



Dorset  
Council

Dorset Council  
Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy  
2021 - 2026

DRAMA

**Dorset Council**

Dorset Council is a unitary local authority that was founded on 01<sup>st</sup> April 2019. The Council's boundaries are largely co-terminus with those of the Dorset Ceremonial County area. The Council's leadership consists of a Chair of the Council, Leader of the Council and Chief Executive. The Council has 82 seats.

Acknowledgement: This Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy was commissioned and funded by Dorset Council and formulated by Neil Morland & Co Housing Consultants. Thanks go to Sharon Attwater, Andrew Billany, Fiona Brown and Sarah How from Dorset Council for providing invaluable assistance. The time and materials that numerous people and organisations have generously contributed to help produce this Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy, especially those persons with lived experience of homelessness, is very much appreciated.

Disclaimer: All views and any errors contained in this Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy are the responsibility of the authors. The views expressed should not be assumed to be those of Dorset Council or any of the persons who contributed to this Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy. The information contained in this Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy is accurate at the date of publication. The information in this Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy should not be considered legal advice. Dorset Council, nor Neil Morland & Co, are not authorised to provide legal advice. No responsibility can be taken by the commissioners or the authors of this Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy for any loss or damage incurred, by any persons or organisation acting or refraining from action as result of any statement in this Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy

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Dorset Council was formed in 2019 and as we continue to emerge as a new Council, I am proud to be the Portfolio holder for Housing. We have worked hard to manage the effects of the current pandemic on all our residents and during this time, we have also thought about those households who need our help to tackle the pressures of homelessness and rough sleeping. I am delighted to have been involved with the development of this new Dorset Council Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy.



We commissioned a review of homelessness in the Dorset Council area. The extensive research with many of the organisations we work with, people who have been or are homeless, our own Council services and Councillors, has helped us to develop the strategy and its action plan for the next 5 years.

This strategy aims to provide us the right strategic approach needed to achieve this. It was also clear the very important role our community partners and voluntary organisations have in supporting us to deliver the help where it is most needed. From these conversations it is clear there are specific areas of focus if we are to truly tackle homelessness and rough sleeping.

By focussing our efforts we hope to be able provide better support for vulnerable families and communities where homelessness exists: Improve the help for people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness: Take action against any of the reasons that cause homelessness: Work well in collaboration throughout our Council services especially housing, adult social care, children services and public health so that we can demonstrate need and fund the right activities: Benefit from the essential contribution by local and national public bodies, housing associations, voluntary organisations and community groups.

This strategy provides a single plan for all the agencies across Dorset including the Council and will help to concentrate our efforts for tackling and preventing homelessness over a short-medium term for all people who are at risk of homelessness.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those organisations and individuals that contributed to the development of the strategy and action plan and look forward to working together to deliver it.

Cllr Graham Carr-Jones  
July 2021

## 1.0 Introduction

The approach taken to formulating this Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy, complies with the obligations found in the Homelessness Act 2002. This legislation requires local authorities to take strategic responsibility for tackling and preventing homelessness.

This Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy provides a single plan for all Dorset agencies to concentrate their activities for tackling and preventing homelessness.

In formulating this strategy, Dorset Council's housing services were assisted by its adult social care and children services and had the co-operation of housing associations. Numerous other agencies also made contributions. Elected Councillors were actively involved via workshops and individual discussions.

It is intended to be in place for a maximum of five years, from 2021-2026. A new strategy shall be published sooner, if there are substantial changes to homelessness legislation or significant revisions to statutory guidance on homelessness.

Prior to this Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy being formulated, a review of homelessness (the Homelessness Review) was completed, to evaluate the current picture of homelessness in Dorset. This concentrated on:

- levels of homelessness,
- activities for preventing homelessness,
- activities for securing accommodation,
- activities for providing support, and
- the resources available to deliver the above activities.

The strategy is a forward-looking document that includes a summary of the findings from the Homelessness Review. This separate document paints a picture of homelessness at the time the research was carried out, looking at what has happened over the past five years.

It incorporates a comprehensive action plan, that shows clearly:

- which organisations are going to be involved in completing each action,
- specifics of each action to be taken,
- a deadline for when each action is expected to be completed,
- the resources that will be needed to complete each action,
- the intended change that accomplishing each action will achieve, and
- the steps that will followed to complete each action.

The strategy includes an explanation about the delivery and accountability of achieving the agreed objectives and actions. This encompasses arrangements for democratic oversight of a Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy, steering the enactment of the action plan, sharing good practice, and case conferencing of complex cases.

When formulating this strategy, the objectives of Dorset Council's Housing Allocation Scheme and Tenancy Strategy have been cross-referenced. Statutory guidance on

homelessness strategies was also considered, as was national guidance published the by Local Government Association.

This strategy acknowledges the emerging Dorset Council Local Plan and a new Dorset Council Housing Strategy will impact the delivery of affordable housing in this area and our objective to ensure there is enough suitable accommodation for people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness. The objectives set out in this strategy will referenced in these emerging plans.

The action plan forms part of this strategy and shall be updated annually. Doing so will help Dorset Council demonstrate which actions have been completed and which are yet to be carried out. This will ensure accountability and explain why any actions might be behind schedule, or have been completed early, or are no longer relevant.

Dorset Council carried out consultation on the objectives and actions of the strategy, prior to publishing it.

This Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy is available to download from Dorset Council's website. It can be viewed at the Council offices during usual opening hours. Copies are also available free of charge.

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## 2.0 Summary

### 2.1 Introduction

This Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy seeks to tackle all forms of homelessness, including those who are owed a statutory duty of assistance and often living in temporary accommodation, as well as people who are staying in supported housing, sleeping rough on the streets, or have other transient arrangements (e.g. sleeping on a friend's sofa).

#### **Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy Objectives:**

- 1) Reduce the current and future levels of homelessness.
- 2) Prevent homelessness
- 3) Ensure there is enough suitable accommodation for people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness.
- 4) Ensure there are adequate services to support people who are homeless, or threatened with homelessness, or were previously homeless, to prevent a reoccurrence of homelessness.
- 5) Appropriately resource the delivery of this Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy

A range of actions has been identified for Dorset Council, along with other public bodies, housing associations and voluntary organisations, that can help tackle and prevent homelessness. Specific actions have been included for people who are more at risk of homelessness. The priorities and actions contained in this strategy have had regard to the functions exercised by Dorset Council in respect of its housing, adult social care, and child social care services. It promotes working across organisations and policy boundaries, to ensure social inclusion and equality of access to services. When developing this strategy, a broad range of organisations have been consulted including support providers, voluntary organisations and health services as well as people who were experiencing homelessness or had done so previously.

### 2.2 National homelessness context

There is national legislative framework setting out the rights of people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness and the responsibilities of local authorities, other public bodies and private registered providers of social housing (housing associations).

Causes of homelessness include poverty, inadequate housing, health problems and relationship breakdown. All contribute to why people become homeless.

Nationally, levels of homelessness have increased over the past decade, with more people approaching local authorities for assistance and rising numbers of people sleeping rough. The number of households living in temporary accommodation has doubled since March 2010 from 50,000 up to 93,000 at March 2020. Persons of black ethnic origin are disproportionately more likely to become homeless, as are young people aged 16-25 years of age.

The UK Government has an ambition to end rough sleeping by 2024. As part of their pursuit of this objective, an internationally proven method of helping people exit street

homelessness, known as the Housing First approach is being piloted. During 2020, the UK Government launched the Everyone In campaign as part of its response to the COVID-19 pandemic, which resulted in over 29,000 people being helped to find accommodation.

Since December 2019, The UK Government has allocated over £700m to local homelessness services, with over 300 councils across England receiving a share of funding to support people experiencing homelessness in their areas.

### **2.3 Local homelessness context**

The information in Section 4 of this Strategy is a summary of the evidence found in the recent review of homelessness<sup>1</sup>.

When formulating this strategy, regard was had to the conclusions of the Review, which assessed the levels and patterns of homelessness, and identified gaps in local knowledge and services. Regard was also had to local Housing Allocations Scheme and Tenancy Strategy, plus other relevant strategies and policies.

Households aged 24 to 44 years, with dependent children and of White British origin are the main type of household to seek assistance from the council in relation to homelessness in line with national trends. In addition, a growing number of single male and single females who have difficulties as a result of physical and mental health problems are becoming homeless in Dorset, also in line with national trends.

Levels of homelessness in Dorset have increased over the past five years and several factors indicate that this is set to continue including; 23.6% of children in Dorset living in poverty; high house price to income ratios; and the impact of the Coronavirus Pandemic leading to potential job losses and reduced incomes.

It is clear from the Review that activity to prevent homelessness and support for those who are or may become homeless is the key to tackling homelessness in Dorset. The council has developed excellent partnerships with services in Dorset that have been commissioned to support homeless people and help to prevent homelessness. These services are well placed, experienced and keen to expand to help meet the growing need.

The Action Plan in appendix 2 of this Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy has been designed, with input from stakeholders, to help meet the growing levels of homelessness and secure additional suitable housing for those in need.

During the recent Covid pandemic new initiatives have been introduced to tackle rough sleeping. This strategy introduces objectives and actions which support the new initiatives.

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<sup>1</sup> Morland, N, Christou, A, A Review of Homelessness in the Dorset Council Local Authority Area, 2021.



## 3.0 National Homelessness Context

The UK Government is responsible for making decisions about homelessness law and strategy for England. The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) is charged with leading on policy formulation and programme delivery.

The Homelessness Act 2002 places a duty on local authorities, to formulate a Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy at least every five years. A review of homelessness in a local housing authority area must take place prior to a Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy being formulated and published. The legislation requires local authorities to take strategic responsibility for tackling and preventing homelessness in their area. This duty complements other duties local authorities have, to freely provide advice to anyone at risk of homelessness and assist persons in specified circumstances who are homeless or threatened with homelessness.

### 3.1 Homelessness legislation

A legal framework setting out the rights of people who are experiencing homelessness and duties local authorities must administer, has been in force since 1977<sup>2</sup>, with significant amendments being made to it 1985<sup>3</sup>, 1996<sup>4</sup>, and 2017<sup>5</sup>.

#### Definition of homelessness

Households (single persons, couples, families with dependent children are all covered by the term) who are homeless or threatened with homelessness include those who:

- are street homeless
- are hidden homeless
- have been illegally evicted,
- are living in accommodation that is unaffordable, unfit, overcrowded, are experiencing domestic abuse or threats of domestic abuse, and other exceptional circumstances,
- are at risk of becoming homeless due to parents/family/other no longer willing or able to accommodate, leaving care, prison, the armed forces or escaping domestic abuse), and
- have been served a valid notice to quit their tenancy by their landlord.

All local authorities have a duty to ensure advice and information is available and free of charge to any household, about preventing homelessness, finding a home, rights when homeless and help available locally.

Any adult, or child aged 16-17, who believes they are homeless or threatened with homelessness, is entitled to make an application for assistance to any local authority.

<sup>2</sup> Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977

<sup>3</sup> Housing Act 1985

<sup>4</sup> Housing Act 1996, Part 7

<sup>5</sup> Homelessness Reduction Act 2017

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

### **Local authority duties**

When a household is eligible for assistance, local authorities must:

- Carry out an assessment of their housing and support needs and formulate a personal plan to meet these needs.
- Arrange temporary accommodation, when a local authority believes they have a priority need for accommodation due to them having a specified vulnerability.
- Attempt to prevent homelessness for them if they are likely to become homeless within 56 days of them making their application for assistance.
- Attempt to relieve homeless for up to 56 days, when they are already homeless, when making an application for assistance.
- Arrange short-term accommodation when they are intentionally homeless and have a priority need.
- Obtain permanent accommodation where they are unintentionally homeless and have a priority need.

Local authorities have discretion to consider whether a household has a local connection with the local authority to which they have made an application for assistance.

A household has a right to request review of certain decisions made their application.

When administering their public law homelessness duties, local authorities must co-operate with each other and can expect co-operation from housing associations and child social care services. Specified public authorities have a duty to refer a household who is at risk of homelessness to a local authority.

### **3.2 Causes of homelessness**

MHCLG with the Department for Work & Pensions (DWP) published independent research on the causes of homelessness and rough sleeping<sup>6</sup>. An assessment of evidence concluded that for families there was strong evidence of domestic abuse, relationship breakdown, financial issues, poverty and lack of social housing being the causes of homelessness. For single persons there was strong evidence that relationship breakdown, mental health and substance misuse were the causes. In terms of rough sleeping, the strongest cause identified was relationship breakdown.

### **3.3 Homelessness statistics**

Official statistics published by the UK Government, for April 2019 – March 2020<sup>7</sup>, showed:

- Households with children are more likely to be owed a prevention duty at initial assessment than a relief duty
- Single adult households are the largest group of households owed a prevention or relief duty, representing 60.1% of all households who had a duty accepted.

<sup>6</sup> Alma Economics. 2019. Homelessness: Causes of homelessness and rough Sleeping: rapid assessment of evidence, London, Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government and Department for Work & Pensions

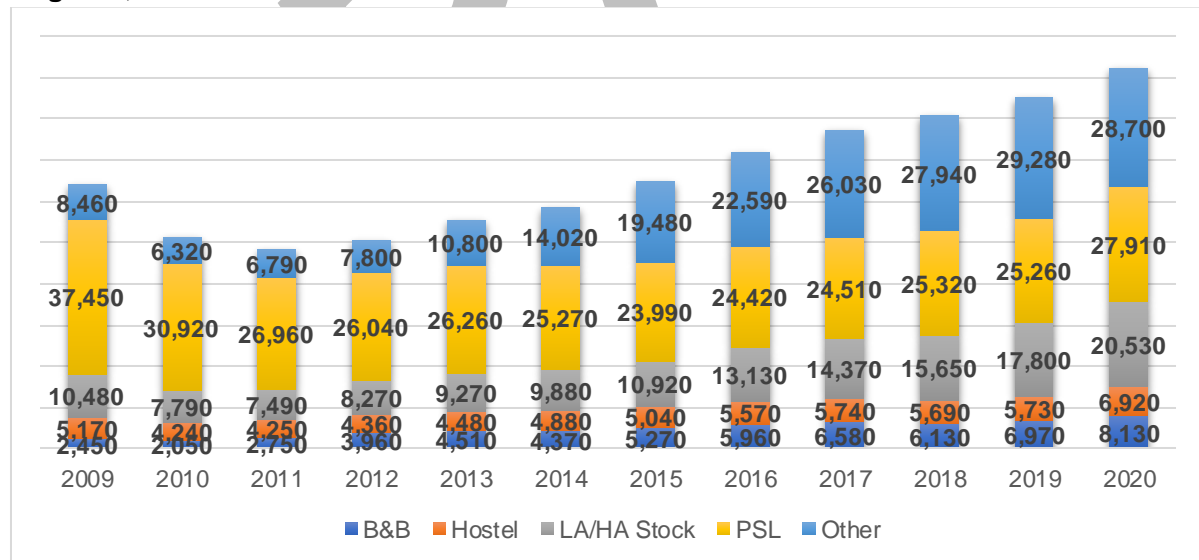
<sup>7</sup> Statutory Homelessness Annual Report, 2019-20, England. Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government.

- 57.6% of single adults are initially accepted under the relief duty.
- Of the households that were owed a duty in in 2019-20, those that were owed a prevention duty were more likely (58.5%) to have an accommodation secured outcome than households owed an initial relief duty (40.0%)
- Accommodation secured under the prevention duty is more likely to be in self-contained private rented sector accommodation at 36.3%, or in a social rented sector registered provider tenancy at 21.7%.
- Accommodation secured at relief is more likely to be a social rented supported housing or hostel offer at 26.6%
- Main duty acceptances have reduced by 29.3% over the past three years, due to the number of households who are prevented from becoming homeless or have homelessness relieved

The number of households owed the main duty of assistance (obtain permanent accommodation for households that are unintentionally homeless and have a priority need) has decreased 29.3%, from 56,600 in 2017-2018 before the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 (HRA17) to 40,040 in 2019-2020, two years after the new legislation came into force. This is because more households are receiving assistance at an earlier stage, through prevention and relief duties, one of the aims of the legislation.

The number of households in temporary accommodation has risen to 93,000 on 31st March 2020, the highest level in almost 15 years. This is largely driven by single households, while the number of households with children in temporary accommodation has remained more stable.

**Chart 1: Households in temporary accommodation, annual snapshot taken on 31<sup>st</sup> March, England, 2009 - 2020**



Source: Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government

### Demographics of homeless households

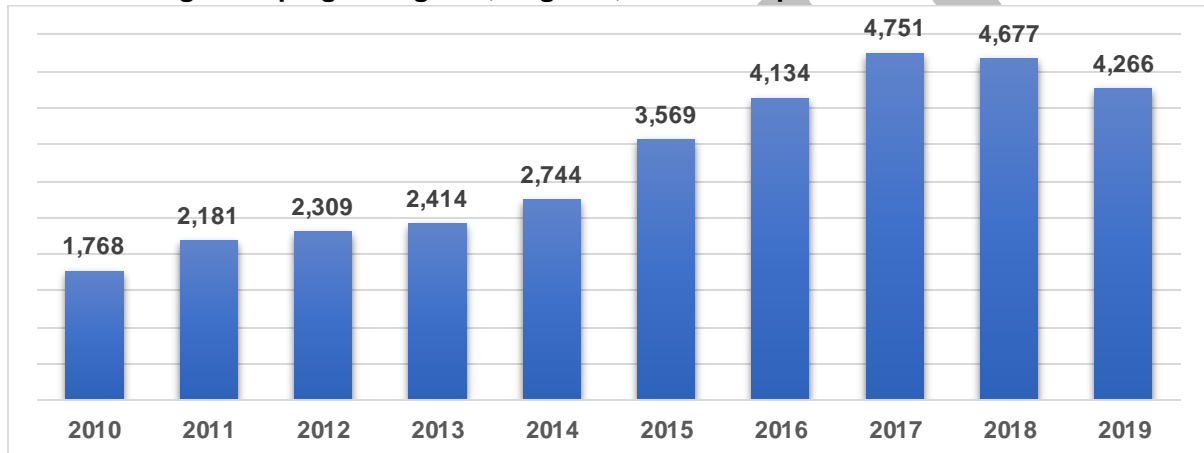
During 2019-20 69.8% of homeless households had a White lead applicant, while 84.6% of individuals in England are White, suggesting White households are less likely to be homeless. Households containing an Asian lead applicant are also underrepresented as

they account for just 6.3% of homeless applications and for 8.1% of the population. Households with a Black lead applicant are the most disproportionately homeless as they account for 10.7% of those owed a duty while they are estimated to comprise of 3.6% of the population.

In 2019-20, the most common age group of lead applicants in households owed a prevention or relief duty were aged between 25 and 34 years old, making up 87,990 households or 30.5% of the total.

The latest rough sleeping snapshot statistics<sup>8</sup> show that in 2019 there were 4,266 individuals recorded as sleeping rough on a single night in England.

**Chart 2: Rough sleeping in England, England, annual snapshot taken Autumn 2010-2019**



Source: Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government

### 3.4 Homelessness Policy

The UK Government has an ambition of ending street homelessness by 2024<sup>9</sup>.

From 2017-2019, the UK Government invested £1.2bn to tackle homelessness, which included £76m for an initiative to reduce street homelessness and £28m to pilot the Housing First approach. In August 2018, the MHCLG published a Rough Sleeping Strategy<sup>10</sup>.

The UK Government appointed an independent advisor to lead a review into the causes of street homelessness, that will provide advice on additional action required to end street homelessness by the end of 2024.

### Everyone In campaign

The UK Government's initial response to COVID-19 and rough sleeping in March 2020 was to bring in those people experiencing street homelessness to protect their health and stop wider transmission, particularly in hot spot areas, and those in assessment centres and shelters that are unable to comply with social distancing advice.

<sup>8</sup> Rough sleeping snapshot in England: autumn 2019. Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government.

<sup>9</sup> The Conservative and Unionist Party, Manifesto 2019.

<sup>10</sup> The rough sleeping strategy, 2018, Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government

By September 2020, over 29,000 people were reported as being helped, with 10,000 provided with emergency accommodation and nearly 19,000 provided with settled accommodation or move-on support.

An eviction ban for six months was put into force. Subsequently the law was changed to increase notice periods to six months. Bailiff enforcement action is not permitted during national restrictions.

All local authorities were asked to update actions plans for tackling rough sleeping by the end of 2020, following which they have been expected to carry out a rapid assessment of need for everyone they assist who is experiencing street homelessness.

As new restrictions came into force in from January 2021, MHCLG asked local housing authorities once again to make sure those experiencing street homelessness were helped to obtain accommodation and also register with a GP.

An independent review of the HRA 2017<sup>11</sup>, commissioned by MHCLG, concluded that more people are getting help who previously would not. The review also identified improvements could be made to how the HRA is being administered, data collection and joint working.

Research<sup>12</sup> carried out by MHCLG with over 500 people who had experienced street homelessness found that before sleeping rough most had not been in stable accommodation. The research estimated the annual cost of a person who is experiencing street homelessness was £12.2k, compared to £3.1k for people at risk of homelessness who do not have to sleep rough.

### **3.5 Homelessness Funding**

Since December 2019, The UK Government has allocated over £700m to local homelessness services, with over 300 councils across England receiving a share of funding to support people experiencing homelessness in their areas.

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<sup>11</sup> Knight, Tim., Greenstock, Jane., Beadle, Shane., Charalambous, Steph., Fenton, Catherine. 2020. Evaluation of the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act: Final Report. Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government. London.

<sup>12</sup> 2020. Understanding the multiple vulnerabilities, support needs and experiences of people who sleep rough in England. Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government. London.

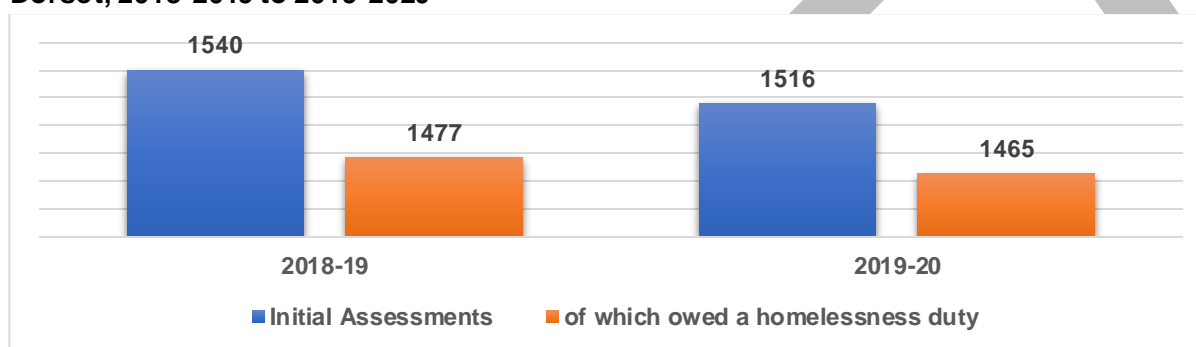
## 4.0 Local Homelessness Context

The information in this section of this Homelessness Strategy is a summary of the evidence found in a recent review of homelessness in Dorset<sup>13</sup>.

### 4.1 Levels of Homelessness

Initial assessments, introduced by the HRA17<sup>14</sup>, determine if a duty is owed to a person who is homeless or threatened with homelessness. The number of assessments carried out by Dorset Council, and former component housing authorities, reduced by 1.5% between 2018-2019 and 2019-2020. Of those assessed, 95.9% during 2018-2019 and 96.6% during 2019-2020 were found to be owed a homelessness duty.

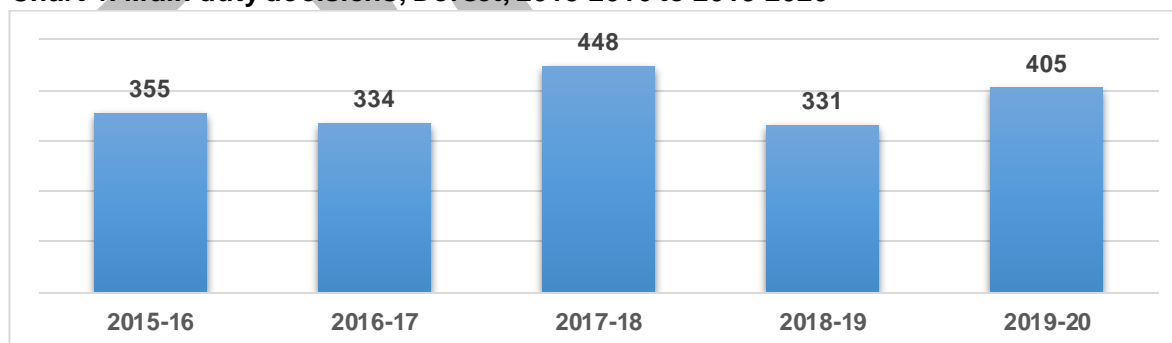
**Chart 3: Number of households initially assessed for a homelessness duty post enactment of HRA17, Dorset, 2018-2019 to 2019-2020**



Source Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government

The number of main housing duty<sup>15</sup> decisions made on homelessness applications in Dorset for the period 2015-2016 to 2019-2020, was at a peak in 2017-2018, reducing by 25% the following year to the lowest number for the five-year period. It is not clear why there was an increase in 2017-2018, but Dorset Council followed the national trend in 2018-2019, all showing significant reductions with the enactment of the HRA17.

**Chart 4: Main duty decisions, Dorset, 2015-2016 to 2019-2020**



Source Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government

During 2019-2020, 65.18% of main duty decisions found applicants to be eligible for assistance, in priority need and homeless. 18% were found to be not homeless. The proportion of not homeless

<sup>13</sup> Morland, N., Christou, A., (2019). A review of homelessness in the Local Authority of Dorset

<sup>14</sup> The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 (Commencement and Transitional and Savings Provisions) Regulations 2018

<sup>15</sup> Housing Act 1996, Pt VII s193(2)

applicants has reduced significantly since the enactment of HRA17, as should be expected with an increase in prevention activity.

The main ethnic group was white and main applicants were predominantly aged between 25-44 years. Households which included dependent children were the majority household type that were found to be eligible for assistance, unintentionally homeless and having a priority need for accommodation.

For the period 2015-2016 to 2019-2020 the use of all types of temporary accommodation has increased in Dorset, in particular the use of bed and breakfast accommodation which for the last quarter of 2019-2020 was the most commonly used form of accommodation.

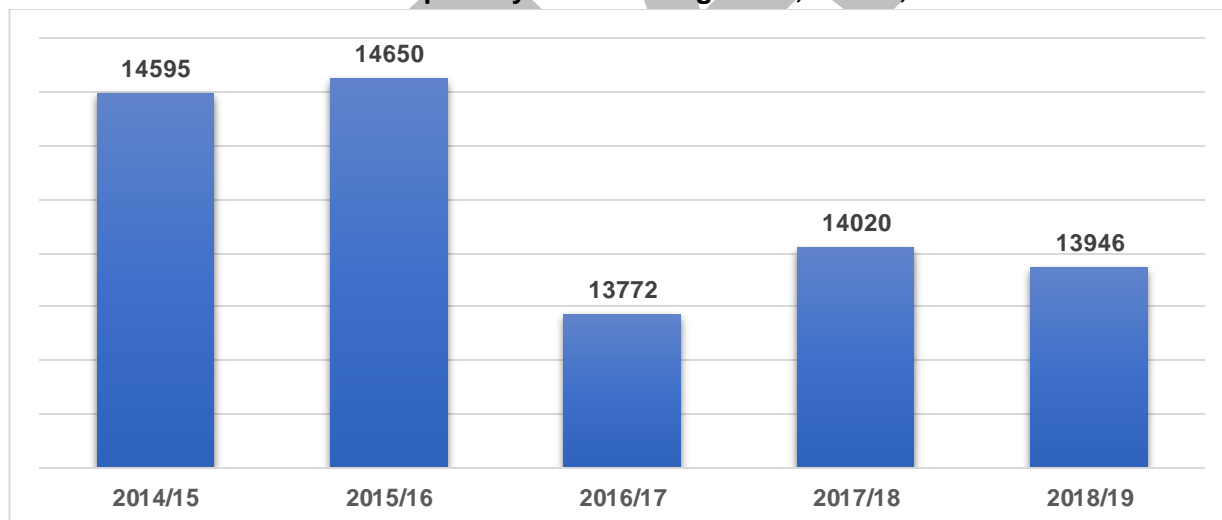
The levels of rough sleeping in Dorset have remained low over the past 5 years (2015-2019), recording 18 persons sleeping rough on the 2019 annual count.

The relative rate of homelessness, temporary accommodation usage and rough sleeping for Dorset is lower than that of Bournemouth, Christchurch & Poole (BCP), South West England, England not including London, and the whole of England.

To forecast future levels of homelessness, child poverty rates, labour market statistics, and house price data has been analysed.

At a local level 23.4% of Dorset children were identified as living in poverty, according to the latest data. The number and portion of children in poverty in Dorset is lower than BCP, South West, England without London and the whole of England.

**Chart 5: Number of children in poverty after housing costs, Dorset, 2014-2015 to 2018-2019**



Source: Child Poverty Action Group. End Child Poverty

#### Indicators of future likely levels of homelessness

In Dorset the percentage of 16-64-year-olds recorded as unemployed is lower compared to elsewhere. Of the Dorset population aged 16-64, 2.7% are in receipt of out of work welfare benefits. Of these, 52% are between the ages of 25 to 49 years This is lower than BCP, South West England, and all of England. The percentage of 16-64-year-olds in employment in Dorset is lower than BCP, South West England and all of England, while there are a higher percentage of self-employed workers.



Gross weekly pay is on average lower in Dorset compared with BCP, South West England and all of England.

Conversely, median house prices in Dorset are higher compared to BCP, South West England, and England which means a higher than average house price to earnings ratio of 10.06 times median gross annual earnings for Dorset. This is higher than BCP, South West England and all of England.

## 4.2 Preventing Homelessness

### Duty to refer

A dedicated online referral form and specific email address is available on Dorset Council's website for public authorities and other organisations to use when contact is made with someone who might be at risk of homelessness. 202 referrals were made during 2019-2020, of which 31% were from public authorities. In addition to the Duty to Refer<sup>16</sup>, many housing associations that hold stock in the Dorset Council area have signed up to the National Housing Federation's voluntary Commitment to Refer<sup>17</sup>.

Responsibilities performed by Dorset Council include:

- Providing housing advice,
- Taking applications for homelessness assistance,
- Determining eligibility for assistance,
- Providing accommodation for an interim period to people who might be homeless, eligible for assistance and have a priority need,
- Completing assessments and formulating personalised plans,
- Fulfilling duties to prevent and/or relieve homelessness, provide accommodation to people who are unintentionally homeless and have a priority need, plus provide advice and accommodation for a reasonable period to people who are intentionally homeless and have a priority need,
- Making referrals to other local authorities for persons who do not have a connection to Dorset,
- Completing reviews of decisions made about entitlements to assistance,
- Ensuring suitability of accommodation offered, protection of a household's belongings, working with children services when cases involve children, receiving referrals from specified public authorities, and
- Detecting fraudulent applications for assistance.

Dorset Council's website has a specific page which includes details about how to access the housing and homelessness services, plus links to information and services for:

- Rough sleeper outreach workers
- Dedicated support for victims of domestic abuse
- Initiatives that can prevent homelessness (e.g. landlord incentives that can assist to secure private rented sector (PRS) accommodation)
- Facts about people's rights to assistance when homeless.

Dorset Council also offers a range of information about homelessness within its web pages, including:

- The duty of specified public authorities to refer cases of homelessness to a local authority,
- Rights to make an application for homelessness assistance,
- Provision of temporary accommodation, and
- Entitlements to seek a review of a homelessness decision.

<sup>16</sup> Homelessness (Review Procedure Etc) Regulations 2018, Part 4 Duty to Refer

<sup>17</sup> National Housing Federation. (2018). Commitment to refer: guidance for housing associations



Dorset Citizens Advice office operates a face to face triage service, five days each week at the Dorchester Branch. Advice is also available online and at other branches, by telephone, email webchat, and video link.

An officer from Dorset Council's Homelessness Service will attend a local Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangement meeting if required.

Dorset Council's Homelessness Service and Children's Social Care work with children aged 16 and 17, plus young adults leaving care aged 18, 19, or 20 years, each fulfilling any relevant duty owed. Children's Social Care facilitate the organisation of a personal adviser for each person leaving care, to provide support until their 21<sup>st</sup> birthday (or 25<sup>th</sup> if they remain in full time education). For 16- and 17-year olds there is a joint protocol setting out how officers from both services will work together to ensure that these children receive a seamless service from the first approach as homeless or threatened homelessness. Following the introduction of the HRA17, new guidance was published jointly with MHCLG and the Department of Education on the provision of accommodation for 16 and 17 years-olds who may be homeless and/or require accommodation<sup>18</sup> therefore a review of the current protocol is required.

There are some specific homelessness prevention initiatives to respond to the common characteristics of adults who experience homelessness. Contact details are available on the council website.

The You First Domestic Abuse, Stalking and Sexual Violence Integrated Service provides outreach support in the community and accommodation-based services in Dorset, including a safe house for those at significant risk of harm.

The Lantern Trust in Weymouth help to prevent homelessness by mediating and advocating with landlords on behalf of individuals and assisting with rent deposits. The Lantern Trust has their own housing and benefits team and provide premises for Shelter Housing First, and Citizens Advice, who has a drop-in service two days each week plus a GP service each Friday. The Dorset Council Integrated Prevention Support Service fund the core running costs of the Trust.

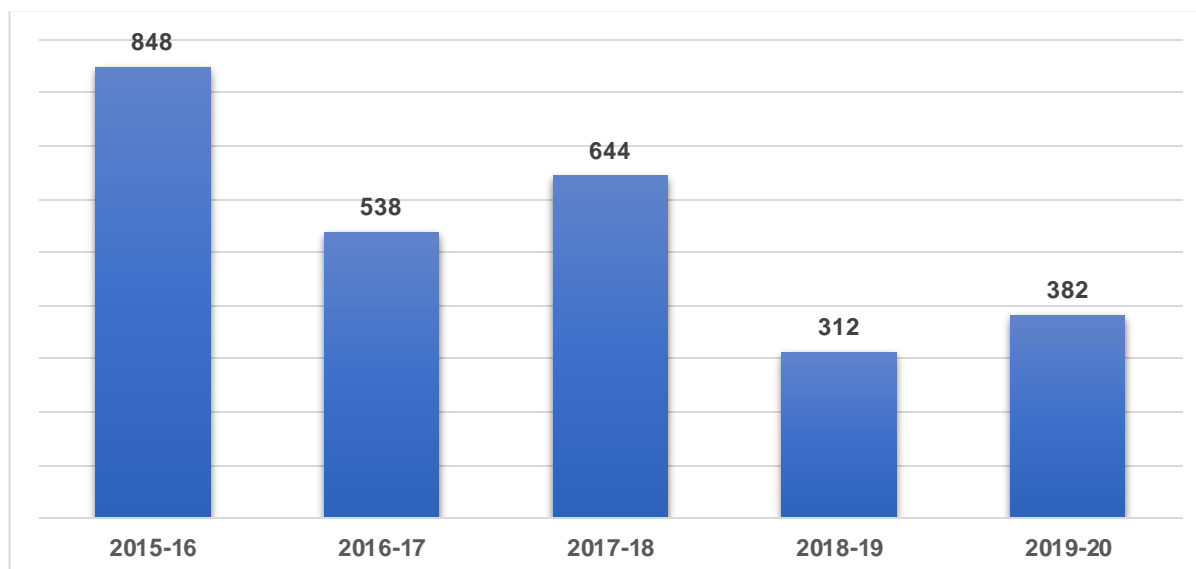
Royal British Legion and SSAFA provide access to welfare benefits, debt and money advice and other support to anyone who has served in the armed forces, including helping rough sleeping veterans off the street and into move on accommodation when they are ready.

The number of cases where positive action by Dorset Council (and the local authorities that preceded it) prevented homelessness was highest in 2015-16, and has reduced each year since, becoming lower in 2018-2019 than all other years. This coincided with the implementation of the new HRA17 duties, and new recording methods being instigated by MHCLG, as well as the reorganisation of local government in Dorset.

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<sup>18</sup> Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, Department for Education. (2018). Prevention of homelessness and provision of accommodation for 16 and 17-year old young people who maybe homeless and/or require accommodation. Guidance to children's services authorities and local housing authorities about their duties under Part 3 of the Children Act 1989 and Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996 to secure or provide accommodation for homelessness 16 and 17-year-old young people

**Chart 5: Number of cases where positive action succeeded in preventing homelessness, Dorset, 2015-2016 to 2019-2020**



Source Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government

The majority of main applicants of households owed a prevention or relief duty are between the ages of 25-34 for both 2018-2019 and 2019-2020, followed by those aged 18-24 and those aged between 35-44. All three aged groups had small reduction in numbers for the two-year period, while those aged 75+ increased by 46% to 32 households. Those aged 16 to 17-year olds, the age group who cannot yet be legally responsible for a tenancy, increased by 28% to 23 households.

For 2019-2020, the main ethnic group of those owed a prevention or relief duty in Dorset was White British at 95.4%, followed by Mixed at 0.7%, Black or Black British and Asian or Asian British, both at 0.5% and Other Ethnic Origin at 0.4%. 2.5% of cases had no ethnic group stated.

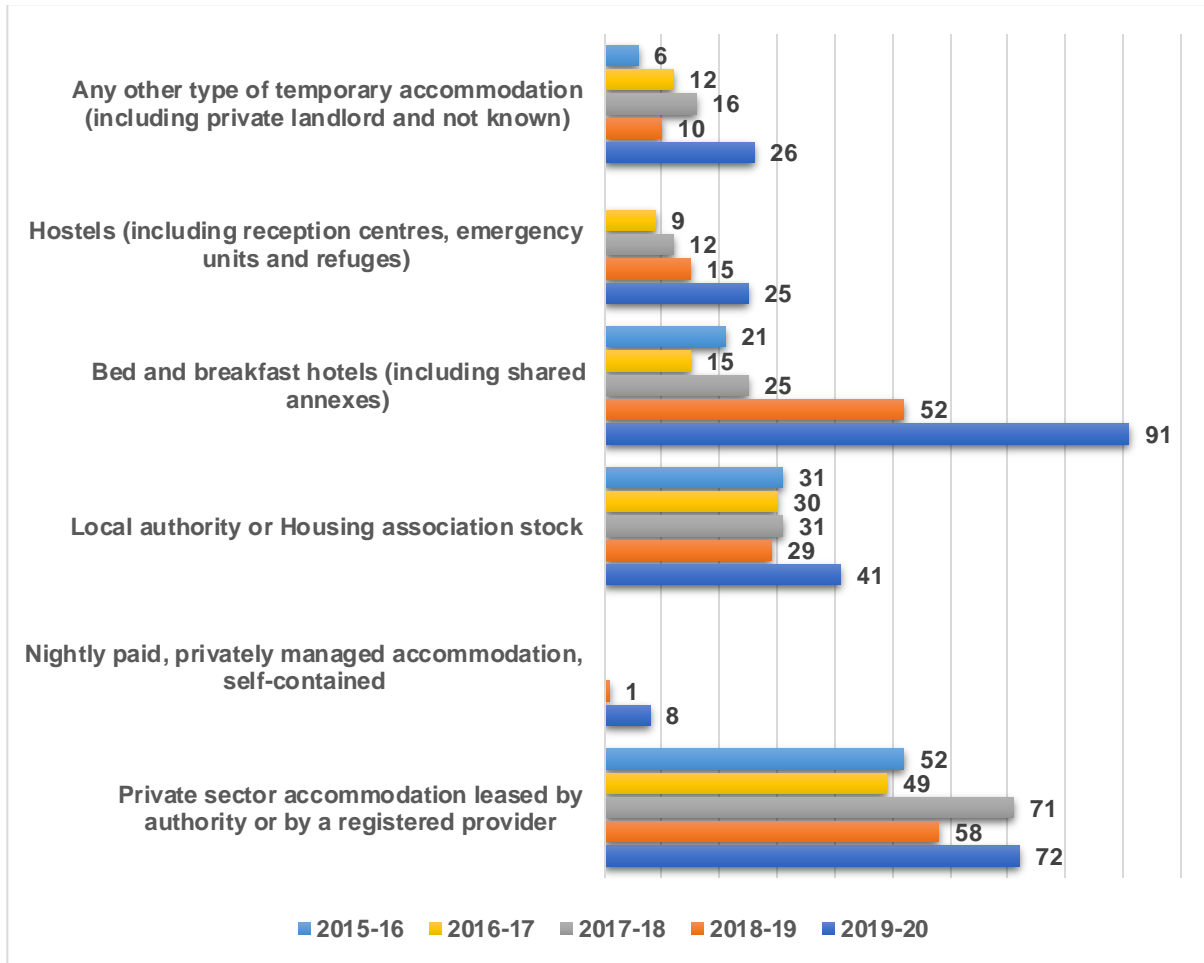
### 4.3 Securing accommodation

#### Housing homeless households

Dorset currently have access to 224 units of temporary accommodation located across the area and is seeking to increase this portfolio. Emergency bed and breakfast accommodation in the towns of Weymouth (in the south west of the local authority area) and Bournemouth (in a neighbouring local authority area) is also used regularly. During the past five years, temporary accommodation usage has increased across Dorset, BCP, South West England, England not including London, and the whole of England. The relative and actual usage of temporary accommodation is lower in Dorset than all comparator areas.

Most households to whom Dorset Council owe a duty because they are eligible for assistance, unintentionally homeless and have a priority need for accommodation, are provided with temporary accommodation for the foreseeable future. Leasing of private sector housing for use as temporary accommodation, is the most common method used to accommodate homeless households in Dorset and all comparator areas.

**Chart 6: Number of households in temporary accommodation at end of final quarter by type of accommodation, Dorset, 2015-2026 to 2019-2020**



Source Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government

Homelessness relief activities are typically carried out by Dorset Council’s homelessness service, as well as the commissioned Integrated Prevention Services.

449 cases of accommodation being secured to relieve homelessness, have been recorded in the two years since the commencement of the HRA 17. The number of relief cases increased between 2018-19 and 2019-20 across Dorset and all comparator areas.

There are three common forms of accommodation used to relieve homelessness, locally and nationally: (i) supported housing, of which there is only a limited amount in Dorset; (ii) private rented sector accommodation; and (iii) social rented housing. Demand for all types of accommodation exceeds the supply available. The Homelessness and Rough Sleeping action plan includes activity to increase the housing supply and make best use of stock.

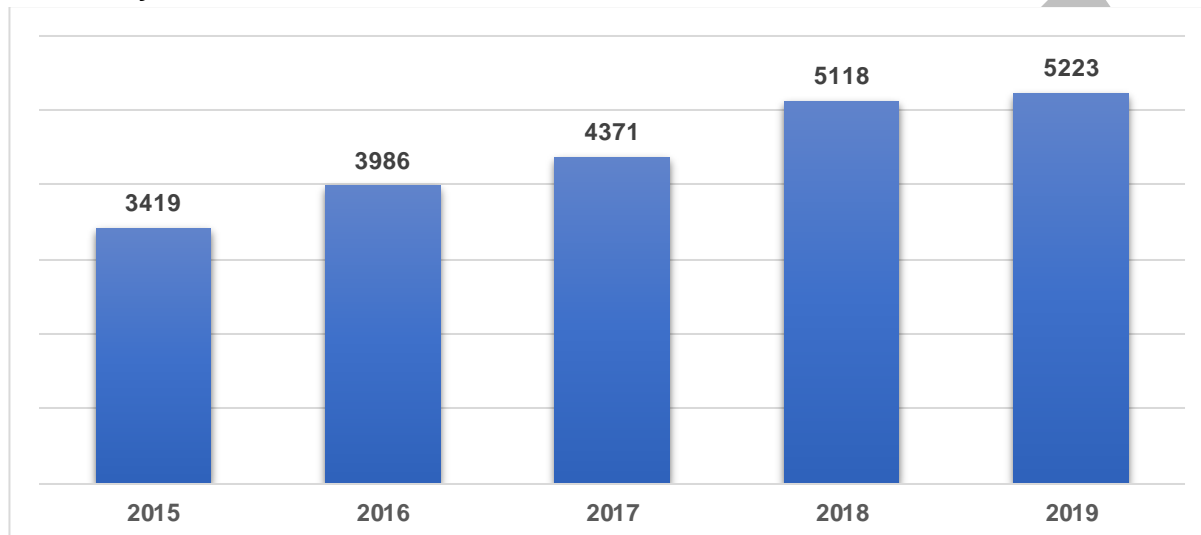
The former districts making up Dorset Council, previously adopted the use of discretionary powers to make a suitable<sup>19</sup> offer of private sector housing<sup>20</sup> to make an offer of accommodation to people who are homeless. In order to assist with securing this accommodation, Dorset Council’s Homelessness Service works with housing benefit administrators to arrange discretionary housing payments, to help cover rent in advance and/or rental security deposits.

<sup>19</sup> Homelessness (Suitability of Accommodation) (England) Order 2012.

<sup>20</sup> Private Rented Sector Offer (PRSO) Policy 1. Policy Christchurch Borough Council & East Dorset District Council, 2017

Dorset Council has a common housing allocation scheme, named Dorset Home Choice, with BCP Council, plus with seven housing associations. Between 2015 and 2019 the number of households on the Dorset Council's housing waiting list has increased each year. This is slightly contrary to trends in the other comparator areas which have seen increases only since 2018.

**Chart 7: Number of households registered for an allocation of social rented housing at end of calendar year, Dorset, 2015 to 2019.**



Source Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government

Social rented accommodation is still the main type of housing secured for those owed a main homelessness duty, with 128 properties being allocated to homeless household owed the main duty in 2019-2020 and a further 127 properties allocated in the same period to those owed a relief duty.

1.4% of Dorset's active housing applicants have indicated that they are homeless or threatened with homelessness. Additionally, 0.9% are owed a prevention or relief duty and 0.8% are owed a main duty.

The Dorset Home Choice policy was reviewed following public consultation in November 2020, with changes to be implemented in during 2021. Homeless households owed a full housing duty<sup>21</sup> will be placed in Band A<sup>22</sup>, alongside exceptional housing need: disrepair, medical and welfare, and statutory overcrowding<sup>23</sup>. Those owed a relief duty<sup>24</sup> will be placed in Band B, and those owed a prevention duty<sup>25</sup> will be placed in Band C. The policy also confirms that serving prisoners with a local connection who will be homeless will have their application considered up to 2 months prior to their release date.

Dorset Council Tenancy Strategy<sup>26</sup> sets out the matters that must be considered by all social landlords in Dorset Council area when developing their own tenancy policy. The strategy included a commitment to prevent the termination of a fixed term tenancy from leading to an increase in homelessness approaches and requiring registered providers to provide households affected by the termination of a tenancy with relevant advice and assistance to enable them to relocate to alternative suitable accommodation.

<sup>21</sup> Housing Act, 1996, Part 7, section 193 Duty to persons with priority need who are not homeless intentionally

<sup>22</sup> Dorset Council Housing Allocations Policy, 2021 – 2026, p.21

<sup>23</sup> Housing Act 1985, Part X, section 324 definition of overcrowding

<sup>24</sup> Housing Act 1996, Part 7, Section 189B Initial duty owed to all eligible persons who are homeless

<sup>25</sup> Housing Act 1996, Part 7, section 195(2) Duties in cases of threatened homelessness

<sup>26</sup> Dorset Joint Tenancy Strategy, Dorset Councils, plus Christchurch and Poole, 2012 to 2015

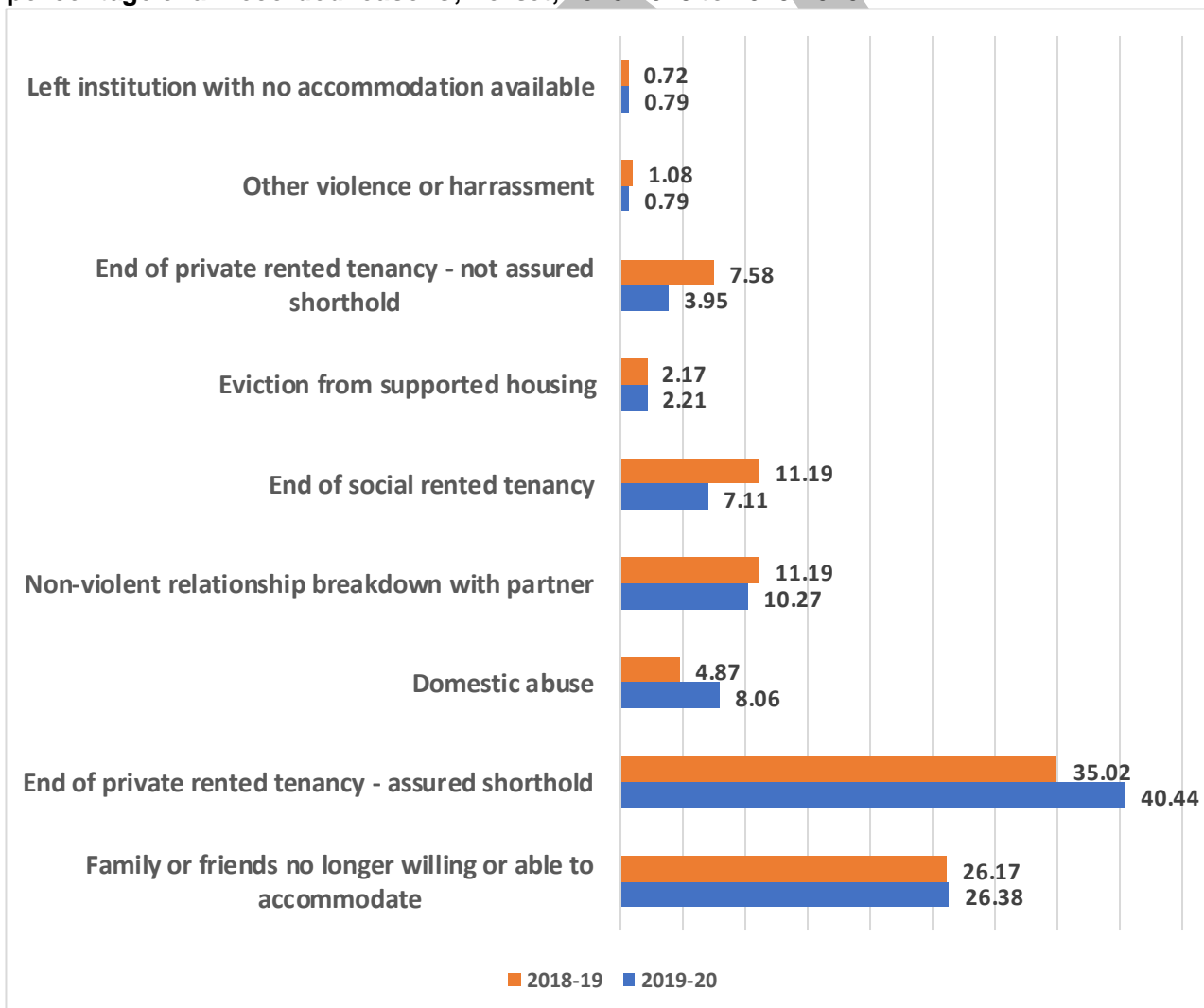
In 2021 work will begin to develop a new Housing Strategy which will set out a 5-year plan for housing in the new unitary area of Dorset Council. This will contain our plans to increase the supply of housing for all sections of the Dorset community, to drive incremental improvements to the quality of Dorset housing and to address housing needs across all localities, vulnerabilities and for all groups of vulnerable residents. This strategy will support objectives and action plan of the Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy.

#### 4.4 Providing Support

The type and prevalence of support needs for households owed a prevention, relief or main duty has been monitored since the introduction of the HRA 17. During 2019-20, 47% of households owed any homelessness duty by Dorset Council, had a support need, of which 69% had more than one support need.

Of all households owed a homelessness duty, 26.57% lost their last settled home as a result of friends and family no longer willing or able to accommodate, 21.57% due to end of private rented assured shorthold tenancy, 12.8% due to non-violent relationship breakdown and 7.64% due to domestic abuse. 7.16% were due to the end of social rented tenancy, 2.65% as a result of eviction from supported housing and 1.70% due to leaving an institution with no accommodation to go to.

**Chart: 8 Reason for loss of last settled home for households owed a homelessness duty, by percentage of all recorded reasons, Dorset, 2018-2019 to 2019-2020.**



Source Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government

The main type of nationality of main applicant to whom the local authority has accepted a duty of assistance are UK Nationals.

Presently, information, advice and assistance for people experiencing street homelessness is provided by the Council from each of the former district or borough locations. Support is also provided by Julian House who have a dedicated assertive outreach service that help provide food, assist with access to drug and alcohol services, mental health support and accommodation to people sleeping on the streets.

The Lantern Trust in Weymouth is commissioned to deliver a supported lettings service for rough sleepers, assisting with rent deposits, applications for welfare benefits, organising GP access and helping to set up tenancies. People who use this service receive a personal budget of £800, funded through short-term grant awarded by MHCLG as part of its Rough Sleepers Initiative, which enables a fast tenancy set up, purchasing of white goods and other necessities.

The Dorset Healthcare University NHS Trust Homeless Health Service<sup>27</sup> provides intensive medical support for people experiencing street homelessness, who have a physical or mental health problems. The links between health and housing are recognised in this strategy. The action plan includes commitments to maximise opportunities to strengthen the provision of support to people experiencing complex and multiple health needs.

Support from community groups is valuable. The strategy recognises the valuable contribution positive community engagement has for people who are homeless and encourages the inclusion of community representation in delivering the objectives set out.

#### **4.5 Resources**

Alongside the money committed from Dorset Council's General Fund budget to fund homelessness services, funding has been awarded by MHCLG to support prevention and reduction of homelessness and rough sleeping:

- £225,777 – Homelessness Reduction Grant 2020-2021
- £442,352 – Flexible Homelessness Support Grant (FHSG) 2020-2021
- £472,470 – Rough Sleeper Initiative 2020-2021
- 624,000 – Next Steps Accommodation Programme Short Term and Intermediate Support fund
- £1,556,730 – Next Steps Accommodation Programme Longer Term and Move on Accommodation Capital Funding

The Homelessness Reduction Grant and Flexible Homelessness Support Grants have from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2021, been combined into a Homelessness Prevention Grant, and uplifted by £47m nationally. Dorset has been awarded £889,494 has been awarded for 2021-2022. This does not currently fully fund the cost of homelessness in Dorset but contributes to work to reduce the financial and human impact.

Dorset Council, and the former constituent local authority areas, have received a grant funding from MHCLG to enable the delivery of local strategies and services since 2003. The funding can be used for initiatives carried out by the local authority or invested into projects operated by voluntary organisations.

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<sup>27</sup> Homeless Health Service [www.dorsethealthcare.nhs/homeless-health-service](http://www.dorsethealthcare.nhs/homeless-health-service)

Dorset Council employs a total of 31 officers (26.2 full-time equivalent) to administer public law homelessness duties. A service review is currently underway to ensure that the necessary number of experienced officers are in the appropriate locations across Dorset in order to meet current and future demand.

In accordance with Council rules a new IT system is presently being procured. The new system should continue to deliver a range of automated efficiencies including effective case management, compiling statistics and receiving referrals.

#### **4.6 Consultation**

Interviews of 22 stakeholders and staff were carried out to inform the Homelessness Review and this Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy.

Two online surveys were made available, one for service users, another for stakeholders. A total of 30 responses were completed by people who had experienced homelessness. 27% of these described themselves as currently homeless, including two people describing themselves as currently sleeping rough, 20% as being threatened with homelessness and 43% as formerly homeless, now in settled housing. 12% of respondents had been homeless on at least one previous occasion and 46% believed being helped up to two months before crisis would help them prevent homelessness.

53% thought that the best housing option when homeless or threatened with homelessness was social rented housing. 70% felt that when homeless or threatened with homelessness, the most important matter to get help with was to find a house and 67 of service users agreed that homelessness funding should be used to secure additional accommodation.

57% of service users completing the survey were female, and 51% were aged 25 to 54 years. 43% lived alone and all stated they were of a white ethnic origin.

A total of 8 responses were received from stakeholders, an 11% response rate.

75% of these work for a public authority within Dorset and the same number believe that homelessness has increased during the past five years, with 62.5% believing it will continue to increase. The number of respondents was insufficient to provide information on the questions within the survey.

## 5.0 Delivering this Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy

### 5.1 Delivery arrangements

Legal and regulatory requirements require the delivery of this Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy to involve close working between Dorset Council's housing, adult social care and children services. Additionally, housing associations are also expected to play an active role.

A steering group shall be established to oversee the delivery of the strategy. The Dorset Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy Steering Group shall meet every three months, covering an agenda that will include:

- information about the current levels of homelessness,
- discussion about the progress towards achieving the objectives and actions of the strategy, to prevent homelessness, secure accommodation and provide support, and
- decisions about the allocation of resources to deliver the strategy.

The Dorset Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy Steering Group shall be responsible for changing or recommending updates to the action plan, to ensure it remains relevant. The steering group shall be chaired by Dorset Council's Corporate Director of Housing and Community Safety. Other members of shall include chief or principal officers from bodies that have a statutory obligation to assist with delivering the strategy and administering homelessness duties, these being:

- Adult Social Care,
- Children's Services (social care, leaving care, youth offending), and
- Housing Associations (especially those that own social rented housing previously voluntarily transferred by the former Dorset district local authorities – Magna Housing Limited, Sovereign Housing Association Ltd, and Synergy Housing Limited - a subsidiary of Aster Group).

Senior officers for the following public bodies shall also be invited to be members of the Dorset Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy Steering Group, as these organisations have duties to refer individuals who are homeless or threatened homelessness, and/or are responsible for setting local policy for people who are more at risk of homelessness:

- Local prisons
- National Probation Service:
- Jobcentre Plus
- NHS
- Public Health Dorset
- Dorset Police & Crime Commissioner
- Chairpersons of any casework action groups
- Chairperson of the Dorset Homelessness Service Providers Forum
- Chairperson of the Dorset Homelessness Lived Experience Panel

Membership could also include periodic attendance, whenever a specific reason warranted it, from other agencies who can contribute to tackling homelessness, such as –

- other public authorities,
- voluntary and community organisations (or a representative body on behalf of the sector), and
- Any other interested persons (including those with experience of homelessness).

Short life (e.g. less than 12 months) task & finish groups shall be created as and when needed, to accomplish a specific action from the strategy. Membership of these groups shall vary, depending on the



specifics of any given actions. Nevertheless, it will be necessary for a member of the steering group to chair any task & finish group, to ensure accountability and deliverability.

A homelessness forum shall take place, twice a year, to promote progress towards achieving the objectives and actions of this Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy. Attendance at the Dorset Homelessness Forum shall be open to everyone with an interest in tackling and preventing homelessness. The Dorset Homelessness Forum shall be chaired by a Dorset Council cabinet member, whose responsibilities include homelessness. Local or national expert figures shall be invited to speak at the forum. A core agenda will cover the following matters:

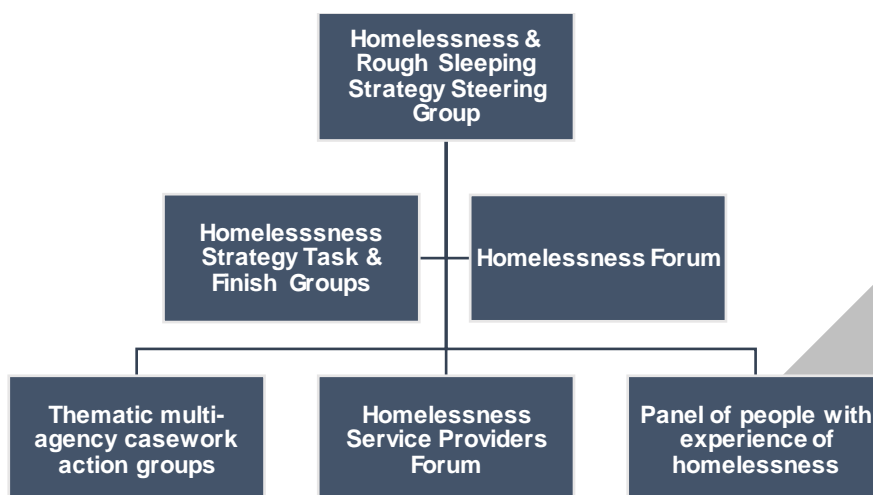
- a report from the Chair of the Dorset Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy Steering Group, on progress being made to accomplishing the objectives and actions of this Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy,
- reports from any Dorset Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy Task & Finish Groups, on the work they have completed,
- recruitment of volunteers to join any Dorset Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy Task & Finish Groups, to carry out actions from this Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy before the next meeting of the Dorset Homelessness Forum,
- reports from thematic and multi-agency casework action groups, that might meet to better co-operate to tackle and prevent homelessness,
- a report from any service provider forum that might meet to improve practice and service standards, and
- a report from any forum of people with experience of homelessness that might meet, to share their expertise and advocate for improvements to policy and practice.

Any number of casework action groups might be set-up, to better coordinate activities across agencies that either commission or provide services for people experiencing any form of homelessness (e.g. street homelessness or hidden homelessness), or due to specific characteristics (e.g. young adults aged under 24 years, persons of a black or other minority ethnic origin), or due to specific causes of homelessness (e.g. persons leaving care, hospital or prison). Chair of such any forums shall attend the Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy steering group, to represent views of the forum members.

A forum for organisations that provide services to tackle homelessness, shall be formed, to benchmark service standards relating to advice, accommodation, support, and other matters. The Chair of the Dorset Homelessness Service Providers Forum shall attend the Dorset Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy Steering Group, to represent views of the forum members.

A panel of service users shall be established, to review the progress of delivering the objectives and actions from the strategy, plus be consulted about the priorities looking ahead. Their know-how can be used to ensure that the actions carried out will have a relevant impact on the lives of those who it is intended to benefit. The Chair of the Dorset Homelessness Lived Experience Panel, shall attend the Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy steering group, to represent views of the panel.

**Graphic 1: Dorset Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy Delivery Structure**



Any of the above groups, forums and panels shall be extended to cover neighbouring local authority areas, when there is evidence that doing so would improve the deliverability of this strategy.

## **5.2 Accountability Structures**

Elected councillors have seen the findings from the Homelessness Review and understand how this affects the wards they are elected to represent. Councillors have been active in decision-making about homelessness matters, taking responsibility to develop and review the strategy.

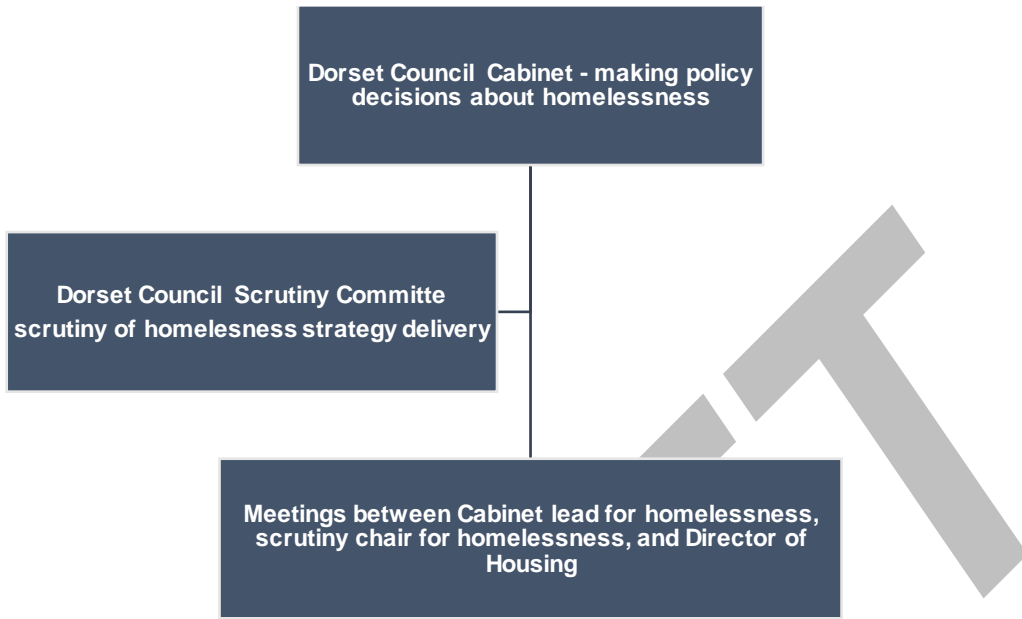
Elected councillors that are members of Dorset Council’s Cabinet, have taken decisions about this strategy. Evidence from the Homelessness Review, plus annual action plan updates shall provide valuable information for members of Dorset Council’s Cabinet to consider. Sufficient time shall be set aside for a discussion by members of Dorset Council’s Cabinet, to consider how the council’s policies can help deliver this strategy. The member of Dorset Council’s Cabinet whose portfolio of responsibilities includes homelessness, will benefit from regular (e.g. quarterly) updates, from the Director of Housing, about the delivery of the strategy, plus information on the levels of homelessness and activities being carried out to tackle homelessness.

A committee of elected councillors, who are not members of Dorset Council’s cabinet, have scrutinised the findings from the Homelessness Review and the priorities and actions of this Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy. A committee of elected councillors shall scrutinise its delivery and any subsequent modifications made to the action plan that accompanies it.

A committee charged with scrutinising homelessness policy and strategy, shall do so at least annually. The chairperson of such a committee, on behalf of the other members of the committee, will benefit from receiving updates from Dorset Council’s Director of Housing, akin to what is set out above for the cabinet member with responsibility for homelessness.

To help ensure all elected councillors understand the statutory homelessness duties the council is charged with, training and briefing notes shall be provided when a councillor is first elected, and periodically thereafter.

**Graphic 2: Dorset Council's Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy Accountability Structure**



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