom of a combination of transience, poverty, and social problems. We believe it is therefore essential that services work together effectively to address these issues holistically.

Housing Options partners include a range of internal and external stakeholders.

Internal key stakeholders include colleagues in Community Safety and Benefits.

External key stakeholders include:

- Adult and Children’s Social Care
- Social Housing Providers
- Supported Accommodation Providers – both commissioned and non-commissioned
- Health
- Local food banks
- Local churches
- Substance misuse services
- The Police
- Her Majesty’s Prison and Probation Service
- Citizens Advice Bureau

Additionally, the Homelessness Reduction Act introduced a duty on specified public authorities to refer service users who they think may be homeless or threatened with homelessness to local authority homelessness/housing options teams. The duty became effective from 1 October 2018 and applies to the following public authorities:

- prisons
- young offender institutions
- secure training centres
- secure colleges
- youth offending teams
- probation services (including community rehabilitation companies)
- Jobcentres
- social service authorities (both adult and children’s)
- hospital A & E departments

- urgent treatment centres
- hospitals in their function of providing inpatient care
- Secretary of State for Defence in relation to members of the regular armed forces

The duty to refer helps to ensure that services are working together effectively to prevent homelessness by ensuring that peoples' housing needs are considered when they come into contact with public authorities. The duty encourages local housing authorities and other public authorities to build strong partnerships which enable them to work together to intervene earlier to prevent homelessness through, increasingly integrated services.

Pathways and multi-agency approaches

Our commitment to partnership working has enabled us to successfully implement a number of key pathways and solutions to prevent homelessness.

These include:

Offender Pathways – joint working with offender management services and prisons to identify offenders at risk of homelessness prior to release

Action to help rough sleepers – a shared multi agency targeted response to understand the demands of this client group. This enables partners to identify those that are genuinely homeless (as opposed to street drinkers/beggars) and provide effective and holistic solutions.

Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP) volunteers– partnership working with a local church that utilises volunteers to deliver the SWEP assistance.

MyHomeChoiceFyldeCoast (Choice Based Lettings Scheme) – a partnership of the major social landlords across the Fylde Coast. Applications to the scheme are processed centrally for the whole Fylde Coast area.

In addition, there are a number of key multi agency working groups that enable coordinated responses to protect and support people at risk of homelessness in the following areas:

- Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) – where agencies talk about the risk of future harm to people experiencing domestic abuse and if necessary their children, and draws up an action plan to help manage that risk
- Wyre and Fylde Integrated Team – hosted by the Council this team co-ordinates joint working with Police, Social Care, Mental Health Services and other relevant partners
- Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) – the process through which various agencies such as the Police, Prison Service and Probation work together to protect the public by managing the risks posed by violent and sexual offenders living in the community
- Child protection conferences and team around the family meetings

- Antisocial Behaviour meetings
- Wyre Young People's Service/Youth Offending Team

Cross Boundary Working and Innovation

Recently a number of partnerships with neighbouring authorities has resulted in us being able to attract additional funding to support the prevention of homelessness and the implementation and sharing of best practice.

Current projects include:

- Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer (2017-2019) - Work between Blackpool, Fylde and Wyre targeting an additional £600,000 over two years for upstream prevention and innovation across the Fylde Coast.
- Domestic Abuse Accommodation (2017) – a Lancashire wide bid to secure accommodation-based wrap around support, including access to employment for victims of domestic abuse complex needs.
- Rapid Rehousing Pathway (2019) – Working with Lancaster and Fylde we won an additional £130,000 to support rough sleepers and people facing homelessness.

7. Homelessness Review – Main Findings

Our review of homelessness has found that homelessness is continuing to increase across the country and this has also generally been the case in Wyre, although the number of homeless presentations in Wyre did drop in 2016/17. In 2016/17 there were 370 presentations in Wyre compared with 458 in 2015/16. The number of presentations increased in 2017/18 to 491 and again in 2018/19 to 536 (most probably due to the impact of the Homelessness Reduction Act). Homelessness Acceptances have remained relatively steady peaking at 10 acceptances in 2016/17 compared with 8 in 2015/16. In 2017/18 the number of acceptances dropped to 6, and only 2 in 2018/19. This is a direct result of the prevention and relief duties through the Homelessness Reduction Act, which aims to address homelessness quickly and without the complexity of traditional methods of accepting homeless applications.

More homeless presentations are made by people aged 21-65, with lone female parents and single males being most likely to seek assistance; again this reflects the national trend.

The main cause of homelessness nationally has consistently been the ending of an assured shorthold tenancy. Locally the main reasons for homelessness have varied although parental eviction and fleeing domestic violence have consistently been prominent reasons.

The main reason for a homeless applicant to have a priority need for assistance in Wyre is having dependent children/pregnancy. This has generally been the trend both locally and nationally for the last five years although the number of people with physical disabilities whose needs cannot be met in their current property is also high in Wyre.

The use of temporary accommodation has fluctuated over the last few years, with 30 cases in 2016/17 and dropping to 18 in 2017/18. This number dropped slightly in 2018/19 to 15. The length of time staying in temporary accommodation has remained consistently low, averaging a little over 10 days in 2018/19.

The number of households who were prevented from becoming homeless has remained high increasing from 285 in 2016/17 to 387 in 2017/18, and again to 398 in 2018/19. This emphasises our focus on preventing homelessness rather than making homeless applications.

There have been many changes in service provision – some have closed and some new ones have opened. Significant developments include:

- The establishment of a women's refuge
- Increased emergency provision for families and young people
- New and effective multi agency and partnership working
- A sustained reduction in use of Bed and Breakfast accommodation (that is never used for young people)

We consider the Council demonstrates strong leadership and a clear commitment to partnership working to address homelessness and its attendant issues. Our success in forging partnerships across the sector in the past has ensured a healthy provision of beds available for those who do find themselves without accommodation. However, ongoing reductions to supporting people budgets has reduced the provision of supported accommodation available. Our current provision includes:

- 9 beds for families – George Williams House
- 6 beds for young people – George Williams House
- 18 Beds for young people and 5 move on – Fleetwood Foyer
- 10 beds for homeless people with complex needs and 5 dispersed units of accommodation – Warrenhurst Court
- 5 beds for domestic violence victims (4 families and 1 single) – Fylde Coast Woman's Aid

Due to the decreasing provision of supported accommodation, the role of the private rented sector has become of key significance in preventing homelessness. In seeing the private sector as being the increasingly likely route of accommodation it is increasingly important that the authority works with landlords and partners to continue to drive up standards in this sector.

Internally Council departments work well together and there are some outstanding examples of good practice such as:

- Average time to assess a claim for Housing Benefit – four days
- The availability of trained debt advisors and family mediators

- An Empty Homes Strategy

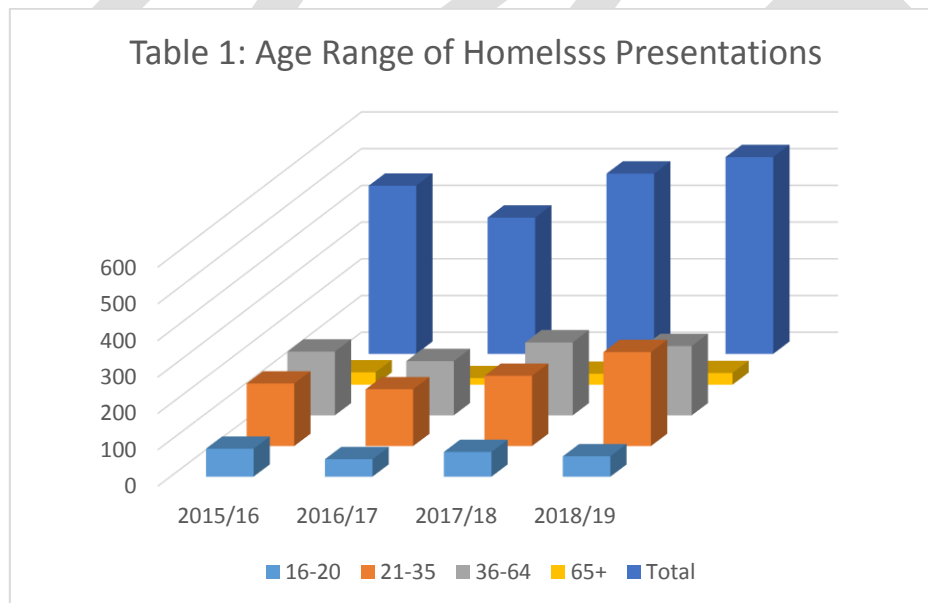
The following key elements have also been highlighted in the review:

- In 2017 the Fylde Coast Homelessness Forum was set up between Wyre, Blackpool and Fylde Councils, local housing providers and other key agencies
- An updated joint protocol for working with young people aged between 16 and 17 has been developed
- The ‘No Second Night Out’ protocol
- A review of the Fylde Coast Choice Based Lettings Scheme (My Home Choice) has recently been completed that has helped to make applying for social housing easier

8. Homelessness Statistics – Wyre

Homeless Presentations

Between April 2015 and March 2019, the Council dealt with 1856 presentations. Presentations were high in 2015/16 before a drop in 2016/17. There was then a significant increase in 2017/18 and 2018/19 (Table 1). The majority of presentations are made by people either aged 21-35 or 36-64, with numbers in both groups consistently being similar.



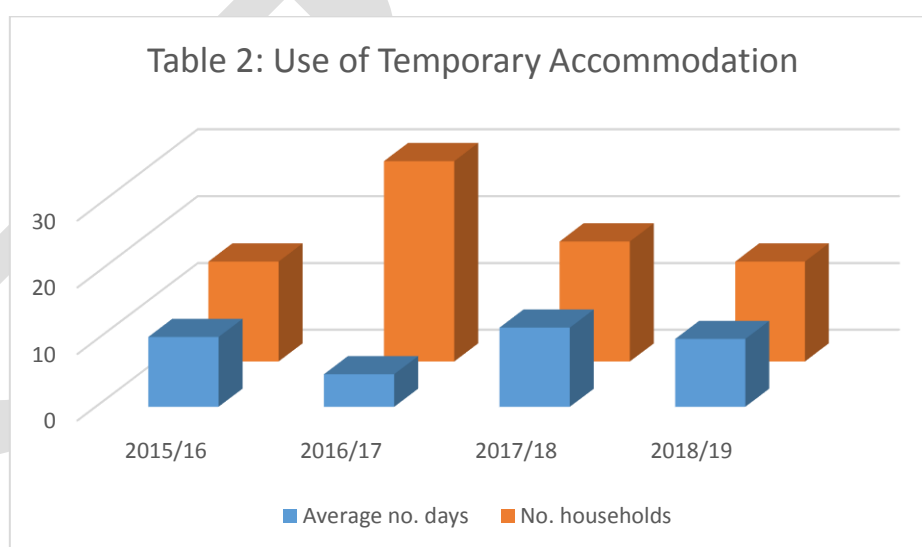
Not all homeless presentations result in a decision being made. There are many reasons for this, such as the applicant failing to make any further contact, or their homelessness being resolved in another way but the contributing factor is evidenced as the Council’s focus on prevention and the intervention of the Housing Options Team.

Homelessness - Temporary Accommodation

Where a person makes a homeless presentation to the Council and there is reason to believe that the person is homeless and may have a priority need for assistance, the Council is under a duty to provide temporary accommodation until a final decision is made on the case.

Government guidelines state that bed and breakfast accommodation should only be used in an emergency and families should not be placed in such accommodation for more than six weeks.

Table 2 shows the average length of time and number of people placed in temporary accommodation by the Council between 2015 and 2019.



Homelessness & Priority Need in Wyre

The Council has a duty to provide temporary accommodation to all applicants who they believe may be homeless and in priority need. This duty remains until a final decision on their case has been made. 18.2 S.193 (2) and s.195 (2) of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002) and the Homelessness (Priority Need for Accommodation) (England) Order 2002 set out the priority need categories.

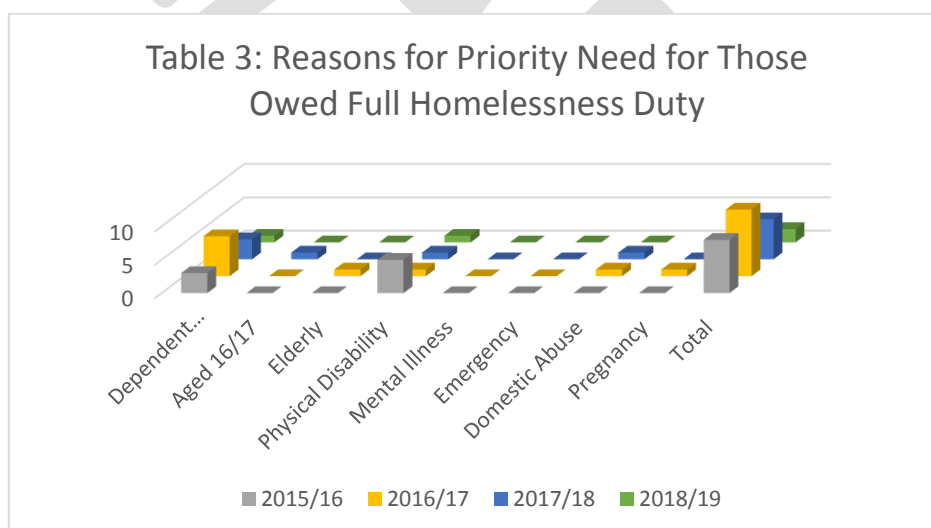
If an applicant falls into one of the following categories, they will automatically have a priority need:

- A pregnant woman or a person with whom she resides or might reasonably be expected to reside
- A person with whom dependent children reside or might reasonably be expected to reside
- A person aged 16/17 who is not a 'relevant child' or a child in need to whom a local authority owes a duty under s.20 of the Children Act 1989
- A person under 21 who was (but is no longer) looked after, accommodated or fostered between the ages of 16 & 18 (except a person who is a relevant student)
- A person who is homeless or threatened with homelessness as a result of an emergency such as flood, fire or other disaster

If an applicant falls into one of the categories below, they will only have a priority need if they are considered to be 'vulnerable' and it is for the local authority to make that decision.

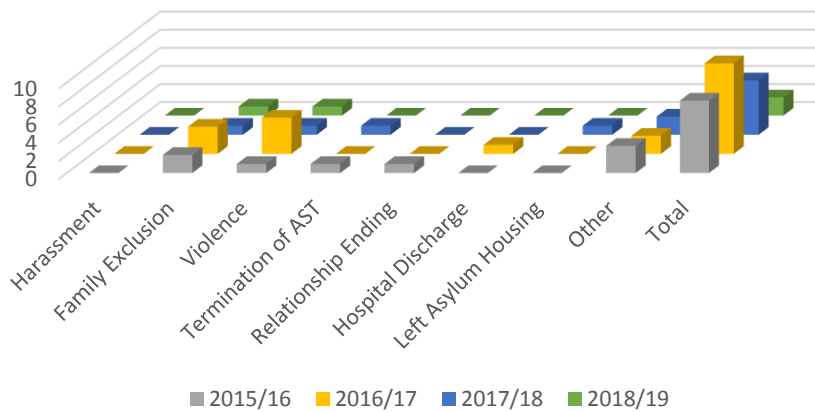
- A person aged 21 or more who is vulnerable as a result of having been looked after, accommodated or fostered (except a person who is a relevant student)
- A person who is vulnerable as a result of old age, mental illness or handicap or physical disability or other special reason or with whom such a person resides or might reasonably be expected to reside
- A person who is vulnerable as a result of having been a member of HM regular naval, military or air forces
- A person who is vulnerable as a result of:
 - a) having served a custodial sentence
 - b) having been committed for contempt of court or any other kindred offence; or
 - c) having been remanded in custody
- A person who is vulnerable as a result of ceasing to occupy accommodation because of violence from another person or threats of violence from another person which are likely to be carried out
- A person who is vulnerable for any other special reason, or with whom such a person resides or might reasonably be expected to reside

The main reason for a person to be found to have a priority need is having dependent children. This has consistently been the main reason both locally and nationally (Table 3).



In Wyre the most common reasons for being homeless to those owed the full homeless duty is being forced to leave the parental/family home and through fleeing domestic violence (Table 4).

Table 4: Reasons for Loss of Last Settled Home for Those Owed Full Homeless Duty



Homelessness Prevention & Relief

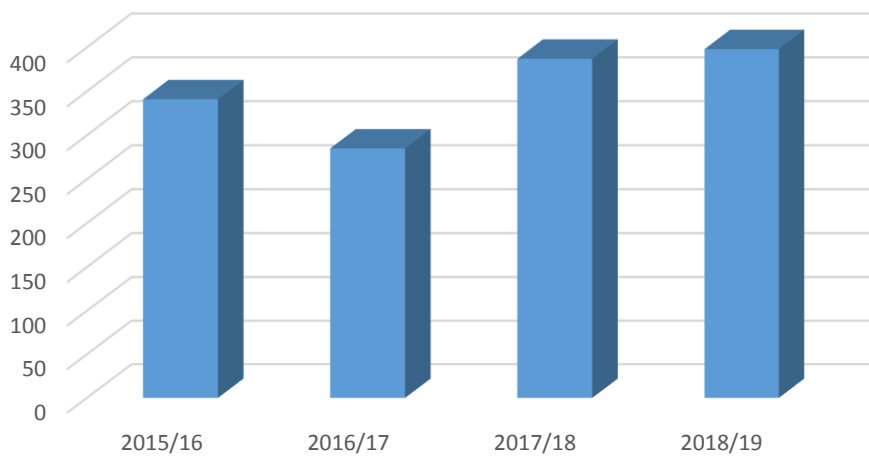
Under the Homelessness Act 2002, the Council must provide homelessness prevention advice to anyone in the Borough who requests it.

Homelessness prevention involves providing people with the means to address their housing and other needs to avoid homelessness. This is done by either assisting them into alternative accommodation or enabling them to remain in their existing home.

Homelessness relief occurs when it has not been possible to prevent the homelessness but the person has been helped to secure accommodation, even though the Council is under no statutory obligation to do so.

Previously, the numbers prevented and relieved were not distinguished. However following the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 the relief duty meant the numbers being relieved being recorded separately.

Table 5: Number of Preventions



9. Current Challenges

Homelessness Reduction Act 2017

The introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act in 2017 has already had a noticeable effect on the service. In particular the extension of the 'at risk of homelessness' to 56 days and further focus on prevention has resulted in a significant increase in the number of presentations to the Housing Options Team. It was feared by some that the new prevention and relief duties could significantly increase placements into temporary accommodation, but fortunately to date, this hasn't been the case in Wyre but it still remains a concern and will be monitored.

The preparation and review of personal housing plans has also added to the workload of the team and we will continue to monitor staffing capacity to ensure the service meets operational service standards and requirements.

Lack of Accommodation

A reduction in the number of supported housing units available is a continuing challenge and has led to increasing reliance on the private rented and social housing sectors. Further close working with partners and housing associations will be needed to explore opportunities to maximise the supply of appropriate housing and make additional bed spaces available.

Local Housing Allowance

Welfare reform has had a number of effects in relation to homelessness in Wyre and most significant is the impact on 21-35 year olds. This age group now only qualifies for the shared room rate of Local Housing Allowance (LHA), restricting the housing available to this group. Whilst some areas of Wyre do have a reasonable supply of shared accommodation, placements into these properties are proving increasingly difficult, and the options open to this age group are limited. We will need to work closely with landlords and housing associations to explore every opportunity to make quality affordable housing available, including the provision of additional shared and dispersed housing.

Universal Credit

In Wyre full rollout of Universal Credit (UC) was implemented on 5th December 2018, but even prior to the full rollout there have been issues where service users have been eligible for UC. This has mirrored the national position, with a delay in processing claims proving a challenge to sourcing housing within the private rented sector. Supporting claimants and liaising with landlords is going to be essential in obtaining and sustaining tenancies.

Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer

Wyre has been part of the Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer pilot, having won funding along with Blackpool and Fylde Councils. This funding was aimed at preparing for the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act with a focus on upstream prevention, particularly relating to those with one or more complex needs. As part of this pilot, Wyre has delivered:

- Two full-time complex needs support workers

- The introduction of a paperless rent-bond scheme
- Tenancy training
- An accommodation finding service
- A shared hospital link worker across the three districts

The success of the Trailblazer is overwhelming with over 200 cases being dealt with.

The project funding was for two years and ended in April 2019 but in order to continue the great work of the Trailblazer opportunities for additional funding will be explored.

10. Key Objectives of the Strategy 2020 – 2024

The main findings of the homelessness review have been used to inform the key objectives of the strategy.

Objective 1: Prevent Homelessness

Objective 2: Provide pathways to short and long term accommodation for those homelessness or at risk of homelessness

Objective 3: Contribute to the improvement of the health and wellbeing of those homeless or at risk of homelessness

Objective 1 - Prevent Homelessness

The main causes of homelessness amongst priority households are domestic abuse and parental/family exclusion.

Although there has been an increase in the number of households becoming at risk of homelessness that are in paid employment or in receipt of partial benefit, the overwhelming majority of households seeking advice and support are fully reliant upon welfare benefits. While the secondary aim of most services and agencies is to enable people to achieve sustainable outcomes that includes help to get into work, access to and addressing problems with benefit payments and the compounding effects of personal debt are significant factors in many cases.

Prevention has been the key priority for all services and partner agencies and we have continued to achieve year on year improvements in the number of households that are either prevented from becoming homeless or are helped to find somewhere to live before they become homeless. In the last full year in Wyre 398 households were prevented from becoming homeless.

Much of this has been enabled through a continued commitment to partnership working across a number of third sector agencies and partners many of whom have enhanced their services by bringing in additional funding from elsewhere. The Council acknowledges that without the support

of partners across the Borough that far fewer households would have been able to be able to achieve the successful prevention outcomes that have been evidenced.

Prevention is effective when it is timely and is aligned to the issues facing the individual or family at the time and we have found that most success results from having a flexible and pragmatic approach. While longer term aims will always be to enable a household to achieve resilience and independence, there are times when direct action is what is required. Having sufficient funding available for rent in advance, bonds etc is essential, and whilst MHCLG has provided a Flexible Homelessness Support Grant over the last two years to assist with such provision, exploring any additional sources of external funding will be a key priority for the strategy.

Whilst the services and support are there for those who present as homeless, hidden homelessness is also considered by many to be an issue. To help to try to combat it the Council will continue to promote our homelessness service and the services it provides.

The Council will seek to continue to provide or facilitate support for all households at risk of homelessness and in particular to try to ensure that there is sufficient accommodation available to all priority households that are unable to find their own solution including households experiencing domestic abuse, households with children, young people previously cared for and those at risk as a result of mortgage default. The Council recognises that resolving homelessness and supporting people to find suitable housing is vital for the economic and community wellbeing of the Borough.

Key Actions:

- Continue to prevent any household with children from being placed in Bed & Breakfast accommodation.
- Reduce Bed & Breakfast Accommodation use to zero.
- Continue to support households at risk of homelessness as a result of domestic abuse.
- Continue to administer funding to assist vulnerable people to sustain their tenancies and prevent homelessness.
- Explore opportunities for external funding to support people with complex needs to sustain tenancies.
- Reduce rough sleeping.
- Promote the Housing Options service and increase engagement with charities and third sector partners to identify and tackle hidden homelessness.

Objective 2 - Provide pathways to short and long term accommodation for those homelessness or at risk of homelessness

Access to housing and move on for those in supported accommodation has continued to be an issue particularly for those with poor housing records and those that are excluded by social landlords.

There is still a lot of work to do with households to prevent them from building up rent arrears and to ensure housing offers are affordable. The majority of private sector and social landlords require rent in advance and many continue to operate exclusions for households with previously unaddressed rent arrears and costs, in some cases going back years. Close work with private sector and social landlords is a key action to accessing secure accommodation.

Universal Credit full service rollout began on 5th December 2018. Housing cost decisions for UC claimants are no longer made locally leading to uncertainties in the level of housing costs and when payments will be received. Scaremongering in the national press and social media has had a negative effect on private sector landlords who were previously accepting of the housing benefit system. Many of the teething problems with the rollout of UC will no doubt be ironed out and regaining the trust and confidence amongst private sector landlords will be important for the years ahead. Private sector housing remains a vital part of our prevention and relief duties and without it the use of temporary accommodation would significantly increase.

Key Actions:

- Work more closely with private sector landlords to promote the private rented sector as a viable housing option.
- Promote the updated Choice Based Lettings system to ensure the housing waiting list is accurate.
- Work with Planning Services to ensure the location and type of new affordable housing provision is appropriate.
- Continue to provide support for private sector tenants with complex needs.

Objective 3 - Contribute to the improvement of the health and wellbeing of those homeless or at risk of homelessness

While motivating and helping people to access training and vocational opportunities is a key aim in enabling people to improve their wellbeing and develop personal resilience, a significant proportion of households coming into contact with homelessness services are not at a level where they can realistically take up such opportunities. In some circumstances there are more practical barriers such as single parents with young children and access to suitable child care. Evidence from partners recognises that households with complex dependencies need a greater amount of intervention and support to get them to a level where by they can get involved.

Key points in housing sustainment and risk of homelessness include issues around social isolation and this is an increasingly recognised issue relating to the health and wellbeing of all sectors of the community. For homeless households this is often compounded by a lack of wholesome networks and while some disadvantaged or vulnerable people can often find mutual support and strength together, it can often have a detrimental effect. The opportunity and ability for providers to engage people in social, creative and confidence building activities is an essential element towards sustainable outcomes and better community engagement. It is essential that partners continue to

work together to share opportunities, pool resources if possible and to record outcomes. Future commissioning could usefully include space within contracts to allow for this type of development and activity.

However, there is further work to be done. Pathways into statutory services can still be difficult and access to timely interventions particularly around mental health is still reported as being a significant barrier. The issue of individuals considered to have a dual diagnosis, that is mental health issues and issues usually relating to drug or alcohol misuse, being unable to access health services is seen as a significant barrier by homelessness service providers. Demands upon health services appear to have resulted in high thresholds with support only becoming available when an individual is at crisis point. Improving access to mental health services is a key priority for this strategy.

Key Actions:

- Early engagement with mental health services to ensure correct support for those service users in need.
- Continue to adopt a multi-agency approach to preventing homelessness especially for those people with chaotic and complex dependencies.
- To help support and prevent service users with chaotic and complex lifestyles from losing their supported accommodation and becoming street homeless.
- Improve the health and wellbeing of people that are at risk of homelessness and to enable people to develop more healthy lifestyles.
- To prevent people being discharged from hospital before a suitable housing option is in place.



ACTION PLAN

OBJECTIVE 1: PREVENT HOMELESSNESS

ACTION:	TASKS:	RESPONSIBLE OFFICER:	TIMESCALE:
Continue to prevent any household with children from being placed in Bed & Breakfast accommodation.	Continue prevention work and more efficient move on from SP family units	Housing Services Manager	Review September 2020
Reduce Bed & Breakfast accommodation use to zero	Continue prevention work and more efficient move on from supported accommodation	Housing Options Team Leader	Review September 2020
Continue to support households at risk of homelessness as a result of domestic abuse	Continue partnership working	Housing Services Manager	Throughout strategy
Continue to utilise available funding to assist vulnerable people to sustain their tenancies and prevent homelessness	Work with Benefits team on use of DHP and use FHSG for bonds/rent in advance where appropriate	Housing Options Team Leader	Monitored quarterly for duration of strategy
Explore opportunities for external funding to support those with complex needs to sustain tenancies	Apply for external funding whenever available and relevant	Housing Services Manager /Housing Options Team Leader	As opportunities arise
Reduce the number of rough sleepers	Further develop partnership working to address rough sleeping and begging, maintaining a coherent mix of enforcement pressure and appropriate support	Housing Services Manager /Housing Options Team Leader/ Community Safety Manager	September 2020
Identify and tackle hidden homelessness	Promote the Housing Options Services;	Housing Services Manager /Housing Options Team Leader	September 2020

	Increase engagement with charities and third sector partners.		
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OBJECTIVE 2: PROVIDE PATHWAYS TO SHORT AND LONG TERM ACCOMMODATION FOR THOSE HOMELESS OR AT RISK OF HOMELESSNESS

ACTION:	TASKS:	RESPONSIBLE OFFICER:	TIMESCALE:
Work more closely with private sector landlords to promote the private rented sector as a viable housing option	Establish a private landlord network to identify the barriers in offering tenancies to homeless households and to find ways to reduce the number of evictions from private rented accommodation	Housing Options Team Leader	September 2020
Promote updated MyHomeChoice (Choice Based Lettings System) to ensure the housing waiting list is accurate	Work with partners to raise awareness of updated My Home Choice portal	Housing Options Team Leader	March 2020
Work with Planning Services to ensure location and type of new affordable housing provision reflects need	Establish routine meetings between Planning and Housing teams to discuss affordable housing provision on new developments	Head of Housing and Community Services	March 2020

OBJECTIVE 3: CONTRIBUTE TO THE IMPROVEMENT OF THE HEALTH AND WELLBEING OF THOSE HOMELESS OR AT RISK OF HOMELESSNESS

ACTION:	TASKS:	RESPONSIBLE OFFICER:	TIMESCALE:
Early engagement with mental health services to ensure appropriate support for those service users in need	Establish contacts within Mental Health teams to improve partnership working and signposting	Head of Housing and Community Services	March 2020
Continue to work with a multi-agency approach to preventing homelessness with those people with chaotic and complex dependencies	Continue to fund support workers to work exclusively with those with complex needs to sustain tenancies (providing assistance with benefits and access to services etc)	Housing Services Manager	March 2020
Prevent service users with chaotic and complex lifestyles from losing their supported accommodation and becoming street homeless	Continue to fund support workers to work exclusively with those with complex needs to sustain tenancies (providing assistance with benefits and access to services etc)	Housing Options Team Leader	September 2020
Improve the health and wellbeing of people that are at risk of homelessness and enable them to	Work with internal and external partners to promote health & wellbeing opportunities	Housing Options Team Leader	September 2020

develop more healthy lifestyles			
Prevent clients from being discharged from hospital before a suitable housing option is in place	To explore with partners the option to retain the Hospital Link Worker for Wyre, Blackpool and Fylde	Head of Housing and Community Services	March 2020

