

# **Reading's Preventing Homelessness Strategy**

**2020 - 2025**

## Foreword by Councillor John Ennis Lead Member for Housing

I am very pleased to introduce Reading's Homelessness Strategy 2019-24, in which we set out the Council's priorities to prevent homelessness and identify how we will invest in services to protect our most vulnerable residents in Reading.

Homelessness is rarely caused by one single issue, and, whilst the lack of affordable housing continues to be a concern for Reading, homelessness is often a symptom of a range of complex interactions between a person's personal situation and wider structural and social factors outside of their control. It can impact anyone and often comes with a cascade of implications that can be incredibly hard to recover from without assistance of some kind.

The issue of homelessness requires a holistic response, which addresses the root causes at the earliest possible opportunity. Reading has always taken a preventative approach to tackle homelessness. It is not an issue that is easy to tackle at crisis point and therefore with this strategy we aim to build further on the work we already do to work more closely with individuals and to deal with the financial and societal issues that lead to homelessness crisis.

We intend to build on the successes of our previous strategy which over its lifetime saw a complete reduction in the use of unsuitable emergency accommodation for homeless families. We will work closely with partners to ensure that preventing homelessness is a key focus for all agencies in our town so that the triggers for homelessness are well understood, allowing earlier detection and intervention.

Whilst the full implications of the Covid 19 pandemic are yet to unfold, both as a serious ongoing health concern for our residents but also the financial impact on households and businesses; we recognise there will be significant challenges ahead, however we remain hopeful and optimistic that with this strategy we can implement exciting new opportunities to support some of the most vulnerable people in our town.

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## Summary: Our strategy at a glance...

Reading's Preventing Homelessness Strategy sets out the borough's priorities and interventions, including the ways in which we propose to do things differently, to prevent and respond to homelessness in Reading.

In developing our strategy, we have undertaken a full review of homelessness in Reading to consider our current services, those affected by homelessness, its causes and the resources we dedicate to it. We undertook consultation with officers from across the Council and with partners and the public. Their views have informed our strategic direction. Whilst some review findings are directly referenced throughout, our full review document titled *Review of Reading's Homelessness Strategy 2016 - 2021* can be found in Appendix 1.

It is our successes in reducing the number of households placed into emergency accommodation (Bed and Breakfast) and the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act in April 2018 that informed our decision to push forward with a new and ambitious strategy from 2020.

We still face several ongoing, new and overarching challenges including significant increases in the number of people approaching as homeless or at risk of homelessness, and a change in the profile of those approaching in crisis. Amid increases in numbers and case complexity we face the further challenge of limited accommodation supply, welfare reform, diminished resources and a commitment to wanting to sustain our reduction of households in Bed and Breakfast.

We commit to early upstream interventions meaning that our aim for 2020 - 2025 will be to shift our Service approach towards earlier, and the earliest possible, interventions for homelessness prevention. We plan to take an interventional approach to homelessness which is modelled on five core themes that underpin our three priorities as follows:

**Priority 1 - Intervening early to prevent and reduce homelessness in Reading** is underpinned by our core themes to have **universal approaches** that provide advice and information for everyone and **targeted upstream interventions** that identify and address potential risk factors for homelessness.

**Priority 2 - Supporting people who are vulnerable to recurring homelessness** is underpinned by **supported sustainment** to provide support and advice to any household at risk of losing their accommodation and **pre-crisis interventions** to prevent impending homelessness.

**Priority 3 - Increasing access to decent, suitable accommodation** is underpinned by **provision of accommodation** and **crisis interventions** to help households secure suitable alternative housing when needed.

A key focus in preventing homelessness is to reduce rough sleeping. Rough sleeping is the most visible form of homelessness and it affects some of the most vulnerable in society. Reading has a separate Rough Sleeping Strategy 2019 - 2024 which can be found at [https://www.reading.gov.uk/media/10275/Rough-sleeping-strategy-2019-2024/pdf/Rough\\_Sleeping\\_Strategy\\_2019\\_-\\_2024\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.reading.gov.uk/media/10275/Rough-sleeping-strategy-2019-2024/pdf/Rough_Sleeping_Strategy_2019_-_2024_FINAL.pdf)

Our homelessness strategy will be delivered alongside our *Housing Strategy 2020 - 2025* which outlines our approach regarding enabling and building new homes and building housing of the quality, type and size that meets the borough's needs.

## Introduction

### Why have a homelessness strategy in Reading?

The straight-forward answer is that under the legislation of the Homelessness Act 2002 all local authorities are legally obliged to have one. At least every five years each authority should undertake a review of homelessness in their area; carry out a consultation and then use the results from both to inform their homelessness strategy, including the formulation of key priorities and an action plan.

Aside from the fact that it is a legal requirement, in Reading we realise that an effective homelessness strategy can ensure that we:

- Have a robust plan
- Are accountable for our response including to those groups most vulnerable to homelessness
- Understand and regularly revisit and review need, including causes of homelessness; what has been achieved and any new priorities that should be introduced
- Focus and re-focus resources where there is need and new priorities are identified
- Can ensure internal and cross-sector involvement in earlier identification and intervention to prevent homelessness
- Link to and are consistent with other relevant legislation, strategies, programmes and local plans within the local authority, homelessness sector and across other sectors such as health, justice and economic policy
- Have a well-rounded response in working with partners to seek joint solutions
- Consider cross-boundary and county-wide approaches with neighbouring authorities

### Partnership working

To deliver our homelessness strategy successfully, we realise that we must continue to develop our relationships with Reading's voluntary and community sector. Reading has a long history of organic, successful and ambitious voluntary sector organisations working in the interests of our residents. As a Council, we fully recognise the value that our community sector groups bring.

Homelessness is cross-cutting. We will work alongside the key legislation, strategies, programmes and local plans that govern and influence our other relevant sectors. We see the continuation of all these working relationships as crucial in achieving the aims of this strategy.

### Related strategies and policies

Our Homelessness Strategy links to the following outcomes of *Shaping Reading's Future: Our Corporate Plan 2018 - 2021*: Improving access to decent housing to meet local needs; protecting and enhancing the lives of vulnerable adults and children and promoting health, education, culture and wellbeing.

It also links to the Council's:

- Adult Social Care Strategy 2019 - 2022
- Community Safety Plan 2016 - 2019
- Domestic Abuse Strategy 2019 - 2022
- Empty Homes Strategy 2020 - 2023
- Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2017 - 2020
- Housing Strategy 2020 - 2025
- Policy for Housing Standards Regulation
- Reading Borough Local Plan 2013 - 2036: Housing Implementation Strategy March 2018
- Rough Sleeping Strategy 2019 - 2024

## Key achievements of our previous strategy

The Council established three key priorities in 2016 and created an Action Plan.

Our former priorities were to:

1. Increase the use and accessibility of the private rented sector
2. Prevent homelessness by supporting people to access housing and to sustain their accommodation
3. Increase the range and accessibility of information and advice available to enable people to make informed decisions about their housing situation

Since its publication, we have achieved significant successes against these priorities.

### To date we have:

- Reduced the number of households placed into emergency accommodation (B&B) from a peak of **178 in July 2016 down to 11 in March 2020**
- Sustained the number of households in emergency accommodation at an **average of 14 each month throughout 2019/20**
- Reduced the number of households living in temporary accommodation by more than half, **from 315 in March 2018 down to 150 in March 2020**
- Reduced the number of people found sleeping rough on ‘a typical night’ snapshot **from 31 in 2017 down to 28 in 2019**
- Fully implemented functions and structures that support the new Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 legislation, including referral mechanisms for the Duty to Refer now placed upon other public bodies

### We can attribute our successes to a range of responses including:

- Restructuring our Homelessness Prevention Team with separate focus upon single people and families to provide a more person-centred response that uses relevant experience, expertise and partner contacts that matches the profile of customers
- Introducing a triage team to maximise opportunities in identifying and preventing homelessness as early as possible and an upstream/early intervention team to support the introduction of the Duty to Refer in October 2018
- Ensuring robust placement, process, monitoring and performance management regarding those placed into B&B
- Increasing our supply and range of temporary accommodation including modular homes and temporarily repurposing homes earmarked for regeneration
- Securing private rented accommodation through payment of rent deposits, rent in advance and rental top-ups
- Increasing supply of permanent affordable accommodation including introducing the Private Rented Sector Offer in 2016, developing a wholly owned company for the provision of private sector homes, Reading’s new build programme and utilising Right-to-Buy receipts to purchase properties on the open market
- Increasing private rented supply by launching a new Rent Guarantee Scheme (RGS) in July 2015 to provide landlords with an enhanced offer which reduces financial risk related to welfare reform and provides a protected income
- Offering money advice and pre-tenancy information sessions to RGS tenants to better equip them in tenancy management
- Commissioning housing-related support for tenancy sustainment and supported accommodation options

A full review of our Homelessness Strategy 2016 - 2021 can be found in Appendix 1.

It is our successes and recent legislative change that have informed our decision to review the current strategy early and push forward with a new and ambitious strategy from 2020.

## Homelessness in context

Despite the achievements of our previous homelessness strategy we still face significant challenges in continuing to prevent and relieve homelessness.

We strategize within a wider economic and policy arena. Leaving the European Union and the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic create further complexity and uncertainty. There will inevitably be adverse economic consequences for all residents and the local authority moving forward.

### **The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 and how it has changed the Council's response to homelessness**

The 1996 Housing Act is the main legislation outlining the responsibilities and duties of all local authorities towards people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. It was amended by the Homelessness Act 2002<sup>1</sup> and the Homelessness (Priority Need for Accommodation) (England) Order 2002<sup>2</sup>. These changes ensured a more strategic approach to tackling and preventing homelessness including strengthening the assistance available to people aged 16 and 17; those leaving care, people vulnerable as a result of time spent in care, the armed forces, prison or custody and those who are vulnerable because they have fled their home due to violence.

The Homelessness Reduction Act (HRA) came into effect from April 2018. Now, anyone approaching a Council as homeless or threatened with homelessness has an enhanced prevention or relief duty of 56 days. In real terms, this means that we work with people to prevent their homelessness (prevention duty) or help them secure alternative accommodation (relief duty), at an earlier stage. Homelessness Prevention Officers must assess and identify housing needs in all cases and ensure support is in place for people to secure or maintain their home. All households develop an agreed Personalised Housing Plan (PHP) and work with their officer to prevent or relieve their homelessness situation.

Other statutory and public bodies such as hospitals, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and probation services are duty bound to refer any customer that they think may be homeless or at risk of homelessness to the Council. This is called having a Duty to Refer<sup>3</sup>. Their customer must give consent and they are able to have choice in the authority that they are referred to.

The introduction of the HRA is enabling councils to help more people in housing need and in a more person-centred way. Two thirds of English local authorities have seen the HRA as having positive impacts and as a positive step forward<sup>4</sup>. However, there is widespread acknowledgement that there are structural and resourcing issues that, if unresolved, risk reversing the achievements of the HRA so far. Reading will work alongside Government in any review of the HRA that is undertaken so we can support with improving our local and national response and ensure the best service and outcomes for our customers.

### **Changes in data collation and what this means**

Data collation from local authorities regarding homelessness and its causes has changed under the HRA. This has resulted in a disparity of official statistics, when comparing pre and post HRA data, and affects how these could be interpreted. Under new reporting mechanisms, more households will be officially recorded as seeking assistance; most will be quantified as having had their homelessness prevented or relieved with only a small

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2002/7/contents>

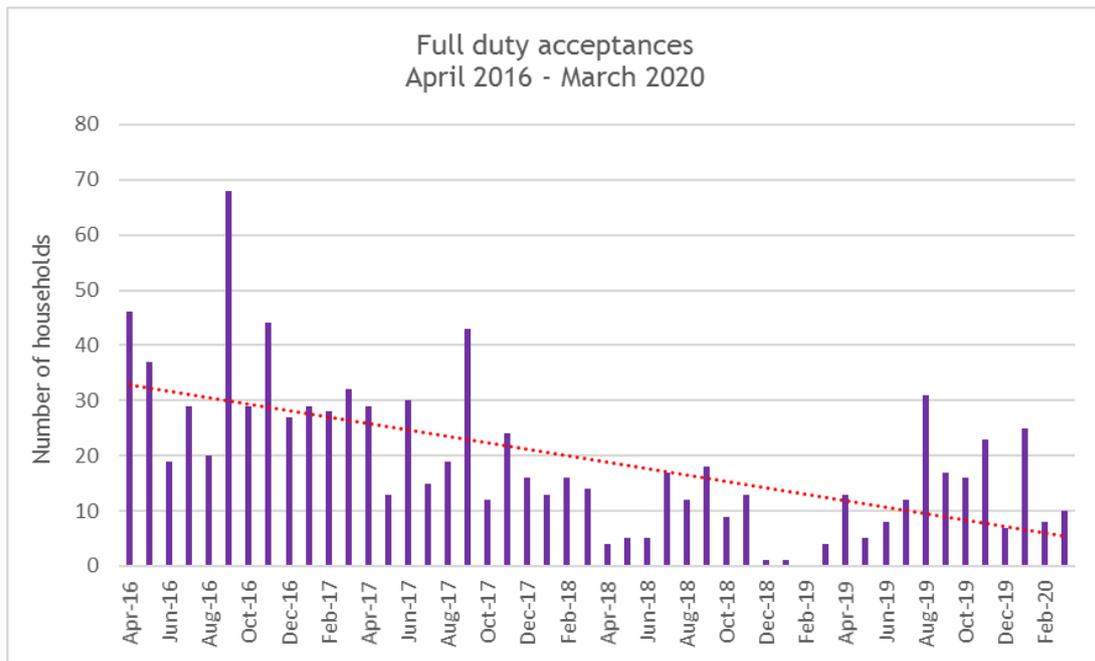
<sup>2</sup> <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2002/2051/contents/made>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2017/13/contents>

<sup>4</sup> Fitzpatrick, S., Pawson, H., Bramley, G., Wood, J., Watts, B., Stephens, M. & Blenkinsopp, J. (2019) *The Homelessness Monitor: England 2019*. London: Crisis.

proportion being accepted under the main local authority housing duty. Historically homeless acceptances have been used as a benchmark for how well a local authority is performing. Whilst this statistic is still important, it is no longer considered to be the main key performance indicator.

As predicted, the graph below shows Reading having a downward trend in full duty homelessness acceptances. This provides just one demonstration of how we must interpret our statistics differently in the new legislative context. Under the HRA framework, prevention and relief outcomes are seen to be more significant and this is where all local authority effort is being focused.



In Reading we consider that it is important to strike a balance between what we previously know about the causes of homelessness and attributing appropriate significance to new data collated since the implementation of the HRA. We recognise that the legislation has caused upheaval within a broader legislative framework with its medium-longer term effects to be determined.

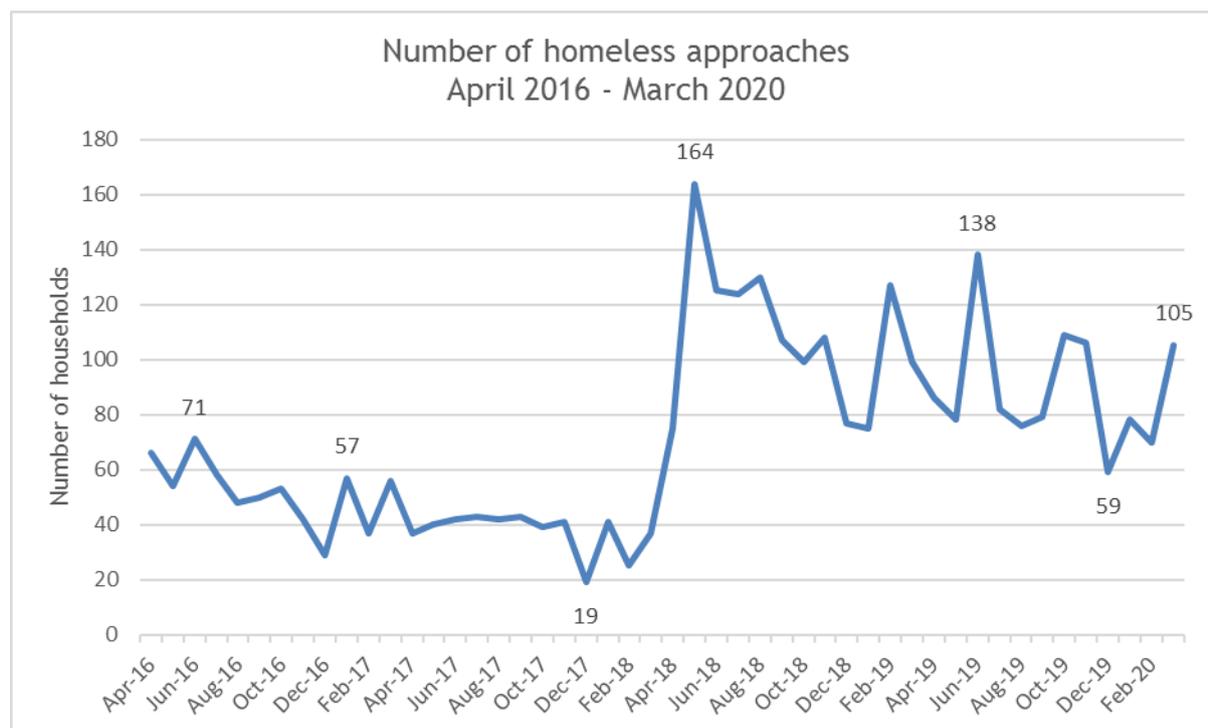
## Challenges in homelessness: the national picture and how Reading compares

### Increased service demand

In 2019 and since the introduction of the HRA, three-quarters of all local authority areas in England are reporting recent increases in homelessness<sup>5</sup>, with a quarter stating that it has increased to a “significant extent”.

Reading has seen notable increases in the number of approaches to its Homelessness Prevention Service for housing advice and options. We can attribute this to several factors including accommodation supply/affordability in the South East, welfare reform/benefit caps, complex, multiple needs and a variety of causes that will be considered further within this strategy. However, clearly the shift in legislation, public and professional awareness of the local authority’s new duties and the Duty to Refer have all promoted our change in service delivery which has encouraged households to approach for assistance.

The graph below shows a significant peak in approaches in April 2018 when the HRA was introduced. Since this initial spike, numbers of approaches have settled at an elevated level post-HRA.



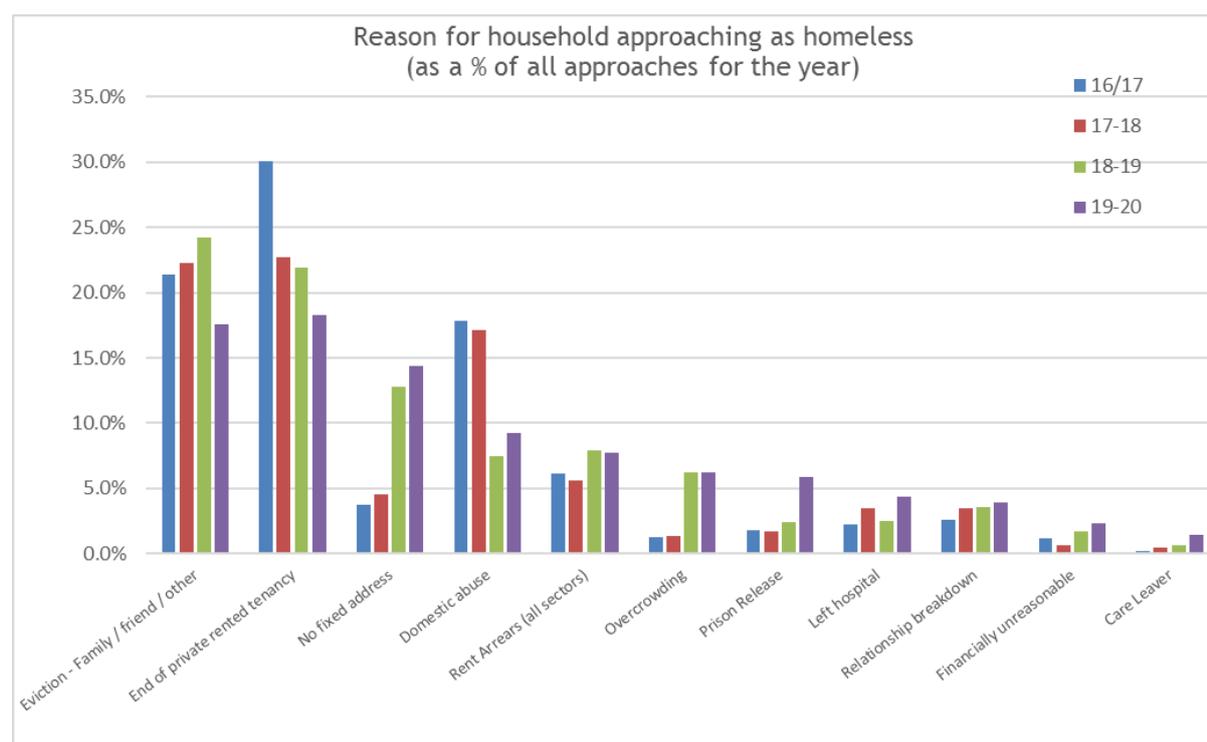
### Immediate causes of homelessness

There are national, regional and Reading specific causes of homelessness and these are the reasons that people will approach our Homelessness Prevention Service. If we can identify and tackle the causes of homelessness, we can intervene and prevent at an earlier stage and prior to crisis.

The graph below identifies the primary reasons for people approaching as homeless in Reading. The reasons behind these causes will be explained and considered as part of this

<sup>5</sup> Fitzpatrick, S., Pawson, H., Bramley, G., Wood, J., Watts, B., Stephens, M. & Blenkinsopp, J. (2019) *The Homelessness Monitor: England 2019*. London: Crisis.

section of the strategy. Some are ongoing challenges, some are newly highlighted challenges, and some are overarching challenges.



## Ongoing challenges

### Eviction: Family or friend

Young people are living at home for longer. Over the last decade, London and the South East have seen a 48% increase in the number of single people aged 20 - 34 living with their parents; nationally this has been an increase of approximately 700,000 non-dependent adults<sup>6</sup>. We know that over the last quarter of a century, younger adults in the South East have faced the impacts of a tight housing market and the worsening of real income/living standards. The numbers “heading up” households reduced from 34-36% in 1992 down to 22-24% in 2018. All evidence shows that the financial crisis and recession a decade ago is still impacting and diminishing the chances of young adults to form separate households.

Concealed households are family units or single adults living with other households who could be considered as a separate household should they wish to do so and if they were given the appropriate opportunity. Not all concealed households will want to live separately at a point in time, but nationally in 2018 there were about 4.87 million households (21.0% of all households) which contained additional family units. Of these, 295,000 (1.3%) were cases of couples or lone parent families living with other households, while 1.48 million (6.4%) were cases of unrelated one person units and 3.35 million (14.5%) were cases of non-dependent adult children living in the parental household.

Concealed households and fewer young people having the financial capacity to “head up” their own household (and overcrowding which is discussed under our newly highlighted challenges due to notable increases) can create pressured environments. Sometimes, when coupled with other health and well-being needs, relationships can break down.

<sup>6</sup> Fitzpatrick, S., Pawson, H., Bramley, G., Wood, J., Watts, B., Stephens, M. & Blenkinsopp, J. (2019) *The Homelessness Monitor: England 2019*. London: Crisis.

In Reading, we have seen a slight reduction in the proportion of households approaching having been evicted from the homes of family or friends; however, it remains our main reason for an approach. Our prevention response lies in understanding who and where families with adult children and concealed households are, why households are living together, if there is intention or preference to move and if there is genuine homelessness risk there. We know that single people/couples and families present to us when they have exhausted, usually in the following order; options with family, then friends or acquaintances. We need to consider these households when responding to the causes of family and friend evictions in a planned way. They are a high-risk group for approaching us in crisis.

### **End of private rented tenancy**

Nationally, and consistently, England has seen sharp rises in the number of households being made homeless from the private rented sector from under 5,000 in 2009/10 to over 18,000 in 2017/18. In 2018/19 this trend reversed whilst other known causes remained more stable.

Reading has been synonymous with the national rise in the number of households made homeless by the ending of private tenancies since 2010 - this seems to have peaked nationally and locally. A significant proportion of those households approaching us in 2016/17 and 2017/18 were due to an end in private rented tenancy because their landlord was selling or moving back into their property. Since 2018/19 our local private rented sector has stabilised, and we have been able to significantly rebuild our Rent Guarantee Scheme portfolio and private sector landlord relationships; this is our primary tool for homelessness prevention and relief when alternative accommodation is needed. This is considered further in the strategy's section on the overarching challenge of *accommodation supply*.

Despite sharp rises relenting, the end of private rented tenancies remains one of our primary reasons for homelessness approaches.

### **Financially unsustainable/rent arrears**

The reasons for homelessness due to a property or financial situation being unsustainable are usually attributed to the impact of welfare reform and lack of affordable housing options. These are challenges outlined further under our *overarching challenges* section.

Whilst in Reading, this is not the most significant reason for homelessness, proportionally there appears to be a steady increase since 2018/19 and therefore, in considering areas for early intervention and prevention, this is significant. We anticipate that the impact of COVID-19 could significantly change this.

### **Relationship breakdown**

Non-violent relationship breakdown has been a consistently occurring reason for homelessness over the last four years in Reading and we have seen a slight proportional increase. The stresses and strains of some of the other challenges that this strategy explores can be contributors including financial difficulties, overcrowding/multiple households in one home and the complex/multiple needs of one or both partners.

### **Domestic abuse**

The Office for National Statistics cites that the prevalence of domestic abuse over recent years has not changed<sup>7</sup> and although our graph regarding reasons for homelessness shows a reduction in the proportion of households approaching the Service fleeing domestic abuse, the *actual numbers* approaching have remained mostly consistent since 2016/17. There

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<sup>7</sup><https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/bulletins/domesticabuseinenglandandwalesoverview/november2019>

were slightly fewer approaches in 2017/18 and 2018/19, but in 2019/20 this reverted to similar levels of 2016/17.

As a notable hidden housing need, we need to monitor this as an ongoing demand and explore ways to further promote approaches to the Service at an earlier stage. We will do this appreciating that domestic abuse presents unique barriers and challenges to households that need to be reflected in our homelessness response alongside the Council’s specific Domestic Abuse Strategy 2019 - 2022.

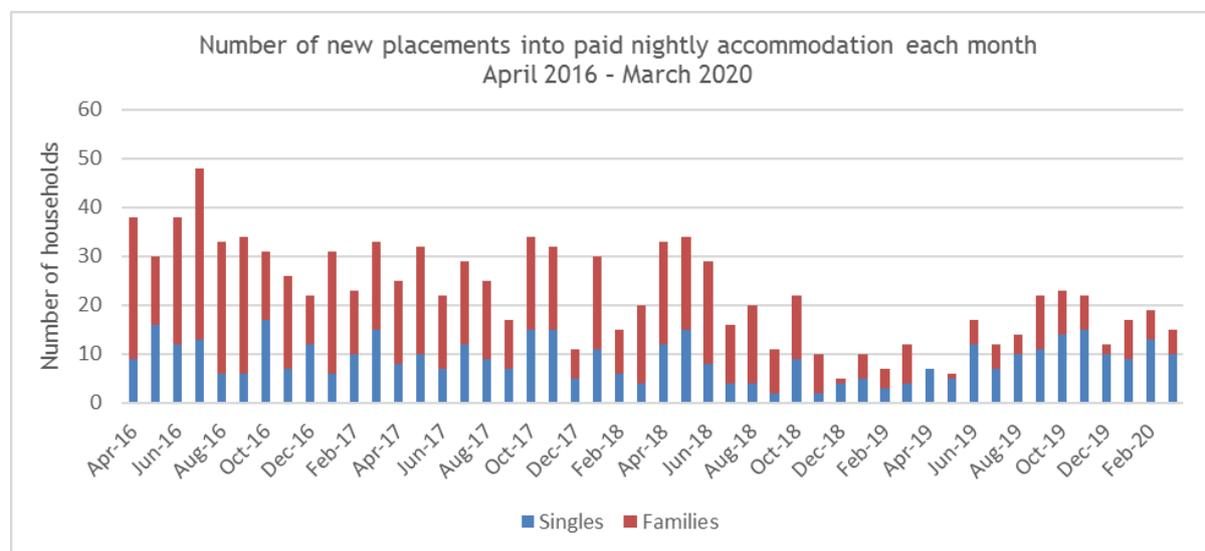
## Newly highlighted challenges

### Change in profile

The graph below primarily illustrates that we have significantly reduced the use of emergency accommodation since 2016. This is contrary to the national picture and consideration of the reasons for this are explored in the section on *overarching challenges* where our key ongoing objective is to avoid crisis situations and the need to utilise Bed and Breakfast.

However, what this graph also illustrates is the change in profile of the types of household approaching us in crisis. It shows that from October 2018 we have seen the previous dominance of family placements, shift towards an increase in crisis placements of single people/couples without children.

Nationally, local authority areas are reporting the same shift with significant increases in approaches from single people and couples and this is being attributed directly to the implementation of the HRA. We know that the successful promotion of the Duty to Refer referral mechanism across prisons, probation, hospitals and the DWP has been a significant contributor locally to an increase in this demographic.



We know from further local profiling that single males account for nearly 20% of those who have approached the Service between April 2018 and March 2020. For the same period, 36% of single people/couples who approached the Service identified as having a support need; 27% as having multiple support needs (more than one) where this accounted for 63% overall, compared to 22% of families.

The same data shows that the most apparent needs for single people are: mental ill-health, physical ill-health, substance misuse, offending history and a history of rough

sleeping/repeat homelessness. Across all households, those with multiple needs were primarily due to mental ill-health and substance misuse (Chart 1 and 2 of Appendix 2).

Rising numbers of single people with these specific complex, multiple needs approaching the Service is a trend mirrored nationally, especially including those not meeting thresholds for adult social care. As per Reading, the national view is that the shift in the number of these approaches can be attributed to the HRA, but that the needs identified are a continuation of a longer-term trend rather than purely recent phenomena.

### **No fixed address and rough sleeping**

Reading's demographic data regarding those approaching the Service with complex and multiple needs illustrates that having a history of rough sleeping and repeat homelessness are significant (Chart 1 and 2 of Appendix 2). For single people, we know that having no fixed address is usually a symptom of a culmination of several and multiple reasons that has caused repeated homelessness. Usually they have spiralled through less secure housing options - often referred to as hidden homelessness such as sofa surfing - and ultimately this can lead to rough sleeping.

In March 2020 Dame Louise Casey called for an 'Everyone In' response to rough sleeping and COVID-19. All local authorities were required to make an offer of emergency accommodation to anyone rough sleeping or at risk of it. The Government's subsequent taskforce has announced that local authorities should strive for no-one remaining or returning to the streets. Consequently, we expect that the way rough sleeping will be funded, monitored and reported will change significantly. Consequently, we anticipate that this will create further challenges for the Service and pressures upon funding.

Reading has an existing Rough Sleeping Strategy 2019 - 2024 dedicated to our rough sleeping response which is still relevant post COVID-19 pandemic. In Reading we spend £1.25m each year on commissioned Homelessness Support Services which include a rough sleeping outreach service and differing levels of supported accommodation. We have secured in excess of £300,000 grant funding under the Government's Rough Sleeping Initiative (RSI), year on year, since 2018/19 and this has enabled us to expand provisions. However, we will review all commissioned and funded services in the context of Dame Louise Casey's 'Everyone In' response, and adapt accordingly, to ensure services are operating most effectively for this vulnerable group.

### **Prison releases**

Data from The Howard League for Penal Reform shows that a third of people leaving custody state they have no-where to stay<sup>8</sup> and nationally, around a third of people sleeping rough have spent some time in prison<sup>9</sup>. The reasons for homelessness upon leaving custody are usually linked to those challenges already highlighted such as family/friend eviction, relationship breakdown, repeat instances of homelessness, previous time in care and complex, multiple needs prior to being sentenced.

In Reading, we have seen significant increases in approaches through the Duty to Refer for this group and we have seen the HRA utilised to best effect to avoid rough sleeping or precarious housing situations for those leaving custody. However, there is still significant challenge in identifying, intervening earlier and supporting tenancy sustainment to avoid the prison/release cycle of homelessness. It can also be challenging to find suitable housing options for this group who often had substance misuse issues prior to custody and present with a high risk of relapse.

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<sup>8</sup> <https://howardleague.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/No-fixed-abode-report.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> <https://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/chain-reports/resource/db4d244e-ab51-44e1-96dd-c8bfa65a62a>

### **Leaving hospital**

Homeless people are less likely to access primary care services. Consequently, they are four times more likely to present at hospital in crisis with complex health and social problems<sup>10</sup>. Following a hospital admittance, they can often be discharged into inappropriate or insecure accommodation; sometimes back to rough sleeping. This can contribute to repeat admittances and discharge.

In Reading we have seen an increase in approaches through the Duty to Refer for hospital discharge patients when homelessness is being established. The challenge for us as a local authority is for homelessness to be flagged at the earliest opportunity by hospital staff. However, our most significant challenge will be in establishing and adopting an even earlier intervention approach for this group to stop ‘revolving door’ nature of some customers due to unmanaged health needs.

### **Care leavers**

Research into youth homelessness shows that over a third of care leavers had experienced periods of homelessness, ranging from a couple of weeks to over a year<sup>11</sup> and that 10% of people sleeping rough in London had spent time in care.<sup>12</sup> Looked after children tend to leave care and move into independence at a much younger age than their peers within the general population. They also do not have the safety-net that their peers do of being able to return to the family home, sometimes on several occasions, until they have the resources and confidence to live independently. The transition from care to independence can feel like a significant responsibility and if care leavers are not fully equipped with the right skills, they may struggle to sustain accommodation and risk eviction. Becoming homeless has been identified as a genuine concern for young care leavers.<sup>13</sup>

We have seen proportional increases in the number of care leavers approaching our service. As a local housing authority, we have a duty to accommodate people moving on from care. Our Allocations Scheme for social housing affords priority on our housing register for a limited number of households leaving care. Alongside the ongoing challenge of having enough affordable housing options for this group, we have the additional challenge of ensuring they can sustain any independent living option they are offered to avoid repeated incidents of homelessness.

### **Overcrowding**

There may be some overlap between previously mentioned concealed households, young people who are unable to afford to “head up” their own household and overcrowding. However, under housing legislation, if a household is statutorily overcrowded then they are homeless. Sometimes this is referred to as “homeless at home”.

There has been a national upward trend in overcrowding, primarily within private rentals and social housing. It is the South East that tends to have the highest rates and it tends to affect larger families (18%), lone parent families (10%) and multi-adult households (6%). This is substantiated by the national picture which shows a reduction in new households being formed, particularly in the private rented sector and a reduction in household “headship” rates for younger adults.

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<sup>10</sup> <https://www.healthylondon.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/190124-GUIDANCE-Safe-and-effective-discharge-of-homeless-hospital-patients.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> Quilgars, D., Johnsen, S. and Pleave, N. (2008) Youth Homelessness in the UK: A Decade of Progress? York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation

<sup>12</sup> Broadway Homeless and Support. (2010) Street to Home: Bulletin 2009/10. London: Broadway Homeless and Support.

<sup>13</sup> Morgan, R. and Lindsay, M. (2006) Young People’s Views on Leaving Care. Newcastle Upon Tyne: A Children’s Rights Director Report.

Data between April 2018 and March 2020 shows a significant proportional increase in those approaching the Service who are statutorily overcrowded. In Reading people may stay in overcrowded conditions due to a lack of, and perceived lack of, affordable housing options.

Our Allocations Scheme for social housing affords reasonable preference (priority) on our housing register for households that are overcrowded; however, the following section on accommodation supply proceeds to explain how lack of affordable housing options is an overarching challenge in Reading.

## Overarching challenges

### Accommodation supply

Reading has low unemployment and a highly skilled local working population, and it is a major transport interchange. It was named one of the two highest performing cities in the 2018 *Good Growth for Cities Index*<sup>14</sup> reflecting continued improvement across a range of measures, particularly income and transport. These socio-economic factors create a competitive housing market, pressure across all tenures and high market rents. Our biggest challenge is demand for affordable housing outstripping supply where Reading has some of the most deprived neighbourhoods in the Thames Valley.

### Homeownership

We know that homeownership itself does little to assist those who are vulnerable to homelessness, nor does it directly support with our prevention and relief agenda. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic national house prices were lower than the 2000s, but they had already inflated prior to the global financial crisis in 2008 and this affects affordability. Low interest rates, the need for larger deposits to access mortgages and increased support via Government Help to Buy schemes have all favoured young couples/families with above average incomes.

### Social housing

Local authorities, especially in the South East, know that their existing social housing provision cannot meet homelessness needs. We know that social housing can alleviate the homelessness of some households and we afford them reasonable preference within our Allocations Scheme, but it cannot meet the accommodation needs of those who present to our Service. Reading has a progressive new-build agenda for social housing but high land prices, the Right to Buy and increased demand for affordable housing, for all housing needs, means that our demand overwhelms supply

We have faced additional challenges where housing associations have become more cautious/stringent on their policies for accepting families and single people with more complex needs. Overcoming this is a priority area for Reading where our analysis shows complex homeless households as a growing need.

### Private rented sector

We know that social housing and homeownership are not viable housing options for most homeless households in Reading. Consequently, we rely heavily upon the private rented sector; however, this presents us with several challenges.

In years preceding the COVID-19 pandemic, there had been a national downturn in uptake of private renting. The buy-to-let market had retracted in response to new tax legislation and, even in the South East, the private rented sector appeared to be decreasing in favour of homeownership. Consequently, market rents have been falling, meaning that

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<sup>14</sup> <https://www.pwc.co.uk/government-public-sector/good-growth/assets/pdf/good-growth-for-cities-2018.pdf>

affordability in the sector seems to be improving but some marginal growth since 2019 has exposed more low-income households to higher housing costs. Across the country a higher proportion of private tenants are experiencing in-work poverty and a smaller proportion are benefitting from the safety net of housing allowances in the benefit system. Whilst these barriers are discussed in more detail under the section on *Welfare reform*, it is worth noting here that historically, the gap between Local Housing Allowance rates and market rents has been a significant barrier in us supporting homeless households into private rented property. Often, we will deem private rented properties as unaffordable meaning we cannot in good faith provide financial support or advocate that households move into them. Even when deemed affordable, households with lower incomes can struggle financially. Having a strong Rent Guarantee Scheme and building meaningful partnerships with private sector landlords has enabled us to address this issue to some extent but it still remains a challenge.

### **Welfare reform**

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, further welfare reform was programmed; however, we are uncertain how these will progress. We know that existing welfare policies and reforms increase financial pressure on those at risk of homelessness which has increased the need for practical and financial intervention from the Council.

Specific detail of what reform and how it affects us locally is detailed below:

#### **Local Housing Allowance (LHA) reform (including Shared Accommodation Rate)**

LHA replaced Housing Benefit in 2008 in the private rented sector. We have felt the long-term consequences of this as landlords retracted from the sector. This reduced the supply of private sector properties, increased the number of households we needed to place into emergency accommodation and meant lower income households using income benefits to meet rental shortfalls. In April 2020 LHA rates in Reading were increased and this provides some alleviation of higher housing costs for those in employment. The longevity of this COVID-19 'boost' to LHA is uncertain and presents risk of inflated market rents. This makes accommodation unaffordable for single people without employment. We continue to rely upon rental 'top-ups' from Discretionary Housing Payments and our homelessness prevention funds.

#### **Universal Credit (UC)**

The roll-out of UC has resulted in financial hardship and homelessness for some households. Claimants have experienced non-payment/delays, deductions at source to recoup overpayments, sanctioning and changes in direct payment to their landlord. We have seen all of these contribute to increased risk of homelessness.

#### **Benefit caps**

Almost 53,000 households are affected nationally by the benefit cap. The cap takes from a household's rental element and we see households making a choice regarding how and if this shortfall in rent is met - the ultimate consequence is risk or actual homelessness. Nationally, almost three-quarters of affected households are lone parents and we recognise that these are the group least able to avoid the cap by moving into work or increasing their working hours. We know that in Reading the benefit cap increases the % of their income households need to spend on rent, to above 50%. We also know that in Reading, the cap disproportionately affects larger households and that this increases risk of homelessness for this group.

#### **Extension of notices and suspension of possession proceedings under the Coronavirus Act 2020**

In March 2020, elements of the Coronavirus Act 2020 were implemented with the intention of protecting residential tenants who were at risk of eviction due to the far-ranging financial impacts of the virus. Under the Act, the minimum notice period for recovery of possession was extended to three months resulting in a temporary postponement on evictions until 30

September 2020. Also, under the Act, all possession proceedings were stayed until 23 August 2020. This meant that if a landlord applied for possession prior to 27 March 2020, the case would be halted, regardless of its progress and that no new possession claims could be processed.

We realise that during this extended period tenants are at risk of continuing to accrue rent arrears or enact other behaviours and lifestyle choices that, after the duration of the coronavirus emergency, mean they will be at risk of losing their accommodation. It is a stark reality that the Act has postponed housing crisis for many households, rather than alleviating it. Tenants could be faced with homelessness after the government's postponement on housing possession is lifted.

Our challenge will be in both our immediate and longer-term prevention and relief response and how we resource it. We will try to predict and manage swells in approaches as possession proceedings are enacted and notices expire; however, we do this whilst still scoping options for and re-homing those housed in emergency accommodation under the local authority rough sleeping response. These significant post-coronavirus-lockdown pressures exist within the context of all other ongoing, newly identified and overarching challenges identified throughout our strategy.

### **Resourcing our strategy, priorities and interventions**

Unfortunately, like all local authorities, we are affected by year-on-year reductions in Government grant funding and so we consistently review and evolve our service's efficiency.

We received additional funds to support with our overall COVID-19 pandemic response, including apportioning some of these funds to our homelessness and rough sleeping response. Further funding amounts and their allocation across the Council's competing sector demands are to be determined. The shorter and longer-term impact of the pandemic upon the future needs and economic circumstances of our residents are uncertain.

All local authorities received funding to meet immediate and ongoing financial costs of introducing the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. Our new approach and additional staffing require significant financial input. We have responded to increases in direct approaches and referrals from agencies and we are intervening at an earlier stage. This means we are working with unprecedented caseloads and demand upon finances to preventing homelessness.

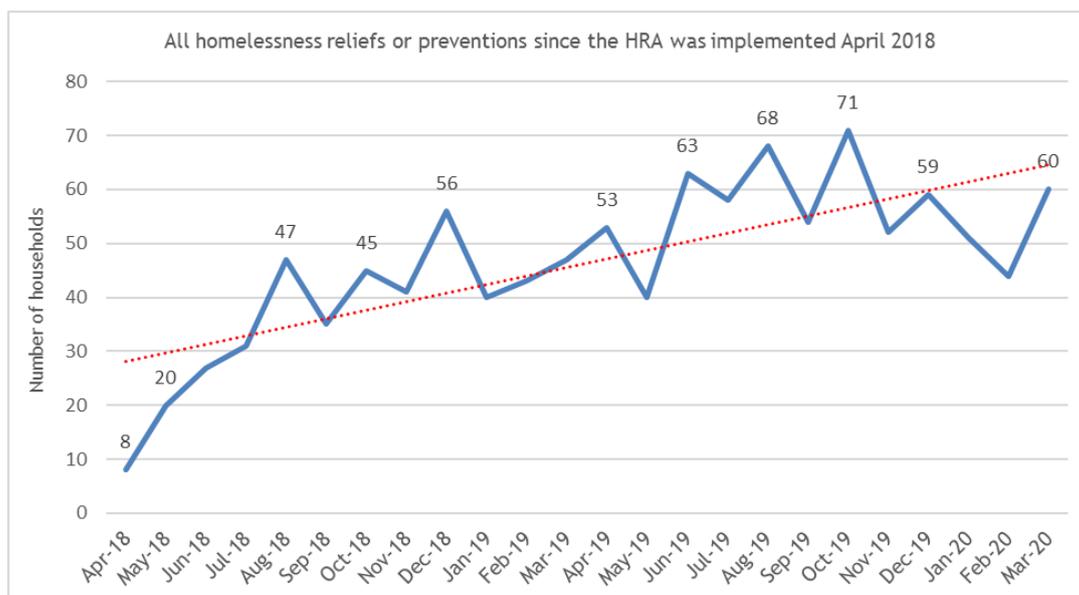
However, we continue to prioritise investment in our front-line services. We apply for ongoing and new capital and revenue funding from Government, including Homelessness grants to target gaps in services; we develop cross-sector and joint commissioning/bids and support our voluntary sector partners to seek and obtain funding from exclusive sources.

### **Sustaining a reduction of households in Bed and Breakfast**

Within the context of all our aforementioned challenges, perhaps our biggest is sustaining our reductions in emergency Bed and Breakfast placements.

Over the two-year period, between April 2018 and March 2020, we assisted 539 households in obtaining alternative accommodation (relief) and 574 households to remain in their existing home (prevention). On average, we prevented or relieved the homelessness of 46 households each month.

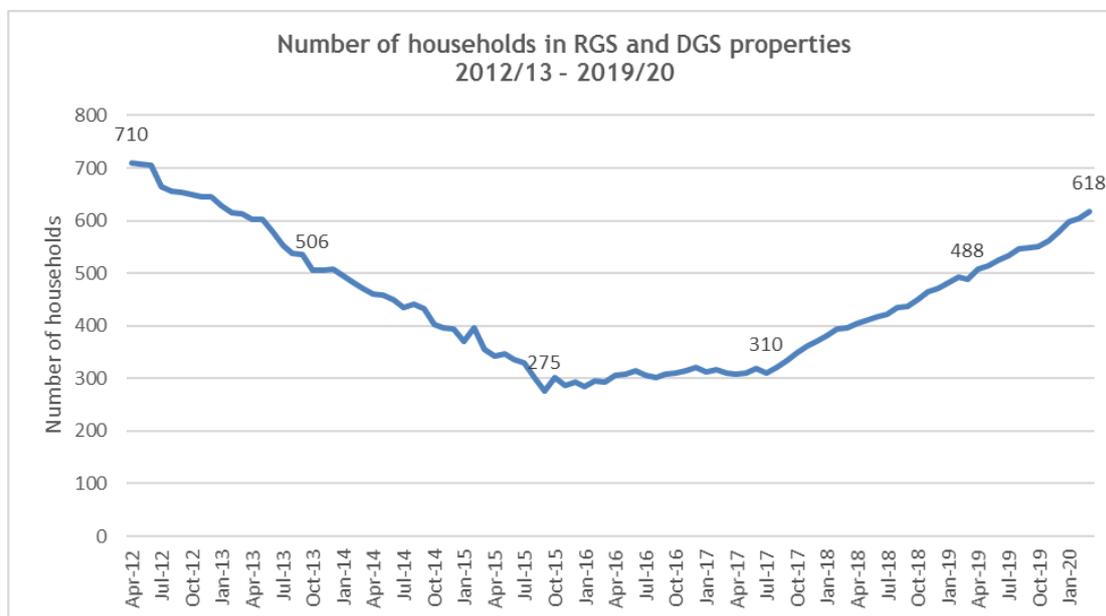
The graph below shows the upward trend in the number of households supported by the Service.



**Increasing housing supply in the private rented sector**

Where we utilise the private rented sector to provide homes for most households that approach us, our Rent Guarantee Scheme (RGS) and Deposit Guarantee Scheme (DGS) and the teams that procure property and enable its delivery, are our primary tool for homelessness prevention and relief when alternative accommodation is needed.

The graph below shows the significant increase in us being able to procure properties via the RGS since its implementation and roll-out in July 2015. This, alongside our ability to discharge our duties into the private rented sector, has meant that we have been able to secure alternative accommodation for households where prevention has not been possible.

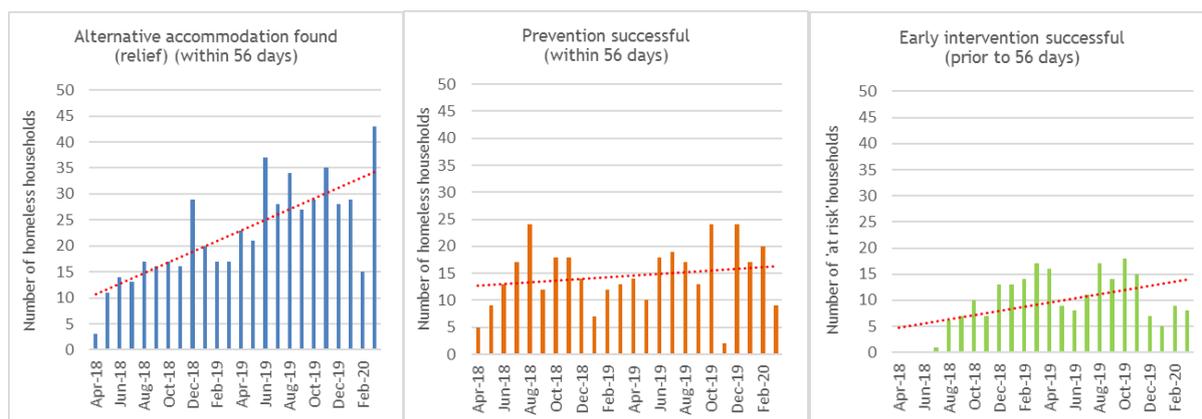


**Increasing prevention and preventative tools**

There has been regional recognition that, for London and the South East where housing demand significantly surpasses supply, homelessness prevention needs to be a local authority’s primary focus. The HRA legislation cemented national focus upon the prevention agenda which has propelled a shift towards helping people retain existing suitable accommodation, rather than finding new (private) tenancies.

Long before the enactment of the HRA, local authorities have noted the value in targeting preventions. In 2009/10 there were 16,000 homeless preventions nationally and in 2017/18 this had increased to nearly 60,000. A growing proportion of our early intervention and prevention activities involve providing debt advice and financial assistance. This is something that Reading had identified as an effective preventative tool, and invested in delivering, even prior to our previous homelessness strategy in 2016. We were already looking for innovative solutions to address the challenges of welfare reform, in-work poverty and unaffordable market rents that had all been amplified by our local economic circumstances and general affluence of Reading as a town in the South East.

The graphs below breakdown the detail of the number of homelessness households we worked with to (1) find alternative accommodation (relief); (2) prevent homelessness within 56 days and (3) prevent homelessness prior to our 56-day duty.



There are clear upwards trends in the number of successful interventions that stopped people from needing to access Bed and Breakfast in a crisis.

The expansion and success of the RGS has paved the way for a steep increase in the number of cases relieved of their homelessness since the introduction of the HRA in April 2018. Our prevention successes have continued in a sustained way and we have seen a steady increase in successful preventions prior to our 56-day prevention duty.

Our aim for 2020 - 2025 will be to see a significant increase in those for whom we provide upstream and earlier interventions.

## Our approach and priorities

Our strategy for 2020 - 2025 is to shift our entire Service approach towards earlier, and the earliest possible, interventions for homelessness prevention.

Across all sectors, there is debate regarding how best to define homelessness and where the boundary is between homelessness and other forms of housing need including 'sofa surfing' and 'hidden homelessness'. Even though being homeless or threatened with homelessness is clearly defined under Sections 175 - 178 of Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996<sup>15</sup> for our strategy to be as comprehensive and inclusive as possible, we have not focussed upon how we, or others, might define homelessness.

Instead, Reading's strategy takes an interventional approach to homelessness and is modelled on five core early intervention and prevention themes that underpin our three priorities:

**Priority 1 - Intervening early to prevent and reduce homelessness in Reading** is underpinned by our core themes to have **universal approaches** that provide advice and information for everyone and **targeted upstream interventions** that identify and address potential risk factors for homelessness.

**Priority 2 - Supporting people who are vulnerable to recurring homelessness** is underpinned by **supported sustainment** to provide support and advice to any households at risk of losing their accommodation and **pre-crisis interventions** to prevent impending homelessness.

**Priority 3 - Increasing access to decent, suitable accommodation** is underpinned by **provision of accommodation** and **crisis interventions** to help households secure suitable accommodation when needed.

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<sup>15</sup> <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1996/52/part/VII>

## Priority 1 - Intervening early to prevent and reduce homelessness in Reading

### Universal approaches

We must develop an approach that provides universal awareness of homelessness within the wider community and ensure that this reaches a breadth of households.

Our aim is to enable residents and communities to identify their own risks of homelessness. We want trigger points on the pathway to homelessness to be within the consciousness of people and professionals in Reading and aim to embed a systemic corporate approach underpinned by *Team Reading* within the Council.

#### We will do this by:

- **Creating and adopting a full Communications Plan to promote a Homelessness Prevention Service that is visible and instils confidence** so that partners and the public feel it is easy to refer and that customers will have a positive person-centred experience.

We will review and redraft literature and website content in line with peers, best practice and customer feedback. We want our service and preventative promotional campaign to destigmatise homelessness; outlining that it is an issue that can affect any household. We intend to provide feedback mechanisms to inform service review, and a 'you said, we did' led approach to service delivery, as well as publicising success stories about how the Service has assisted people.

Our communications campaign will manage customer expectations by providing candid detail of what we can and cannot offer customers and why we have these limitations. This will encompass decisions we make, and the accommodation people can expect to access. We will utilise local media and Council-owned channels of communication to increase the Service's visibility and target areas in Reading where we know households are most vulnerable to homelessness.

We intend to promote high level awareness for employees and managers within local businesses through workplace training across organisational hierarchies. This will include how to signpost to support services/advice and utilise corporate social responsibility, volunteer days and fundraising to promote awareness and support our local homelessness charities.

- **Maximising access to Homelessness Prevention Services** by reviewing information, application and communication methods and paperwork, assessment and referral processes with customers and partners to establish how these could be accessed and submitted digitally in-line with the Council's COVID-19 recovery plans.

We will develop referral routes to the Service for everyone working or volunteering with people at risk of homelessness, replicating the joint working and relationships already in place with obligated public bodies under the Duty to Refer.

Officers will ensure that information, assessment methods and signposting are accessible for different groups by adapting to communication styles that best suit a customer including, for example, those with disabilities, migrants, asylum seekers, refugees and people without recourse to public funds and different age groups. How older people access advice and assistance and develop an awareness of the range of housing and support options available to them will be reviewed.

We intend to sustain and look to improve positive relationships with neighbouring Berkshire and other local housing authorities and support agencies to make reconnection and relocation for households easier.

- **Delivering general and bespoke training to upskill and educate statutory, sector, faith, voluntary and community partners around homelessness** that offers a range of methods including face-to-face delivery, social media and digital and on-line resources (e-learning).

For internal and external sector partners - topics will involve the accumulative effects of debt, welfare reform, in-work poverty, health, personal welfare, anti-social behaviours and current issues (such as cuckooing, county lines, drug and alcohol dependency, modern day slavery and exploitation) and signposting to debt advice and housing-related support services. Our training offer will include co-producing and providing trigger toolkits, referral pathways and communications.

We intend to hold events in the community and offer a bespoke rolling training programme to residents, faith, voluntary and community groups about homelessness and our services including housing options, how to signpost and what support is available. We will work with community hubs, centres, libraries, cafes, bars and schools and alongside community advisory meetings, boards, committees and development associations using a variety of written and social media aimed at generating local conversation and utilising word-of-mouth. We will deliver messages in clear, concise and relevant ways to connect with anyone that might be affected.

- **Supporting primary healthcare partners to identify homelessness risk and refer into the Service.** We will develop mutually supportive relationships with health sector partners to avoid customer crises by reviewing and improving joint working arrangements. We will embed GP registration, referrals to Reading's Walk-In Centre and promote Reading's First Stop Service at homelessness assessment and within personalised housing planning. We will scope the concept of a GP practice homelessness network/champions that supports early intervention and create clear referral pathways where, for example, an early indicator of future homelessness could be someone feeling overwhelmed financially and with associated low-level anxieties. Scoping will also include information in bespoke and useful formats, step-by-step quick reference guides and post-referral updates.

**Improving existing partnerships and joint working with admittance and discharge teams at the Royal Berkshire Hospital and Prospect Park Hospital** to avoid delayed discharge or patients being discharged into unsuitable/no accommodation. For example, by enabling enquiry about address history and security of tenure upon admittance to hospital. We will support healthcare colleagues in promoting recovery by reducing health and homelessness crisis. The Service will continue to provide a dedicated specialist officer role at Prospect Park Hospital and will develop other avenues of mutual support.

### **Targeted upstream interventions**

**We will evolve and embed proactive interventions that identify and work with households that may be at risk of homelessness in the future.**

Our aim is to undertake comprehensive mapping and tracking of previous, current and future housing need and understand the circumstances of those who have become homeless. Data can be used to identify significant themes, indicators and specific features of households that could lead to homelessness. From what we know and intend to establish about the

causes of homelessness in Reading, we aim to respond to specific and wider risks in creative and flexible ways.

**We will do this by:**

- **Continuing our commission of the *Policy in Practice* Low Income Family Tracker (LIFT) dashboard** which enables us to explore household data over time and prevent hardship by identifying people in danger of crisis before it happens. We will use this data to intercept the pathway to homelessness by targeting debt advice and benefit maximisation support where it can be most effective. We will then track changes to see if our upstream approaches are working. We will also develop this approach to include non-financial indicators of where housing advice might be of benefit.

The entire aim of the LIFT dashboard is to turn analysis into impact. The tool uses two household indicators: financial resilience and total available resources. The financial resilience measure enables us to consider living standards and understand poverty. By filtering household data, we will be able to identify those who are ‘in crisis’ as defined by a huge shortfall in their income and outgoings - this is combined with ‘flags’ such as children at home or council tax arrears. These indicators create a targeted cohort with whom we can proactively engage.

The dashboard can be used to better forecast risk by identifying those impacted by welfare reform. In measuring the relationship between income and costs, households can be split into groups defined as ‘coping’ through to ‘in crisis’. Households at risk can be tracked over time to monitor changes in circumstances, enabling identification of those who have responded to support by changing housing or economic status, and those whose financial position may be getting worse and therefore may benefit from an intervention.

Over time, we can introduce additional data sets to consider health, employment, child care or third-party debt. By overlaying the right data, a cohort for action can be created, which can, in turn, be translated into targeted upstream interventions. For example, by applying filters to data around barriers to work against financial resilience measures, the dashboard can identify people who are in work, but struggling to make ends meet (in-work poverty) and who may need additional support. Ultimately, this can promote better employment outcomes and keep people economically active. In using metrics that measure outcomes over time (a year from the first point of any intervention) we can demonstrate social impact and prove the value of our interventions and the impact of our homelessness prevention initiatives.

- **Reframing analysis away from the most recent reason that someone lost their home and consider wider factors along the pathway to homelessness.** We will develop analytical platforms that consider unemployment, shortage of affordable housing, health and the themes and combinations of these problems that evidence risk of homelessness amongst specific groups. We will undertake an overall review of how we ask for and collate our equalities data across the Service. This will be in readiness for being able to benchmark against the next release of Census data in 2021.

We will capitalise on the information garnered from the ‘Everyone In’ initiative for those ‘sofa surfing’ or at risk of rough sleeping. This group have previously been part of a ‘hidden’ cohort of homeless households. Our accommodation and support offer have meant that this group are unusually accessible. We will use this unprecedented opportunity to explore what has led to risk of homelessness, first-hand with this

group, to inform how we might be able to respond more effectively at earlier opportunities.

- **Continuing to provide homelessness advice and information within community and homelessness sector settings through outreach and in-reach.** For example, where we utilise our Housing Needs Outreach Officer to provide/support drop-in services. We will explore how more housing advice functions could be delivered from community and partner settings to best effect. The data we obtain from the LIFT dashboard and a review of our equalities data will inform how and where we target these responses.
- **Continuing to support vulnerable households with moving to Universal Credit** by working with the Department for Work and Pensions, having a coordinated approach across the Council and signposting to support. We have a well-established debt advice service to support with maximising income and making referrals for Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) to bridge the gap between benefit levels and rents, for example due to Local Housing Allowance caps.
- **Piloting awareness sessions in schools, colleges, universities and youth services about factors that can lead to homelessness, its impact and what can be done to prevent it.** This would be a two-pronged approach in educating young people about the triggers and challenges of single homelessness and promoting their awareness as a member of a family household that could be at risk.

## **Priority 2 - Supporting people who are vulnerable to recurring homelessness**

### **Supported sustainment**

**We will provide support and advice to any household currently at risk of losing, or having previously lost, their accommodation to stop the cycle.**

For some households, homelessness cannot be relieved or prevented solely through the provision of accommodation. This includes people transitioning into independent living for the first time such as care leavers, veterans and those leaving custody, mental health hospital discharges, supported accommodation move-on and gypsy and traveller households choosing to access settled accommodation. There are a proportion of households and individuals who are susceptible to repeat homelessness due to their lifestyle, behaviours, health and/or choices who can be perceived as difficult to house. They often require more intensive preventative and responsive support to avoid personal and housing crisis.

Our aim is to provide exceptional housing-related support for independent living that can effectively identify additional needs and signpost to services that can support with relationship breakdown, domestic abuse, mental ill-health problems, drug and alcohol dependency, poverty, debt and unemployment.

**We will do this by:**

- **Ensuring that housing-related support continues to play a key part in assisting with finding and maintaining suitable accommodation for independent living in the community.** Support includes daily living skills, accessing benefits and maximising income, health or community care services and

establishing or maintaining social support and networks to help counter social isolation. We will continue to fund and commission housing-related support services for residents living within all tenures to sustain their housing and prevent evictions and focus these services upon households vulnerable to recurring homelessness in a targeted and flexible way and intensively when required.

Officers will undertake a cross-sector analysis of all existing housing-related support provision, including a skills audit to identify any geographic and thematic gaps or duplication in current services. Once mapped we will ensure maximised utilisation of existing housing-related support resources, including community sector provisions, to best enhance our supported sustainment and pre-crisis responses. We will provide services that can deliver quick, intensive support when a household's needs change or increase. This will include transitional and resettlement support for households accessing independent living for the first time or with different cultural backgrounds.

- **Developing and rolling-out a holistic modular/accredited pre-tenancy training programme with partners** that includes supporting families and single people with 'policing' their own front door, developing healthy and supportive relationships and preventing anti-social behaviour.
- **Reviewing how people access and move on from supported accommodation and ensuring that it meets needs now and in the future.** We will review existing Homelessness Support Services and the needs of young people's accommodation and support pathways to ensure options meet differing customer needs, including care leavers and those with higher needs. We will endeavour to move people on from supported and temporary accommodation at the right time. This ensures long-term independence by ensuring that move-on planning is at the forefront of support for those in temporary settings where timely move-on can avoid despondency or lapsing into counterproductive behaviours whilst in services.

As part of this review, we will identify and commission appropriate support and housing solutions for clients with drug/alcohol misuse and/or mental ill-health (dual diagnosis). We will enhance joint working protocols, referral and support processes between housing, primary and secondary health care, adult social care and Brighter Futures for Children (BFfC) for when risk and crisis are identified. We will scope funding and joint commissioning opportunities for dual diagnosis clients.

- **Working alongside Brighter Futures for Children (BFfC) in preparing care leavers for independent living** where their transition may require higher levels of support to prevent repeat homelessness. This can include a history or current challenges with drugs and alcohol, money management and mental ill-health. We will ensure housing-related support builds upon the preparation for independent living undertaken by BFfC to prevent the risk of spiralling behaviours in post-care accommodation.
- **Preventing the cycle of mental health discharge, readmittance and risk of homelessness** where mental ill-health can incite extreme and antisocial behaviours, neighbour complaints and tenancy breaches. Our housing-related support services will work alongside and sign-post to pre and post-crisis mental health teams to de-escalate these needs and prevent cyclical homelessness.

- **Continuing to maximise our grant revenue funding opportunities from Government** having had several successful bid outcomes to fund homelessness prevention initiatives. We will support other statutory and community sector partners to apply for additional funding to support the prevention agenda.

### **Pre-crisis intervention**

**We will work with households who are at risk of losing their homes to prevent homelessness and avoid housing crisis.**

We know that certain groups and communities are more vulnerable to homelessness. Homeless households are more likely to have a low income and that in-work poverty is a growing issue. There are also clear indicators that ward areas in Reading with a higher Index of Deprivation are more at risk of homelessness.

Our aim is to prevent homelessness for all households that approach the service at risk.

**We will do this by:**

- **Continuing existing, well established preventative practices under our Homelessness Reduction Act prevention duties** that include developing a Personalised Housing Plan with everyone at risk of homelessness that approaches the Service to set out agreed actions intended to prevent homelessness from occurring. We will embed pre 56-day preventative offers across the Service taking learning from our existing Resolution and Enablement Team to support households approaching as homeless prior to any homelessness duty that might be owed. We will continue to award Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) to mitigate some of the financial pressure's welfare reform has created. We use our annual DHP budget to prevent rent arrears and in creative ways to sustain people in their homes.
- **Promoting planned move-on options for those vulnerable to friend and family evictions** to avoid escalated tensions when relationships have entirely broken down and enable planned move-on from the family home. We will scope the pathway to homelessness for this group and explore how earlier intervention can be promoted including scoping mediation services for parental evictions. We will prioritise casework that reduces overcrowding in households, for example, assisting non-dependent adults into their own tenancy in the private rented sector with the support of our Rent Guarantee Scheme.
- **Better understanding the reasons behind relationship breakdown** and if there is a role for the Council in helping to prevent this. We will scope a mediation offer in cases of relationship breakdown with a spouse or partner, where domestic abuse is not involved.
- **Continuing to respond to homelessness from the private rented sector**, working with landlords and lettings agents by negotiating repayment agreements with landlords where there are rent arrears. We will continue to refer customers for support with debt advice and maximising income to prevent arrears and find ways to encourage landlords, letting agents and individuals at risk to approach services sooner.

We will maintain the use of our powers to challenge unlawful or retaliatory evictions when a tenant has complained or is taking action against their landlord

due to poor conditions. In these instances, we can provide advice to households without recourse to public funds. We will sustain intelligence sharing relationships with colleagues in our Private Sectors Housing teams regarding problematic landlords and provision of Disabled Facilities Grants if a property becomes unsuitable due to a tenant's physical health needs.

- **Supporting social landlords to identify early risks of homelessness with tenants and with signposting to the Council or support services** to avoid notice being served and people approaching us in crisis. We will review and provide a forum that strengthens relationships between the Council and our social housing providers, including ways to identify behaviours and circumstances that might present a risk of homelessness - especially anti-social behaviours and rent arrears.
- **Improving communication when enforcement action is planned or imminent** between enforcing agencies, for example housing management or Thames Valley Police, and our Homelessness Prevention Service. We will provide pre-crisis support and advice to households who have been served notice or a Closure Order has been enacted on a property which could lead to homelessness.
- **Exploring and promoting employment opportunities for those at risk of homelessness.** We will ensure that employment support is always part of a household's Personalised Housing Plan including what training opportunities are available and making referrals to local employment support services for work and life skills. We will promote employment support services amongst social and private landlords and ensure that this is reciprocated by employment support service partners who can identify and refer those at risk of homelessness to the Service.
- **Embedding universal trauma informed approaches for assessing and supporting complex and higher need households that may be experiencing multiple disadvantage.** We will provide training for staff to work in trauma informed ways where specific groups vulnerable to homelessness are likely to have experienced or be experiencing multiple disadvantage - sometimes referred to as having complex needs and where trauma and Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) have been prevalent. This will enable full engagement for assessment of housing need. We will continue to work with partners to deliver and signpost to hoarding disorder support groups, as well as finding flexible solutions to support those at risk of homelessness due to hoarding, clutter and chronic disorganisation with sustaining accommodation to ensure that current or alternative housing options are not exhausted.

## **Priority Three: Increasing access to decent, suitable accommodation**

### **Provision of accommodation and crisis intervention**

**We will relieve and prevent homelessness by enabling residents to access secure and suitable accommodation that they can call home.**

When early intervention and prevention have not been successful the Council are required to relieve homelessness by ensuring access to accommodation. Our aim is to increase housing supply to avoid use of emergency temporary accommodation and improve the standards of accommodation for new and existing tenants that approach our Homelessness

Prevention Service. Given what we know about Reading's housing market, our focus will primarily be within the private rented sector.

**We will do this by:**

- **Advocating that resolving homelessness is not just about the provision of 'bricks and mortar'** where successful early interventions and prevention require committed cross-sector support. We will work with other statutory partners and public bodies to promote this message and establish joint responses in preventing and alleviating homelessness.
- **Continuing existing, well established practices under our Homelessness Reduction Act relief duties** that include working with customers to secure suitable accommodation. We take an enabling role with customers, where Homelessness Prevention officers will continue to work in partnership with our Rent Guarantee Scheme, supported accommodation and social lettings teams to provide appropriate housing options.

We will continue to ensure that no families are placed into emergency accommodation with shared facilities. Where we do make placements, we ensure that property used meets required standards and we have an assessment and review process to ensure this. We aim to sustain and reduce numbers placed into emergency accommodation following the success of our previous strategy.

When a customer approaches us having fled domestic abuse, we will continue to provide safer accommodation options including our Sanctuary Scheme, a robust management transfer process via our housing register and referrals to refuge. We will ensure that the priorities identified in the Domestic Abuse Strategy 2019 - 22 are embedded across Housing Needs and commissioned housing-related support services.

- **Ensuring that the provision of temporary accommodation is adequate in meeting the needs of any growing pressures.** We will continue to ensure that temporary accommodation is only used when necessary. We will closely monitor its use and throughput, alongside the information we collate on approaches and emergency placements, to understand if there is growing pressure and demand. We will ensure responsive procurement if required.
- **Regularly reviewing how we procure enough private sector housing for homeless households.** We continue to look for innovative ways to increase supply of property and landlords in the private rented sector. This includes our continued focus upon our partnerships with local private sector landlords to sustain and expand our Rent Guarantee Scheme property portfolio.

We will develop private sector accommodation options for single people aged under 35 living independently of the family household, who are in receipt of income benefits and can only afford a room within a House of Multiple Occupancy (HMO). We will increase accommodation options for single people within the private rented sector to prevent the use of emergency and temporary accommodation and provide move-on options for those moving on from supported housing.

- **Continuing to provide information, advice and support for landlords** on all aspects of property and tenancy management to improve landlord practice, sustain tenancies and prevent illegal eviction. We will continue our workshops and pre-

tenancy training for all prospective Rent Guarantee Scheme tenants. These sessions upskill customers to find their own accommodation, feel prepared for viewings and target money management. Our workshops have proven to improve a household's chance of obtaining and sustaining private rented housing.

We will sustain our relationships with Environmental Health and Private Sector Housing team regarding poor quality accommodation, empty homes and problematic landlords to enable enforcement action and drive up housing standards and increase decent and suitable homes for homeless households.

- **Continuing to make developing more affordable housing a priority for the Council** as detailed in the Housing Strategy 2020 - 2025. We have purposefully aligned the review and dates of our homelessness and housing strategies for congruent delivery. We link both to our Strategic Housing Market Assessment and Local Plans.
- **Implementing our revised Allocations Scheme by 2021/22** to reflect local priorities and needs and developed with reasonable preference for households owed a homelessness duty. Our scheme will continue to offer and review an allocated quota, per year, for move-on from supported accommodation, for care leavers, adult social care and other vulnerable groups. We will continue to incentivise down-sizing for those under-occupying our stock and we have a dedicated officer to support with this.
- **Reviewing and developing accommodation and support for those aged 16 - 24** to provide a pathway to independence. We have a *Preventing and Reducing Youth Homelessness Action Plan* developed with Brighter Futures for Children for young people aged 16-17 and those leaving care. The Action Plan is centred around analysing need, partnerships and information sharing, the young person's journey, advice/support/training and accommodation options. We will continue to jointly deliver and review this plan.
- **Scoping and implementing a permanent site/pitch for the gypsy and traveller community** to avoid/minimise unauthorised encampments. We will couple this offer with assertive outreach and support for households to acquire suitable settled accommodation within communities where this option is preferable.
- **Maximising opportunities to support and signpost homeless households without recourse to public funds** by sustaining case contact with Brighter Futures for Children (BFfC) regarding families without recourse to public funds who are provided accommodation under the Children's Act 1989. We will intervene with assistance and accommodation options as early as our legislation allows once recourse to public funds have been established. We will maintain links regarding these households to prevent/reduce time households might spend in emergency accommodation.

We will support our community, faith and voluntary sector partners in meeting the accommodation needs of single households without recourse to public funds where they are able support them in ways that the local housing authority cannot. We will continue to commission emergency fold-out beds within our Homelessness Support Services which single people without recourse can access for a limited period. We will provide a co-ordination role to scope innovative ways of delivering services for this group, learn from best practice and enable partners to apply for funding/grant opportunities for accommodation and support.

### **Implementation, monitoring and review**

Reading's Homelessness Strategy will govern our approach until 2025. During a period of emerging policies and economic change we will ensure that it remains responsive and reflective of legislative change. Therefore, it will be underpinned by a separate Action Plan that will be refreshed annually.

Our Action Plan will be overseen by the Housing Strategy Steering Group. It will evolve in co-development with partners and customers and be held to account by identifying key Council officer responsibilities, representation at strategic and partnership forums and the publication of updates and milestone achievement.

## Glossary

### **Affordable housing**

Accommodation that includes social housing and intermediate housing which the local authority provides or enables provision. It is for households whose needs are not met by the housing market and eligibility is determined using local incomes, house prices and other local circumstances.

### **Allocations Scheme**

Guidance relating to the allocation of social housing within the borough. It provides a set of rules which the Council adopts to determine priorities and procedure to be followed in this allocation. It determines who can join the Housing Register and the reasons for those applicants afforded preference.

### **Asylum seeker**

A person who has left their country and is seeking protection from persecution and serious human rights violations in another country, but who has not been legally recognised as a refugee and is waiting to receive a decision on their asylum claim.

### **Befriending**

A relationship between people who have experienced or are experiencing homelessness, in which one person has more experience than the other and can offer emotional support and companionship. The success of this, and peer mentoring schemes, relies on the creation of a strong and supportive relationship between two people.

### **Brighter Futures for Children (BFfC)**

A not-for-profit-company established to deliver children's services in the Reading Borough area, giving the best possible opportunities for the children of Reading including Children's Social Care, Early Help, Safeguarding and Youth Offending Services.

### **Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG)**

Created following the Health and Social Care Act in 2012 and replaced Primary Care Trusts on 1 April 2013. Clinically-led statutory National Health Service bodies responsible for the planning and commissioning of health care services for their local area.

### **Disabled Facilities Grant**

Grants provided by the Council to enable people with a disability to make necessary changes to their home.

### **Discretionary Housing Payment**

Payments which can make up the difference, or some of the difference, between Local Housing Allowance or the housing element of Universal Credit and rents. These are assessed in line with the Council's policy.

### **Dual diagnosis**

A term used to describe patients with both severe mental ill-health and chronic substance dependency.

### **Duty to Refer**

A legal obligation on certain public/statutory bodies to notify the local housing authority under 213B of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 of anyone who is homeless or at risk of homelessness.

### **Experts by Experience**

people with first-hand experience of homelessness who can shape and inform the change and development of services and strategy for homeless households.

### **Hidden homelessness**

A that refers to people who would meet the legal definition of homeless if they were to make a formal application but are not represented in the local authority homeless statistics.

### **Homelessness**

A broad term which includes people who live in unsuitable housing, don't have rights to stay where they are, or are rough sleeping.

### **Homelessness Support Services**

The collective name for services commissioned by the Council to support households who are homeless or at risk of homelessness and that includes the following contracts: Rough Sleeping Outreach Service; Floating support service for early intervention, prevention and tenancy sustainment; Intensive and engaging support: Hub and accommodation service and Working towards Independence accommodation service.

### **House of Multiple Occupancy**

A property where at least three tenants live, forming more than one household and where they share toilet, bathroom or kitchen facilities with other tenants.

### **Housing Associations**

See Registered Providers.

**Housing Benefit**

A benefit that can help people pay their rent if they are unemployed, on a low income or claiming benefits. This is being replaced by Universal Credit.

**Housing-related support**

Services that aim to develop or sustain an individual's capacity to live independently in accommodation. Support enables rather than does things for an individual.

**Homelessness Prevention Service**

The Council's frontline homelessness service which provides support for residents who need housing advice or are threatened with homelessness.

**Intermediate housing**

Housing for people that are not eligible for social housing but where market homes are still unaffordable. It can be rented housing or low-cost home ownership like shared ownership.

**Local Housing Allowance (LHA)**

Paid when someone needs financial support to pay their rent. The amount received depends on individual circumstances and the LHA rate for the local area. Generally, LHA levels reflect the 30th percentile of local private rented sector rates, up to an overall cap.

**Market rent**

Housing that is for rent in the private sector at the full market value that is not discounted in any way.

**Migrants**

A person who is staying outside their country of origin, who are not asylum-seekers or refugees. They may have left their country to work, study or join family. Others may have left due to poverty, political unrest, gang violence, natural disasters or other serious circumstances.

**Multiple disadvantage**

The experience of a combination of difficulties including homelessness, substance dependence, contact with the criminal justice system and mental ill health.

**No Recourse to Public Funds**

An immigration condition restricting access to public funds, including many mainstream benefits such as welfare and housing.

**Peer mentoring**

A relationship between people who have experienced or are experiencing

homelessness, in which one person has more experience than the other and can transfer their skills and knowledge that provide support and homelessness prevention or alleviation. It can be one-on-one or part of a group. Mentoring tends to involve support around education, employment and training.

**Person-centred**

Can mean different things to different customers but is about focusing on the needs of an individual household and ensuring that people's preferences, needs and values guide clinical decisions and provide housing and support that is respectful of and responsive to them.

**Personalised Housing Plans (PHPs)**

An outline of the steps to be taken to prevent or relieve a person's homelessness where they are homeless or threatened with homelessness and are eligible. The 'plan' should be drawn up by the local housing authority as part of its duties under the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. It should be based on its assessment of her/his needs and include agreement on the steps to be taken by the individual, the local authority and any other parties involved in supporting that individual.

**Quota queue**

Additional priority given to certain groups in housing need, from different social care groups, within the Council's Allocations Scheme. The number of individual quotas for each queue is calculated on an annual basis. Single homeless people, including people sleeping rough where there are no specific support needs and people moving on from Homelessness Support Services are one of the community groups that can be afforded this priority. A panel determines which individuals are included in this quota.

**Reconnection**

Considered on the particular facts of each homeless case, including if it is safe and appropriate to do so, but where a council can refer a homeless applicant to another local authority under section 198 of the Housing Act 1996.

**Refugee**

A person who has fled their own country because they are at risk of serious human rights violations and persecution there. The risks to their safety and life were so great that they felt they had no choice but to leave and seek safety outside their country because their own government cannot or will not protect them from those dangers.

**Rough sleeping**

A term which refers to people who are sleeping or bedding down in the open air, in places such as streets, doorways, parks, benches or bus shelters, or even in sheds, car parks, tents or makeshift shelters.

**Social housing**

All Council and Housing Association properties in the borough are let through Reading Borough Council's Choice Based Lettings Scheme. Applicants are awarded priority for housing based on their level of housing need, considering criteria such as overcrowding, homelessness, or medical or welfare needs.

**Sofa surfing**

An informal term that describes the practice of a homeless person staying temporarily with various friends and relatives while attempting to find permanent accommodation.

**Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA)**

Assessment which provides an up to date assessment of housing need in Berkshire and breaks that down for each authority area.

**Supported accommodation**

Accommodation commissioned by the council that provides specialist support (to varying degrees) to people formerly sleeping roughs and other vulnerable people.

**Trauma informed**

A strength-based response to the impact of trauma within support delivery by emphasising the physical, psychological and emotional safety of those affected by trauma. This creates opportunities for those affected to rebuild a sense of control and empowerment.

**Trauma informed approach**

An approach which supports individuals who have experience of sustained exposure to traumatic events and the symptomology arising from such exposure, which is described as complex trauma and is identified as a recurring theme amongst homeless women.

**Registered Provider**

Not for profit or charitable organisations that, along with local authorities, also provide Affordable Housing. They can be known as Housing Associations.

**Rent Guarantee Scheme**

A Council scheme that matches people who need homes with landlords who have properties to let. Rent is paid directly to the landlord, in advance. Payment of rent is guaranteed to the landlord, up to six weeks', as a tenancy deposit to cover costs if property is damaged by the tenant.

**Team Reading**

Reading's vision to ensure that Reading realises its potential as a great place to live, work and play, and that everyone shares the benefits of this success. It is based upon working together; driving efficiency, being ambitious and making a difference. This vision is underpinned by a People's Strategy where staff are key to delivering this vision and sets out how we aim to achieve this and create an organisation that provides excellent services to Reading.

**Temporary Accommodation (TA)**

Accommodation provided by the Council for homeless households they have a rehousing duty towards.

**Under Occupation Rate**

This is sometimes known as the 'removal of the spare room subsidy' or 'bedroom tax'. If you are working age and rent your home from a social housing landlord such as the council or a housing association, and have a spare bedroom, your Housing Benefit or Universal Credit may be reduced.

**Universal Credit**

Replaces Job Seekers Allowance, Employment & Support Allowance, Income Support, Child Tax Credits, Working Tax Credits and Housing Benefit for working age people. However, Housing Benefit remains for some groups including some supported and sheltered housing, temporary accommodation, refuges for survivors of domestic abuse.

**Welfare reform**

This is a general term to describe a range of changes which were made to the benefit system and were introduced through the Welfare Reform Act 2012. The changes include Local Housing Allowance caps and an Overall Benefit Cap for non- working households.

## Review of Reading's Homelessness Strategy 2016 - 2021

### PRIORITY ONE - Increase the use and accessibility of the private rented sector

#### Our aim was to...

- Reduce the number of households in B&B and other types of emergency and temporary accommodation
- Reduce the number of households becoming homeless from private rented accommodation

#### Achievements against this priority - we have...

- ✓ Reduced the number of households placed into emergency accommodation (B&B) from a peak of **178 in July 2016 down to 11 in March 2020**
- ✓ Sustained the number of households in emergency accommodation (B&B) at an **average of 14 throughout 2019/20**
- ✓ Ensured that **no families are being placed in emergency accommodation with shared facilities** (kitchen or bathroom)
- ✓ Reduced the number of households living in temporary accommodation by more than half, **from 315 in March 2018 down to 150 in March 2020**
- ✓ **Prevented 574 households from becoming homeless** by assisting them to remain in their accommodation between April 2018 - March 2020
- ✓ **Relieved 539 households of their homelessness** by supporting them to obtain alternative accommodation between April 2018 - March 2020

#### How this was achieved

##### Launch of the Rent Guarantee Scheme (RGS) in autumn 2015

- Alongside the Deposit Guarantee Scheme (DGS), the RGS provides guaranteed rent to landlords to incentivise renting to households who at risk of/are homeless
- Resulted in an increase of property sign-ups and properties procured for use by families at risk of homelessness

##### Implementation of the Private Rented Sector Offer (PRSO) in Reading in 2016

- Since its inception, over 100 homelessness duties have been discharged into the private rented sector utilising the PRSO, alongside prevention fund payments to assist with deposits and rent in advance

##### Creative utilisation of Homelessness Prevention Funds and Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs) to prevent homelessness

- Control of the DHP budget moved from Revenues and Benefits and to the Income Recovery team within the housing department
  - 2019/20 - 136 households utilised £304,687 of DHP for prevention
  - 2018/19 - 110 households utilised £293,819 of DHP for prevention
  - 2017/18 - 129 households utilised £275,237 of DHP for prevention

##### Improving standards of property in the private rented sector

- Standardised inspections of all properties secured with homelessness prevention funds to ensure they meet with required standards
- Private rented sector charter developed in 2017 to outline the Council's main actions in supporting tenants, landlords, managing and letting agents to deliver a safe, healthy and thriving private rented sector
- Additional specialist procurement officer employed to meet the specific needs of homeless households

## Action to take forward to our next strategy

### Continue to:

- Reduce homeless households placed into emergency and temporary accommodation
- Reduce the number of households becoming homeless from the private rented sector
- Increase the supply of private sector landlords through the RGS
- Improve private rented sector standards and enhance the Council's offer for landlords
- Use DHP/the Homelessness Prevention Fund for homelessness prevention

## PRIORITY TWO - Prevent homelessness by supporting people to access housing and to sustain their accommodation

### Our aim was to...

#### Reduce the number of:

- Individuals newly identified as sleeping rough
- People returning to rough sleeping
- Households living in emergency and temporary accommodation - especially bed and breakfast
- Families found to be intentionally homeless
- Households living within unstable housing where they have additional needs

### Achievements against this priority - we have...

#### Reduced the number of:

- ✓ Households living in emergency and temporary housing
- ✓ People found sleeping rough on our autumn annual snap-shot count, from 31 in 2017 down to 28 in 2019<sup>16</sup>
- ✓ Households found intentionally homeless - by 2019/20 this had decreased to 18 across the whole year
- ✓ Full homelessness duty acceptances - in 2016/17 this was 408 households and by 2019/20 this was 175 households

### How this was achieved

#### Introduction of newly commissioned Homelessness Support Services (September 2018)

- To include the provision of emergency bed spaces for a No Second Night Out response; supported accommodation for single people/couples/dog owners and tenancy sustainment support for households at risk of homelessness

#### Additional funds secured from the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) to the amount of £327,000 for 2018/19, £861,000 for 2019/20 and £647,000 for 2020/21

- To include targeted interventions to reduce rough sleeping numbers, sustain former rough sleepers within independent accommodation and to sustain households in the private rented sector

#### Publication of Reading's Rough Sleeping Strategy 2019 - 24

- Developed to ensure specific strategic and operational focus for those rough sleeping

#### Improved support pathways for victims of domestic abuse

- Sanctuary Scheme support now available through homelessness prevention funds
- Reviewed, remodelled and recommissioned refuge and Domestic Abuse outreach services

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<sup>16</sup> The impact of Dame Louise Casey's 'Everyone In' COVID-19 rough sleeping response is likely to alter how rough sleeping data and numbers will be captured/monitored and how support will be funded/delivered post April 2020.

- Revised Domestic Abuse Strategy for 2019 - 2022

#### **Duty to Refer introduced under the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017**

- New duty since October 2018 for all statutory partners to refer anyone at risk of homelessness within 56 days to the local housing authority
- Relevant Service Level Agreements implemented with all statutory partners
- Introduction, roll out and training for partners of the ALERT referral system

#### **Co-ordination and availability of services for people in financial difficulties**

- Landlord Liaison Officer role in post between 2016 - 2018 providing a single point of contact for RGS landlords regarding their functions, legislation and tenants
- Specialist money advisor in post from 2018 to give advice and support to RGS/DGS tenants in maximising their income, reducing outgoings and addressing debts
- In-house debt advice team who can administer DHP for homelessness prevention
- Creation of the Social Inclusion Team to support sustainment of Council tenants
- Greater utilisation/referral to charities that can provide financial assistance in crisis
- Upskilling of homelessness prevention officers in debt advice knowledge

#### **Supporting those identified under the *Troubled Families* agenda to sustain suitable accommodation**

- Provision of data, from housing, regarding those at risk of homelessness; in unsuitable accommodation and temporary accommodation to the (now former) Troubled Families team to enable early identification and intervention and to assist in mitigating the effects of welfare reform

#### **Avoiding use of bed and breakfast accommodation for 16/17-year olds and improved support pathways for young people**

- All emergency 16/17-year-old placements made by Children's Social Care to ensure they are appropriate and to understand and monitor demand and need
- Commissioning and use of Reading YMCA crash pad in 2016 to assist with ensuring that no young person aged 16-17 is placed into B&B
- Joint protocol between Brighter Futures for Children (BFfC) and housing reviewed in accordance with Southwark judgement compliance
- Cross-service *Youth Homelessness Action Plan* between BFfC and housing developed that is centred around analysing need, partnerships and information sharing, the young person's journey, advice/support/training and accommodation options

#### **Increased units of temporary accommodation**

- 28 units developed at Lowfield Road site
- Approximately 40 properties re-purposed at Dee Park whilst properties were awaiting demolition and the area being regenerated

#### **Supporting geographical mobility**

- Support for households to move to another area via Homefinder UK, Homehunt and financial support to enable this

#### **Action to take forward to our next strategy**

- Review of accommodation and housing support services and pathways for young people aged 16 - 24, including those leaving care or custody
- Explore joint working relationships with Registered Providers regarding those at risk of homelessness
- Continue improvement in support pathways for victims of domestic abuse
- Continue joint working/embedding of practices for those households that would formerly have been identified under the Troubled Families programme

## **PRIORITY THREE - Increase the range and accessibility of information and advice available to enable people to make informed decisions about their housing situation**

### **Our aim was to...**

- Reduce the number of approaches to the Council's Housing Advice Service at the point of a housing crisis
- Fewer households living in emergency and temporary accommodation

### **What we achieved...**

- ✓ Reduction in households living in in emergency and temporary accommodation and where the reduction in placements shows that fewer placements were needed to be made for households in crisis

### **How this was achieved**

#### **Introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 legislation**

- Placed extra duties upon and provided extra funding to the Council to prevent and relieve homelessness within 56 days including the introduction of Personalised Housing Plans to avoid housing crisis and focus upon prevention

#### **Redesigned and additional staffing resource within Homelessness Prevention teams**

- Separate single and family homelessness prevention teams that provide specialist advice and support to different households
- Piloted Resolution and Enablement Team for early intervention in preparation for the Homelessness Reduction Act and embedding early upstream prevention ethos
- Introduced triage system and specialist frontline Housing Advice Support Team for households presenting in crisis to the Council

#### **Introduction of a personalised and enhanced online response for applicants to Homechoice Reading (social housing register)**

- Introduced online application form in September 2017 with functions to host targeted campaigns/advice and links to out of area options/alternative solutions
- Introduced of daily advertising making the system and service more accessible

#### **Development and dissemination of information for households who are homeless or at risk of homelessness**

- Suite of leaflets developed to inform and publicise available support and advice
- Rolling training programme developed and delivered for partners on the Homelessness Reduction Act, Duty to Refer and new Homelessness Support Services
- Housing Needs Outreach Officer single point of contact function
- Tailored community/voluntary sector training for trustees and volunteers
- Targeted work and training with BfFC regarding sourcing accommodation for intentionally homeless households

#### **Proactive contact with those at risk of homelessness (early identification and interventions)**

- System/software procured to identify households who may be at risk of homelessness due to changes in their finances, low income or welfare reform

#### **Development of information for people being discharged from Prospect Park and Royal Berkshire Hospitals**

- Discharge flowcharts and a protocol developed for staff prior to Homelessness Reduction Act and Duty to Refer being implemented
- Duty to Refer mechanism introduced, promoted and training provided
- Homelessness Partnership Officer based within Prospect Park Hospital teams once a week to provide support and guidance around homelessness/risk of homelessness

- Communications piece undertaken with A&E at Royal Berkshire Hospital in reporting people at risk of homelessness or who are identified as rough sleeping

**Working in partnership with Adult Social Care and other services to provide targeted advice for older people living in poor quality accommodation**

- Sheltered accommodation review and new structure and services implemented in 2017/2018

**Launch of Street Support Reading and Reading's Homelessness Partnership**

- Street Support Reading information portal, aimed at single homeless households introduced in 2019
- Reading's Homelessness Partnership established September 2019 with meetings held each quarter

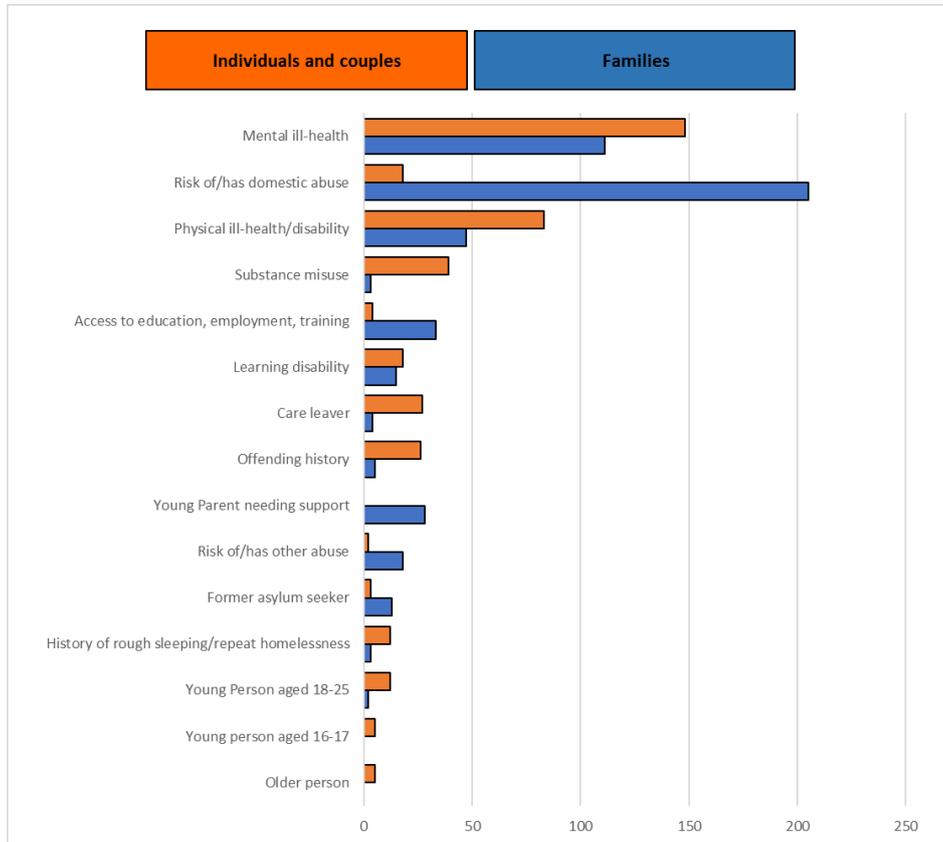
**Action to take forward to our next strategy**

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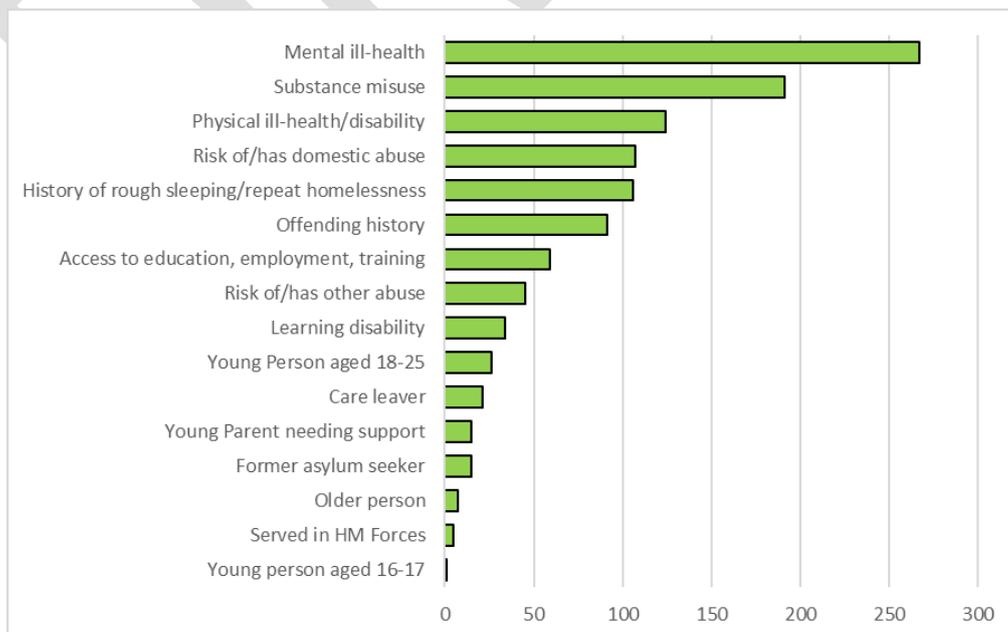
- Provide training for partners on changes in legislation and support available from housing services and ensure training is reciprocated for mutual service understanding
- Develop and disseminate information regarding homelessness that targets households through a variety of media
- Target provision of advice for older people living in poor quality accommodation
- Implement procured system/software to enable early identification/intervention
- Work with households under-occupying social rented accommodation to enable moves
- Link with hospitals regarding the Duty to Refer, co-ordinated discharges and identifying homelessness at the point of admission

## Support need analysis of approaches April 2018 - March 2020

**Chart 1: Primary support needs where only one need is identified<sup>17</sup>**



**Chart 2: Complex support needs across all households (more than one identified support need)**



<sup>17</sup> Data captured for primary household member only