

# HOME

**HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY**  
**MAKING IT EVERYBODY'S BUSINESS**



Telford & Wrekin  
COUNCIL

# **Homelessness Strategy 2017/18 – 2021/22**

## **Introduction:**

Telford & Wrekin Council is pleased to introduce our Homelessness Strategy for the next five years (2017/18 to 2021/22).

The strategy includes a summary of progress over the last four years, an overview of the current position regarding homelessness in Telford & Wrekin and the priorities and actions that we feel will help to tackle and prevent homelessness in future.

At the heart of the strategy is our commitment to preventing homelessness and finding lasting solutions for people rather than just dealing with households at the point of crisis. The strategy also reinforces that homelessness is 'everybody's business' and highlights our aim to raise awareness of homelessness and co-ordinate our approach, both across the Council and the community.

Over the next five years, there are likely to be some significant changes in national homelessness policy and legislation. This includes the Homelessness Reduction Bill, which was published in October 2016. When implemented, a wider range of people will be eligible for help, including those not currently treated as having a priority need, such as single homeless people. There will also be an even greater emphasis on prevention, as the period that an applicant can be threatened with homelessness and be eligible for help will be extended from 28 days to 56 days. We clearly welcome these proposals, however funding for homelessness and related services is already limited and is likely to reduce further over the next few years, therefore we will need to carefully prioritize the actions in Appendix 1 as we develop our more detailed homelessness delivery plan.

## **Progress Update:**

During the period of the current Homelessness Strategy (2013/14 – 2016/17), our focus has continued to be on the proactive prevention of homelessness, working with our network of local partners. Our approach to preventing homelessness has included:

- ✓ Launching an online housing advice tool, [www.telfordhousingoptions.co.uk](http://www.telfordhousingoptions.co.uk) and an in-house lettings agency, Telford HomeFinder, which signposts people to properties available with accredited landlords
- ✓ With partners, developing a young person scheme to accommodate with support
- ✓ Piloting a scheme with Maninplace to support those rough sleeping out of hours
- ✓ Introducing a triage service at Southwater One to allow early intervention and prevention of homelessness – support available includes:
  - Helping with deposits to secure privately rented accommodation through discretionary housing payments and help completing applications for deposits
  - Helping with accessing hardship or homeless prevention funding to pay off arrears

- Arranging mediation to enable people, particularly young people, to return to live with family or friends
  - Offering additional security measures in the homes of people affected by domestic violence, such as personal alarms and fire safety letter boxes
  - Attending court to represent people facing homelessness and working with registered providers to find alternatives to eviction
  - Signposting to other support services, such as the Citizen's Advice Bureau for debt advice
- ✓ Working with the Home Office to carry out immigration checks, ensuring that we operate to the Government's Right to Rent
  - ✓ Implementing a home from hospital protocol to enable homeless people to be discharged from hospital more quickly
  - ✓ With partners, proactively developing accommodation and support plans for groups that are at a greater risk of becoming homeless, such as those due to leave care and those released from prison.

### **Examples of recent success stories:**

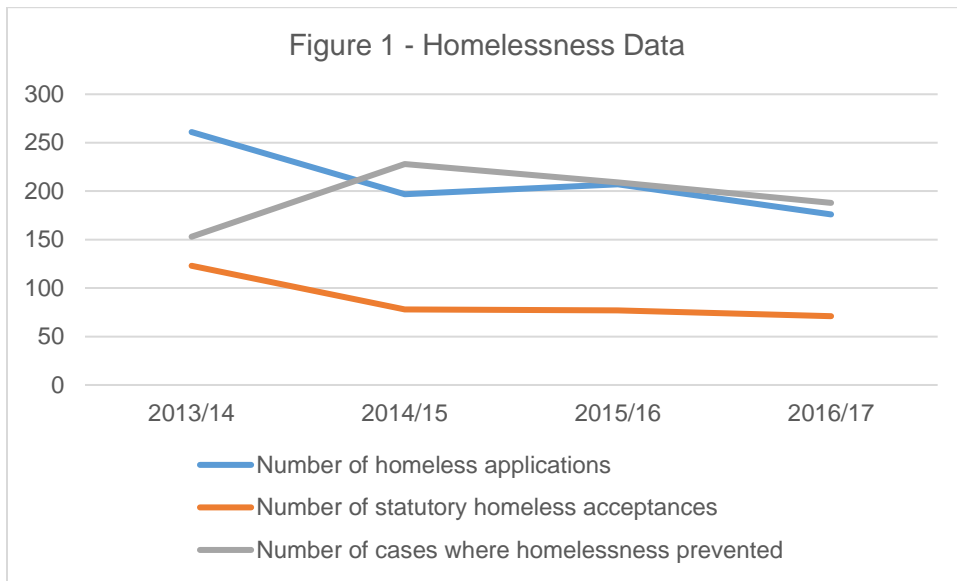
We worked with a 38-year old pregnant former heroin user who was living abroad but wished to return to the UK. To prevent homelessness, mediation took place with the client's family so that she was able to return home and initially stay with her family. We then sourced a 2-bed privately rented property for the client via Telford HomeFinder, helped her with a deposit, and worked with the client so that she was able to source her own rent and move in her before her baby was born. We also worked closely with other local services, such as Children's Safeguarding, Substance Misuse and Thrive (<http://www.inspire2thrive.co.uk>), to ensure that the client had the wider support needed to maintain her tenancy.

We worked with a family (1 adult and 5 children) whose landlord (a registered provider) was seeking possession in court for rent arrears. Working closely with the Citizen's Advice Bureau, we put in place prevention funding to help pay the arrears, an affordable payment plan for the family and mediation with the landlord. As a result of this, the judge suspended action against the family and they were able to stay in their home.

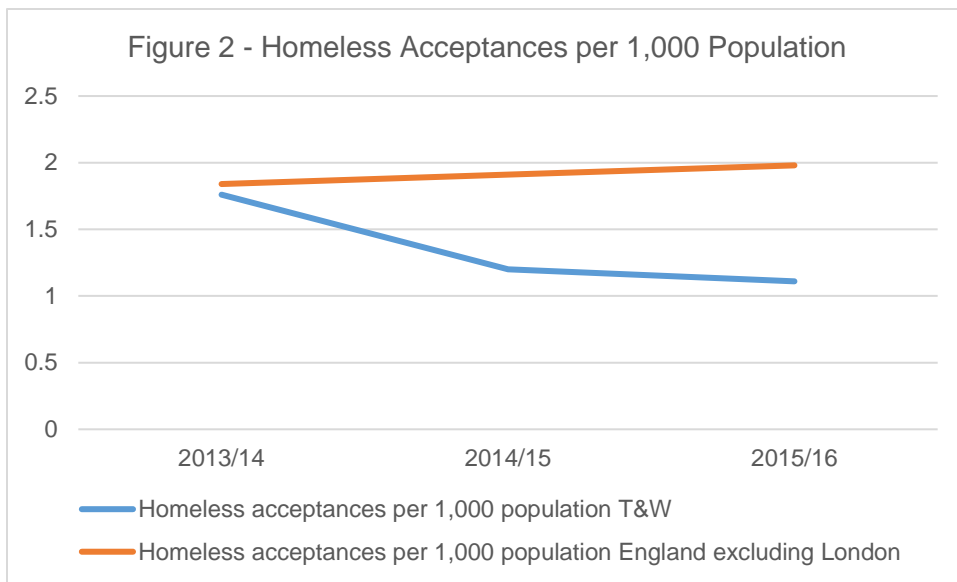
### **Homelessness in Telford & Wrekin:**

The total number of homeless applications received by the Council in 2016/17 is 176. Figure 1 shows that the number of homeless applications received has been on a downward trend since 2014/15.

Figure 1 also shows that the number of homeless acceptances decreased in 2014/15 and have then remained relatively stable. It should be noted that this data on homeless acceptances only relates to people who meet a number of legally prescribed criteria. In practice, the number of households who are homeless is higher than this and some of those who do not meet the legal criteria can still be vulnerable and in need of assistance.

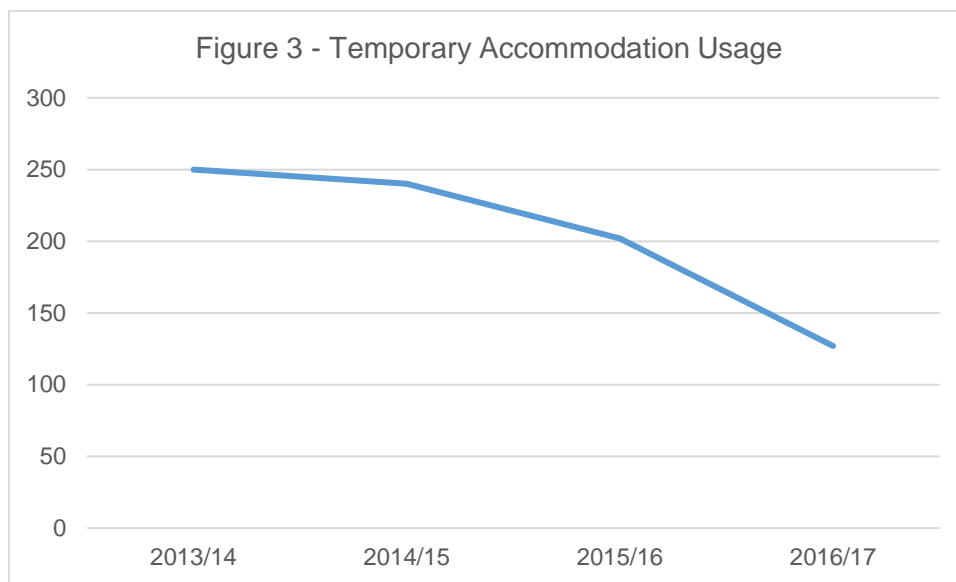


The number of homeless acceptances per 1,000 households in Telford & Wrekin has consistently been lower than the England average (excluding London), as shown in Figure 2. It is also interesting to note that nationally homeless acceptances have been increasing, in contrast to the trends in Telford & Wrekin.



This is thought to be linked to the number of cases where we have been able to prevent homelessness, which as shown in Figure 1, is now at a much higher level than at the start of the previous strategy in 2013/14. The total number of cases where homelessness has been prevented in 2016/17 is 188.

Similarly, we have been able to make further reductions in the use of temporary accommodation (see Figure 3) and have continued to keep use of bed and breakfast accommodation to a minimum. No households have been accommodated in bed and breakfast accommodation for longer than six weeks during this period in 2016/17, although occasionally bed and breakfast is used as a last resort emergency measure out of normal working hours. However future pressures identified may mean we have to look at this resource going forward.



Looking in more detail at the reasons for homelessness, Figure 4 shows that in 2015/16 the majority of homeless applications (60%) were due to two main causes: domestic abuse (30%) or applicants' family unwilling to house them (30%). In comparison, the number of applications linked to rent arrears or termination of tenancies was relatively low. This figure is similar in 2016/17 with domestic abuse representing at 34% and family unwilling to house slightly lower at 22%.

When looking at homeless acceptances and what the most common priority needs were (to be accepted as homeless, one or more priority need has to be met), Figure 5 shows that >96% of acceptances in 2016/17 were linked to three broad needs:

- Having dependent children or being pregnant (62%);
- Being 16 or 17 years old or a care leaver under 21 (17%);
- Fleeing domestic or other violence (18%).

Figure 4 - Most Common Reasons for Homeless Applications  
2015/16

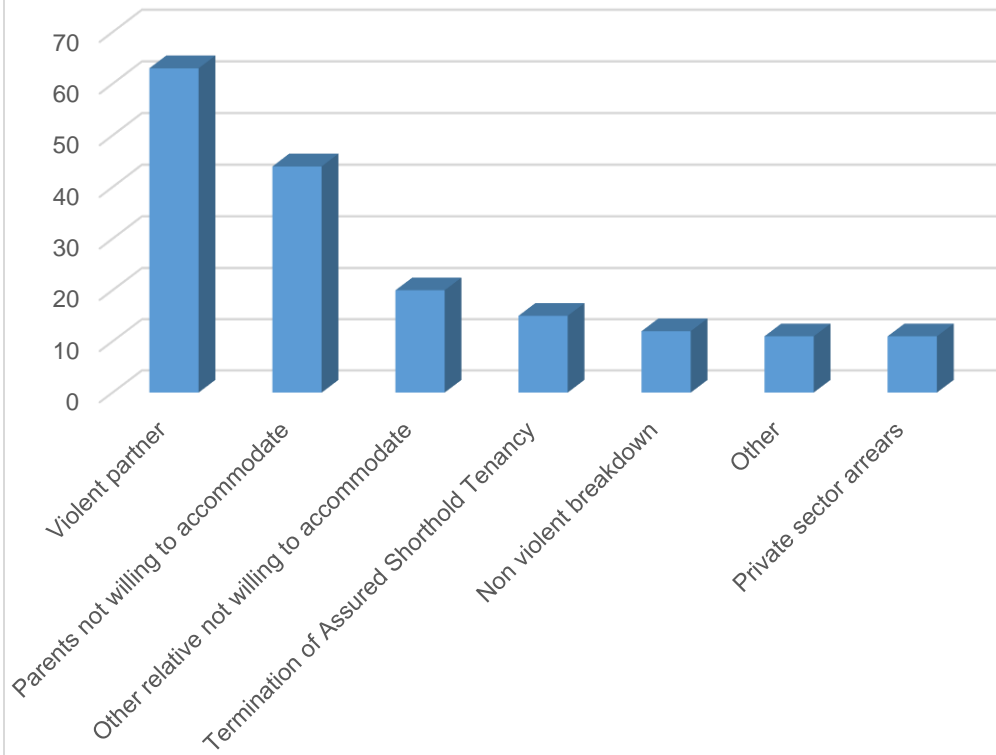
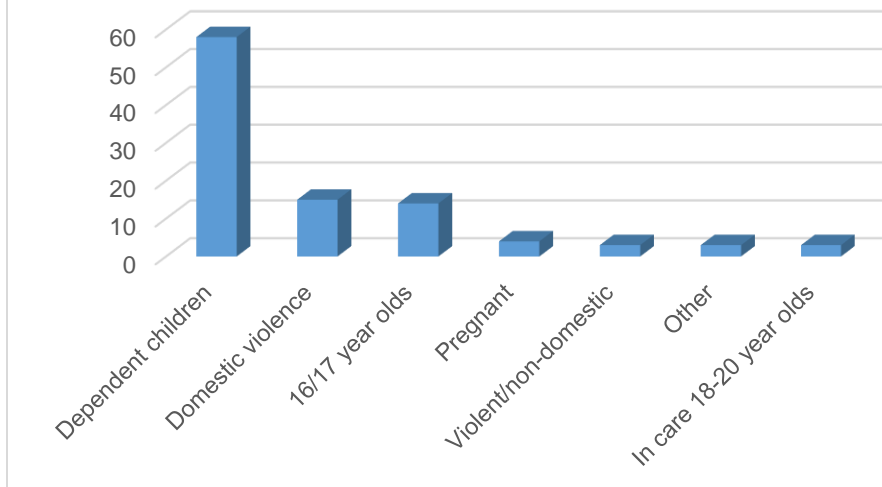


Figure 5 - Acceptances by Priority Need 16/17



## **Future Priorities & Actions:**

We have identified four key strategic priorities for the Homelessness Strategy 2017 – 2022. These priorities have been informed by the homelessness review, most recent data and future proposals. The priorities will form the basis of the a more detailed delivery plan and link to key actions that have been identified to ensure we continue to prioritize and respond to homelessness over the next five years (as set out in Appendix 1) .

The four key priorities are:

- **Priority 1: Ensure that high quality housing advice is accessible and well promoted to all, to ensure that those households or other support services that are able to identify their own housing solutions are able to do so;**
- **Priority 2: Join up council and external services to prevent homelessness arising wherever possible particularly targeting young people and those affected by domestic abuse;**
- **Priority 3: Ensure that temporary accommodation is well managed and meets the needs of the service, ensuring people move onto sustainable housing as soon as possible and minimize the use of bed and breakfast accommodation;**
- **Priority 4: Work with partners to support vulnerable groups and to prevent rough sleeping in the Borough.**

## **Consultation and Partnership Approach:**

Homelessness has been identified as a clear issue and requires a partnership approach to help prevent and combat homelessness both nationally but also locally within the Borough of Telford & Wrekin.

The initial priorities and actions were developed in consultation with front-line staff and through engagement sessions with partners and other services including:

- Customer, Community & Partnerships Scrutiny Committee (who have conducted a scrutiny review of the strategy priorities) and suggestions made have been added into the strategy.
- External partners through the Homeless Partnership Group.
- Internal services, such as Family Connect, Early Help & Support, Benefits and Community Safety.

## **Implementing and Monitoring the Homelessness Strategy:**

In order to take forward the strategy, clear actions have been identified and are set out in the Appendix 1. The actions have been developed and agreed with all partners upon whose cooperation success will rely on.

Monitoring of progress towards achieving the actions within the plan will be undertaken through the Homelessness Partnership Group and new actions will be identified or reviewed which support the priorities set out in the strategy.

## Appendix 1 – Priorities and Key Actions

<b>Priority 1: Ensure that high quality housing advice is accessible and well promoted to all, to ensure that those households or other support services that are able to identify their own housing solutions are able to do so</b>
<b>Action:</b>
Identify improvements to the housing services website and make it easier to access, including links to partner agencies to share information. Design a suite of leaflets with housing and tenancy advice which are printable via the Website
Develop and deliver a communication plan to promote the housing service website to help people self-serve 24/7
Collate all information on housing providers/schemes operating within the Borough and have links to these on all relevant websites
Change the Housing Solutions telephone message to be clearer and encourage self-serve via the Website for those who are able to access through this, ensuring those that need help can do so
Map front line calls to Housing Solutions to stream line future calls
Ensure ward members, town and parish councils and MPs are aware of how to advise residents regarding homelessness through promotion of the Housing Solutions website
Aim to achieve National bench marking standards linked to Homelessness and Housing Advice within Telford & Wrekin Council and with partners
Identify key areas of training and development needed in the Housing Team and feed into the Commercial Services workforce plan, for example attending national and regional meetings to feed into regional strategies and to identify best practice National Housing Solutions tool kits that could be used.
Look at resources that partners can share, including training to help with homelessness.
Promotion of case studies and data in publications such as Your Voice to show what help can be provided.
Partners to update websites with relevant information and sign post to TWC housing website.
Review the Homelessness Partnership membership to enable consistent messages regarding housing across all partners
Continue with preventative services to support individuals to sustain their tenancies and prevent them becoming homeless

**Priority 2: Join up council and external services to prevent homelessness arising wherever possible particularly targeting young people and those affected by domestic abuse**

**Action:**

Explore with partners carrying out exit surveys with young people to understand their experiences in supported/temporary accommodation in order to understand/reduce evictions

Provide online information, specifically aimed at young people

Provide 24/7 support and expand the use of Dodmore Grange for Young People (including those who are not statutory homeless or are intentionally homeless)

Develop a toolkit aimed at young people to help prevent homelessness that is promoted to schools and colleges

Promote to external agencies/partners pathways for young people in housing need to emphasise early intervention and prevention

Better understanding of MARAC (Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference) and how housing feeds effectively into this to help with Domestic Violence clients

Provide updated information to West Mercia Police Website on domestic violence with relevant links to Telford & Wrekin Council services

Build partnerships with Women's Aid and other relevant domestic abuse support to focus on prevention measures

Build on partnership working with Adult services to do a joint assessment approach for vulnerable adults in need of housing to avoid the client getting into a crisis situation

Provide information on services that also help prevent homelessness at key points where young people attend in a clear and approachable format. Look at potential promotion of services through social media

Improve links with the public health team to support teaching of conflict management skills in young people

Identify risk factors for young people becoming homeless to help target preventative work

Have clear process charts for all services linked to Homelessness to understand how it all works together, including RSL, Thrive, Voluntary services, Family Connect etc.

Identify homelessness champions in each service area and with partners to enable quick responses for clients

Sustain current levels of provision at the two current Gypsy and Travellers sites within the Borough

Explore the use of the community building provision at Lodge Road site for Gypsy and Travellers

Allocation of vacant plots for Gypsy and Travellers to be administered through a waiting list in line with procedures ensuring allocation based on priority need and local connection.

<b>Priority 3: Ensure that temporary accommodation is well managed and meets the needs of the service, ensuring people move onto sustainable housing as soon as possible and minimise the use of bed and breakfast accommodation</b>	
<b>Action:</b>	
Review Service Level Agreement with the biT team to turn around temporary accommodation as quickly as possible to keep void time to a minimum	
Identify housing solutions outside of Telford to move clients out of temporary accommodation	
Explain the one offer policy clearly to all clients (this provides one offer of accommodation to clients and if the client rejects the accommodation we can close our duty to that client) to ensure clients are in temporary accommodation for a short time	
Identify clear process with registered housing providers on nominations and to identify priorities for those clients in temporary accommodation	
Promote new landlord accreditation scheme to utilise the private sector to help prevent homelessness and to discharge our housing duty	
Continue to review temporary accommodation to ensure it is meeting the trends of the housing market in Telford and links with the changes of Welfare Reform	
Work with developers and registered housing providers to develop and provide more accommodation to meet the housing trends with the changes in Welfare Reform	
Explore providing new lease agreements with landlords of temporary accommodation so if a tenant is managing well in that property the tenancy agreement is changed to be direct with the tenant	
Compile a list of resources available to support individuals to stay in current accommodation or additional resources for those in temporary accommodation to help them move on	
Promote training courses and Job Box to those clients in temporary accommodation	
Develop a training package for people in temporary accommodation with a certificate to show they are tenant ready to help move clients into sustainable housing, piloted at those most vulnerable within temporary accommodation for twelve months. Then review and if successful, aim to roll-out more widely.	
Work with a local partner to provide emergency accommodation for those presenting as homeless outside of office hours	

**Priority 4: Work with partners to support vulnerable groups and to prevent rough sleeping in the Borough.**

**Action:**

Work with partners such as Maninplace, Kip, Stay, Gateway and Thrive to monitor data and trends coming through all homelessness services across the Borough to identify changes and trends

Work with accredited landlords to help this group of clients to help prevent homelessness

Build working relationships with new partners including Better tomorrow, Yellow Ribbon, to see what support they can provide

Extend the existing rough sleeping project to be run all year round (365 Project) in partnership with Maninplace

Continue partnership work with partners to implement prison release protocol

Explore options for disabled clients whose current housing does not meet need or cannot be adapted and collate information on all currently available options on the Housing Solutions website

Raise awareness of preventing homeless and promote what advice/support is available to other key Council and external services by attending team briefs/meetings, induction shadowing sessions and a new Ollie Training module.

Identify services to assist with more complex issues such as mental health and substance misuse to help prevent homelessness

Work together with partners to prevent, reduce and monitor rough sleeping