Understanding Homelessness and Rough Sleeping in Reading:

Strategic needs analysis

June 2025

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Introduction

This document represents the initial phase in developing a combined Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy for Reading. It brings together a wide range of data and analysis to inform a strategic response that is evidence-based, collaborative, and tailored to local needs.

Drawing on Census 2021 data, local service intelligence, and national policy developments, the review outlines the demographic, economic, and housing context in which homelessness and rough sleeping occur. It highlights key pressures – including population growth, affordability challenges, health inequalities, and the impact of the cost-of-living crisis – that shape demand for services and influence housing stability.

The findings will support the development of targeted interventions and help ensure that future services are inclusive, responsive, and aligned with the needs of Reading's residents. Crucially, this review will inform the strategy's priorities and underpin the development of a detailed action plan to guide delivery over the next five years.

By establishing a shared understanding of the current landscape, this document provides a foundation for strategic planning and service development across the borough in tackling homelessness and rough sleeping.

Funding of homelessness and rough sleeping services

Government funding for homelessness services is channelled through several departments, including the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, Local Government, and the Department for Work and Pensions. These departments allocate resources via specific grants and payments such as the Homelessness Prevention Grant, Rough Sleeping Prevention and Recovery Grant, Discretionary Housing Payments, Housing Benefit, and Temporary Accommodation subsidies. All funding ultimately reaches local authorities, who are responsible for delivering homelessness support.

In 2025–26, nearly £1 billion has been allocated to councils to tackle homelessness. Key funding includes over £633 million for the Homelessness Prevention Grant, £185.6 million for the Rough Sleeping Prevention and Recovery Grant, and £53.7 million for drug and alcohol treatment. Additional support includes £37 million for RSAP, £10 million for Changing Futures, £7.6 million for sector support initiatives, and £5 million for emergency accommodation reduction pilots.

Multiple government departments contribute to homelessness services beyond core housing funding. These include health funding for drug and housing support, justice initiatives like the Community Accommodation Service and housing specialists, and Cabinet Office pilot programmes. Legal aid has been expanded for housing and immigration cases, while the Department for Work and Pensions supports through Discretionary Housing Payments and the Household Support Grant. The Department for Education funds programmes for care leavers, including Staying Put, Staying Close, and targeted support for those at highest risk of homelessness.

The table below outlines grants and amounts awarded to Reading Borough Council, from central Government, between 2020/21 and 2025/26. The Council contributes £932k per annum of General Funds and £337k per annum of Public Health grant towards specialist support, accommodation, and tenancy sustainment for those rough sleeping or at risk of homelessness.

Homelessness and/or rough sleeping grant	Reason for grant award	Amount awarded to Reading Borough Council
Homelessness Prevention Grant	Funding provided to help councils meet duties under the Housing Act 1996 and deliver local homelessness strategies. These total amounts included: £321,771 winter top-up in 2021/22 and £247,516 winter top-up and £21,608 for Domestic Abuse Act new burdens in 2022/23.	£1,856,369 (2021/22) £1,803,722 (2022/23) £2,042,191 (2023/24) £2,054,488 (2024/25) £3,128,534 (2025/26)
Rough Sleeping Initiative 2021/22	£203 million was allocated across 281 areas in England, combining the Rough Sleeping Initiative and Rapid Rehousing Pathway. In Reading, funding supported expanded outreach, additional Housing First, and staffing to improve support and accommodation for people sleeping rough.	£1,036,930
Rough Sleeping Initiatives 2022-25	Up to £500 million was allocated across 303 areas in England to support people sleeping rough or at risk of it. In Reading, it funded expanded outreach, additional Housing First, and staffing to strengthen support and accommodation.	£3,349,023
Rough Sleeping Prevention and Recovery Grant 2025-26	£185.6 million was awarded to councils in England as part of a wider £1 billion package for homelessness services. RSPARG combined funding for rough sleeping services, Housing First, and support for ex-offenders, aiming to simplify grant access and management.	£1,182,240
Winter Pressures / Additional Pressures Funding	£60 million was distributed to 295 councils in three stages to support emergency accommodation during cold weather. It complemented the Rough Sleeping Initiative 2022–25 and aimed to reduce health risks for people sleeping rough.	£457,998
Rough Sleeping Accommodation Programme	Launched in 2020 with £435 million, the programme supports up to 6,000 people into longer-term housing with wraparound support. In Reading, it funds: 40 modular units at Caversham Road, 10 female-only bedspaces at The Nova Project. Both offer 24/7 staffing for people with multiple needs and rough sleeping histories.	£2,300,000 (2021-24) £760,919 (2024/25) £881,919 (2025/26)
Single Homeless Accommodation Programme	£255.7 million was awarded over five cycles to increase long-term housing for people sleeping rough or at risk, across 303 areas. In Reading, it funded five additional Housing First units.	£647,788
Accommodation for Ex-Offenders	AFEO provided capital and revenue funding to help prison leavers at risk of homelessness access private rented housing. It aimed to increase long-term accommodation and reduce reoffending through tenancy support and landlord incentives. In Reading, over 200 referrals were made and 50+ tenancies secured.	£254,063 (2021-23) £336,200 (2023-25)

Current local and national policy context

UK legislation impacting homelessness and rough sleeping

This is an overview of all legislation that governs homelessness services or that is relevant, within other sectors and services, to successful service delivery.

Legislation	Sector	Key Provisions	Implications for homelessness and rough sleeping
Mental Health Act 1983 (as amended)	Health / Adult Social Care	Enables assessment and treatment for mental illness	Supports joint working; may trigger housing duties for those discharged from hospital
Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000	Children's Social Care	Requires pathway planning and support for care leavers up to age 25	Recognises care leavers as a high-risk group; mandates housing and support provision
Welfare Reform Act 2012	Welfare Support	Introduced Universal Credit, benefit caps, and under-occupancy rules	Contributed to rent arrears and evictions; increased financial pressure on low-income households
Care Act 2014	Adult Social Care	Duty to assess and meet care needs; safeguarding responsibilities	Supports wraparound care for people sleeping rough; enables housing-related support for people with care needs
Homelessness Reduction Act 2017	Housing / Local Government	Introduces prevention and relief duties; duty to refer from public bodies	Promotes early intervention; increases referrals from health, justice, and social care sectors
Domestic Abuse Act 2021	Criminal Justice / Housing	Extends priority need for housing to all survivors; duty to provide safe accommodation	Helps prevent homelessness among survivors; ensures access to safe, supported housing
Supported Housing (Regulatory Oversight) Act	Housing / Regulation	Introduces minimum standards and licensing for supported housing	Aims to improve quality and safety; may reduce provision if smaller providers exit the market
Renters' Rights Bill (proposed)	Housing / Tenancy Law	Abolishes Section 21 evictions; introduces tenancy reforms	May reduce rental supply and increase competition for affordable homes

The sections below outline key recent legislation that has, or will have, a significant impact on how homelessness and support services are delivered across the lifetime of Reading's new homelessness and rough sleeping strategy.

Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 (HRA)

The introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 (HRA) has significantly reshaped the way local housing authorities respond to homelessness. By placing a legal duty on councils to intervene earlier, the HRA has expanded the scope of support to include all eligible households, not just those in priority need. The Act also introduced the Duty to Refer, requiring specified public authorities to refer individuals who may be homeless or at risk to local homelessness prevention teams – promoting earlier intervention and cross-sector collaboration. This has led to a marked increase in the number of homelessness applications, particularly under prevention and relief duties. As a result, local authorities have experienced a substantial rise in workload, with more assessments, personalised housing plans, and case management responsibilities. While this has improved the quality and detail of homelessness data, it has also placed additional pressure on already stretched homelessness services.

Renters' Rights Bill

The Renters' Rights Bill introduces reform to the private rented sector that support homelessness prevention, including the abolition of Section 21 'no fault' evictions, enhanced protections against retaliatory evictions, and the creation of a Private Rented Sector Ombudsman. These measures aim to reduce evictions into homelessness and improve housing stability for vulnerable households. However, the Bill is anticipated to have unintended consequences. Increased regulation and uncertainty have prompted some landlords to exit the market, reducing the supply of affordable rental properties. This contraction in stock, combined with rising demand, may lead to higher rents, greater competition, and reduced access to housing for low-income households. Additionally, enforcement challenges – such as limited local authority capacity and tenant reluctance to report issues – could undermine the Bill's effectiveness. These pressures risk exacerbating housing insecurity and increasing demand for homelessness services. Reading's strategy must therefore balance the Bill's protective intent with proactive measures to mitigate market disruption and support those most at risk.

Supported Housing (Regulatory Oversight) Act

The Supported Housing (Regulatory Oversight) Act introduces a national framework to improve the quality, safety, and accountability of supported housing, including provision for people experiencing, or at risk of, homelessness. By establishing minimum standards, a licensing regime, and clearer definitions of supported housing, the Act aims to protect vulnerable residents and ensure public funding delivers effective, value-for-money support. However, sector leaders have raised concerns about several unintended consequences. These include the risk that smaller, community-based or specialist providers may be unable to absorb the administrative and compliance costs, leading to service closures or market withdrawal. A "blanket" regulatory approach may also fail to distinguish between exploitative providers and high-quality services, resulting in disproportionate burdens on compliant organisations. Additionally, devolving licensing decisions to local authorities could lead to inconsistent implementation and local opposition to essential services, particularly in areas with limited understanding of supported housing needs. If not carefully managed, these outcomes could reduce the availability of supported accommodation, increase pressure on homelessness services, and undermine the very protections the Act seeks to strengthen. The strategy must therefore advocate for proportionate,

well-funded implementation that reflects the diversity and complexity of supported housing provision.

Relevant Council and wider sector strategies and policies

Reading's Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2025-30 sits alongside a number of other, strategies and policies. How these all interconnect is crucial where the strategy will not be successful without effective cross-Council, cross-sector and partnership working to tackle homelessness and rough sleeping in Reading.

Why these links matter

The integration of homelessness and rough sleeping strategies with wider Council strategies reflects a recognition that early intervention, breaking the cycle of homelessness and enabling housing security is not an isolated issue. It is deeply connected to health, economic inequality, community safety, and social inclusion. Embedding housing-related objectives across multiple strategic areas would deliver more effective, coordinated, and sustainable responses to homelessness.

Relevant strategy or policy	Link to Reading's Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2025 – 30
Council Plan 2025–2028	Sets the overarching vision and priorities for Reading, including tackling inequality, safeguarding, and supporting the health and wellbeing of Reading's adults and children, and delivering affordable housing – all of which underpin the homelessness strategy.
Reading's Housing Strategy 2020–2025	Focuses on increasing affordable housing supply, improving housing conditions, and supporting vulnerable residents. Promotes prevention and partnership working, with both the homelessness and housing strategy aiming to ensure that everyone in Reading has access to safe, secure, and sustainable housing.
Allocations Scheme (April 2024)	Ensures that those owed a statutory homelessness duty are given appropriate priority for social housing. Includes individuals and families who are homeless, in priority need, and unintentionally homeless aiming to help discharge the council's duty and reduce time spent in temporary accommodation. Scheme includes quota queues – specific allocations set aside for vulnerable groups – including people supported by Adult or Children's Social Care, those leaving care, survivors of domestic abuse, and those sleeping rough engaged with support services. Helps ensure those most at risk of homelessness or social exclusion can access safe, secure accommodation as part of their recovery and reintegration into the community. Recent changes have removed local connection requirements for those leaving care under 25 and former members of the Armed Forces, ensuring they can access social housing regardless of where they live – recognising the unique challenges they face when transitioning out of care or military service.
Development and Regeneration Programme 2025 - 2040	Council initiative to increase the supply of Council owned affordable housing, replace outdated stock, and deliver sustainable, energy-efficient homes that support housing stability and help prevent homelessness.
Tackling Inequality Strategy 2023–2026	Focuses on reducing disparities in health, housing, and access to services. Supports the homelessness strategy's emphasis on prevention, inclusion, and equitable service delivery.

Relevant strategy or policy	Link to Reading's Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2025 – 30
Berkshire West Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2021 - 2030	Recognises housing as a key social determinant of health where homelessness is both a cause and consequence of poor health. Supports integrated mental health and substance misuse services, access to primary care, and hospital discharge planning to prevent homelessness. Aligns with the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) to ensure that local needs drive service planning and delivery.
NHS 10-Year Plan (2019 – 2029)	Recognises that people experiencing homelessness and rough sleeping face significantly poorer health outcomes and often rely heavily on urgent and emergency care. Supports targeted, integrated care pathways – particularly in A&E – to improve access to primary and secondary health services, reduce health inequalities, and prevent avoidable hospital admissions. It aligns with the Core20PLUS5 approach to tackling health disparities and promotes trauma-informed, person-centred care for all socially excluded groups including those who are homeless or rough sleeping.
Adult Care Strategy 2019–2022	Prioritises prevention, independence, and integrated support for vulnerable adults, such as people with mental health needs or disabilities. Promotes early intervention, person-centred care, multi-agency working, trauma-informed care and a commitment to safeguarding and improving outcomes for people with complex needs, aligning with homelessness and rough sleeping strategy priorities and principles.
Domestic Abuse and Safe Accommodation Strategy 2023–2026	Ensures victim-survivors of domestic abuse have access to safe housing. Prioritises early intervention, trauma-informed support, safeguarding, multi-agency working and addressing the complex needs of vulnerable residents. Aims to ensure that those fleeing domestic abuse are not further traumatised by housing insecurity, aligning closely with homelessness prevention priorities and principles.

Relevant strategy or policy	Link to Reading's Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2025 – 30
Community Safety and Serious Violence Strategy 2023–2026	Aims to tackle serious violence, anti-social behaviour, and exploitation – issues that intersect with rough sleeping. For example, individuals sleeping rough are more vulnerable to violence and exploitation, and their presence in public spaces can be associated with community safety concerns. Supports trauma-informed, multi-agency approaches to safeguarding and early intervention and outlines the Community Safety Partnership's commitment to a public health approach by addressing the root causes of crime and disorder which can contribute to housing insecurity and homelessness.
Customer Experience Strategy 2020–2024	Promotes accessible, responsive, and person-centred services. Supports early intervention, reduces barriers to access, and ensures vulnerable residents receive timely assistance through joined-up systems and a "tell us once" approach. Commits to ensuring that all residents, including those at risk of homelessness, can engage with the Council at a time and place of their choosing, using any device, while recognising that some individuals will need additional support.
Empty Homes Strategy 2020–2026	Aims to bring long-term vacant properties back into use, increasing housing availability and improving neighbourhood conditions. Supports homelessness prevention by seeking to expand housing supply.
Leaving Care Service Action Plan 2023/24 (Published by Children's Services as Brighter Futures for Children)	Supports young people aged 16–25 transitioning out of care with housing, education, and health services. Promotes early intervention and stable accommodation to prevent homelessness among those leaving care.
Care Leavers' Strategy (Local offer) (Published by Children's Services as Brighter Futures for Children)	Directly supports care-experienced young people aged 16–25, a group at high risk of homelessness. Outlines housing, education, employment, and health support, aligning with early intervention and prevention goals in the homelessness strategy.
Children in Care Sufficiency Strategy 2024–2026 (Published by Children's Services as Brighter Futures for Children)	Focuses on ensuring there are enough suitable placements for children in care. Helps prevent housing instability and supports smoother transitions out of care, reducing the risk of homelessness.

Relevant strategy or policy	Link to Reading's Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2025 – 30
Youth Justice Plan 2024–25 (Published by Children's Services as Brighter Futures for Children)	Young people involved in the justice system are at increased risk of homelessness. Promotes integrated support and rehabilitation, helping to reduce reoffending and housing instability.
Alternative Provision Strategic Framework 2024–2027 (Published by Children's Services as Brighter Futures for Children)	Supports children and young people with complex needs who may be at risk of exclusion and future homelessness. Ensures inclusive education and support pathways, contributing to long-term stability and resilience.
Brighter Futures for Children Business Plan 2024–25 and Three-Year Strategy 2023–26 (Published by Children's Services as Brighter Futures for Children)	Sets the strategic direction for children's services in Reading. Emphasises early help, prevention, and partnership working – core principles shared with the homelessness strategy.
Sanctuary Strategy 2025–2028 and Action Plan	Aims to make Reading a welcoming place for refugees and asylum seekers, many of whom are at risk of homelessness or housing insecurity.
Private Sector Renewal and Disabled Adaptations Policy	Supports access to safe and suitable housing, particularly for vulnerable individuals, aligning with the strategy's aims for sustainable accommodation pathways.
Housing Standards Enforcement Policy (including HMOs)	Ensures quality and safety in housing, especially in the private rented sector, which is a key part of homelessness prevention.
Antisocial Behaviour Policy	Links to tenancy sustainment and community safety, both of which are important for preventing repeat homelessness.
Modern Slavery Transparency Statement	Addresses exploitation and safeguarding, relevant to rough sleeping and hidden homelessness among vulnerable populations.
Social Value Policy	Encourages commissioning and procurement that delivers community benefit, including support for vulnerable and homeless individuals.
Team Reading People Strategy	Focuses on workforce development, which supports the delivery of trauma-informed, person-centred homelessness services to improve accessibility and provide positive outcomes.

Data sets for comparison

2021 Census

Data from the 2021 Census has provided us with a more up-to-date and detailed understanding of Reading's population, economy, housing market, labour market, and other key socio-economic characteristics. This refreshed insight helps us to better understand the context in which homelessness and rough sleeping occur in our town.

Recognising the challenges and pressures highlighted by this data is essential. It enables the Council to shape more informed, targeted, and effective responses within our homelessness and rough sleeping strategy and action plan.

To note, Census 2021 data were adjusted to account for non-responses, ensuring results represent the entire usually resident population on Census Day. Specific guidance was provided for groups such as furloughed workers and students to maintain accurate classification within the economically active population and usual residence. Changes in question wording for disability improved alignment with the Equality Act 2010, enhancing data quality. Age-standardised proportions, based on the 2013 European Standard Population, were used to enable fair comparisons across time and regions, and all percentages were rounded to one decimal place, which may cause minor discrepancies in totals.

ONS comparison clusters

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) groups local areas across the UK into 'K-means' clusters based on shared characteristics. These clusters help councils and policymakers compare places facing similar challenges or opportunities. In these datasets, Reading is part of Global Cluster D – a broad grouping of local authorities which it is stated have similar profiles across key indicators such as economy, health, education, housing, and more. However, Global Cluster D contains a significant number of London local authority areas, therefore, a South East and nearest neighbour comparator has been applied instead.

ONS determined statistical nearest neighbour clusters are smaller, more focused groups of similar places and encompass a list of the most similar areas for each local authority. This is achieved by measuring how alike places are based on shared features, not physical distance. They use a formula and chart to find the most common levels of similarity. To make sure the comparisons are meaningful, they set a limit on how different places can be to still count as "similar."

The following authority areas are considered to be Reading's statistical nearest neighbours in 2025, and these are the local authorities that the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) use in discussion about comparisons and performance with Reading as a local authority:

- Reading
- Bracknell Forest
- Bristol
- Milton Keynes
- Portsmouth
- Slough
- Southampton
- Swindon
- Coventry
- Derby
- Manchester
- Newcastle upon Tyne
- Peterborough
- Thurrock
- Trafford
- York

H-CLIC data

Local authorities are required to submit Homelessness Case Level Information Collection (H-CLIC) data to the MHCLG every quarter. This statutory return captures detailed information on households who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, including demographics, support needs, accommodation outcomes, and how duties under the Homelessness Reduction Act have been discharged. The data is collated to monitor national trends, inform funding decisions, and enable benchmarking across councils. While H-CLIC provides valuable insights, it has limitations – such as underrepresentation of hidden homelessness and reliance on accurate and consistent local recording by Homelessness Prevention teams. The data is published by the MHCLG and used to support policy development, performance monitoring, and strategic planning at both local and national levels.

It is important to note that in April 2024, all Housing teams at Reading Borough Council transitioned to a new case management system for recording homelessness assessments and outcomes. Data from the previous system was migrated in bulk, which may have introduced some initial anomalies in reporting. As with any system change, there is a period of adjustment while officers become familiar with new processes and data/monitoring teams refine their understanding of input and output requirements. While the overall aim is to improve data quality and consistency, these transitional factors should be considered when interpreting early data from the new system in 2024/25. In cases where pre-case management system change data is considered more accurate, representative, and/or reliable, this has been quoted or used.

Reading's Changing Profile: Insights from Census 2021

Population and demography

Reading's population passed 170,000

The population of Reading increased by 11.9%, from under 155,700 in 2011 to around 174,200 in 2021. Refreshed and most recent mid-year figures in 2022 showed a further increase to 174,820. This is a higher increase than the overall population of the South East (7.5%) and higher than the overall population of England (up 6.6% since the 2011 census).

What the population data tells us:

Rapid growth places added pressure on local housing supply and support services. Increases in population require interventions and resourcing to ensure housing options, homelessness prevention and rough sleeping services can meet increased demand, so that the Council are equipped to support a growing and increasingly diverse population.

Increase in median age from 33 to 35 years of age

The number of people aged 50 to 64 years rose by around 6,200 (28.7%) whilst the number of residents aged 4 years and under fell by around 1,700 (14.2% decrease).

What the population data tells us:

Homelessness and rough sleeping housing pathways should be age-inclusive, ensuring that there is suitable accommodation and support for older adults, including those approaching retirement who may be facing housing insecurity. Concurrently, early intervention and prevention services should ensure that young families receive a responsive service, and a balanced approach to tackling homelessness and rough sleeping is sustained.

Changes in household composition: an increase in households comprising a couple with dependent children

The percentage of households in Reading comprising a couple with dependent children rose from 19.3% in 2011 to 20.0% in 2021 and the percentage of households comprising a lone parent with dependent children remained the same since 2011. The percentage of households comprising a couple without children fell from 17.3% to 16.8%, while the percentage of households including a couple with only non-dependent children increased from 4.6% to 5.3%.

What the population data tells us:

The slight increase in households with dependent children and the stability of lone parent households in Reading, alongside a decline in couples without children and a rise in households with non-dependent children shows the importance of delivering services for families. This includes ensuring access to affordable, appropriately sized homes for families with children – both dependent and non-dependent – and strengthening support services for lone parents. Tailoring homelessness prevention efforts to reflect these household trends will help meet the evolving needs of Reading's residents and reduce housing instability and cyclical homelessness.

Ethnic groups in Reading

Between 2011 and 2021, Reading saw a notable increase in ethnic diversity, with the proportion of residents identifying as "Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh" rising from 13.6% to 17.7%. Those identifying as "White" declined from 74.8% to 67.1%, and small increases were seen in people identifying as "Black" and "Mixed or Multiple" ethnic groups.

It is important to note that there are many factors that may be contributing to the changing ethnic composition of England and Wales, such as differing patterns of ageing, fertility, mortality, and migration. Changes may also be caused by differences in the way individuals chose to self-identify between censuses.

Percentage of usual residents by ethnic group, **Reading**

○ 2011 ● **2021**

Ethnic group	2011	2021
Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh	13.6%	**17.7%**
Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African	6.7%	**7.2%**
Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups	4.0%	**5.1%**
White	74.8%	**67.1%**
Other ethnic groups	1.0%	**2.9%**

Source: Office for National Statistics – 2011 Census and Census 2021
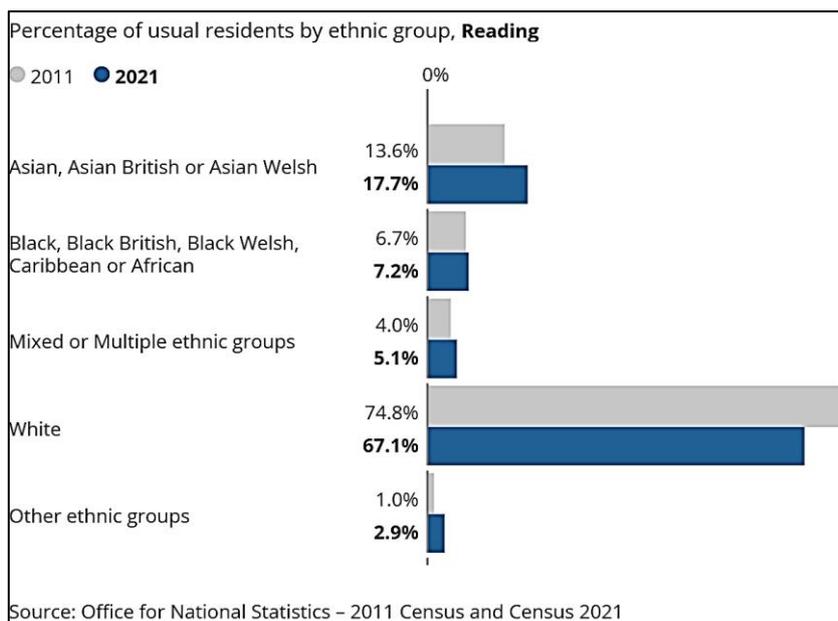
What the population data tells us:

To reflect Reading's growing ethnic diversity, particularly the increase in residents identifying as "Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh", Reading should embed equity and cultural responsiveness across all homelessness and rough sleeping services. This includes improving access through multilingual resources, engaging with diverse communities to co-design services, and ensuring staff are trained in cultural competence to better support individuals from all ethnic backgrounds and respond to the needs of a diverse population.

Reading residents' country of birth

In the 2021 Census, 64.2% of Reading residents reported England as their country of birth, down from 72.1% in 2011, reflecting the town's growing diversity. There was an increase in the number of residents born in India and Poland.

Percentage of usual residents by country of birth, **Reading**

○ 2011   ● **2021**   0%

England	72.1% **64.2%**
India	3.0% **4.5%**
Poland	2.5% **2.8%**
Southern Asia (other than Afghanistan, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka)	1.4% **2.4%**
Pakistan	2.0% **2.0%**

Source: Office for National Statistics – 2011 Census and Census 2021
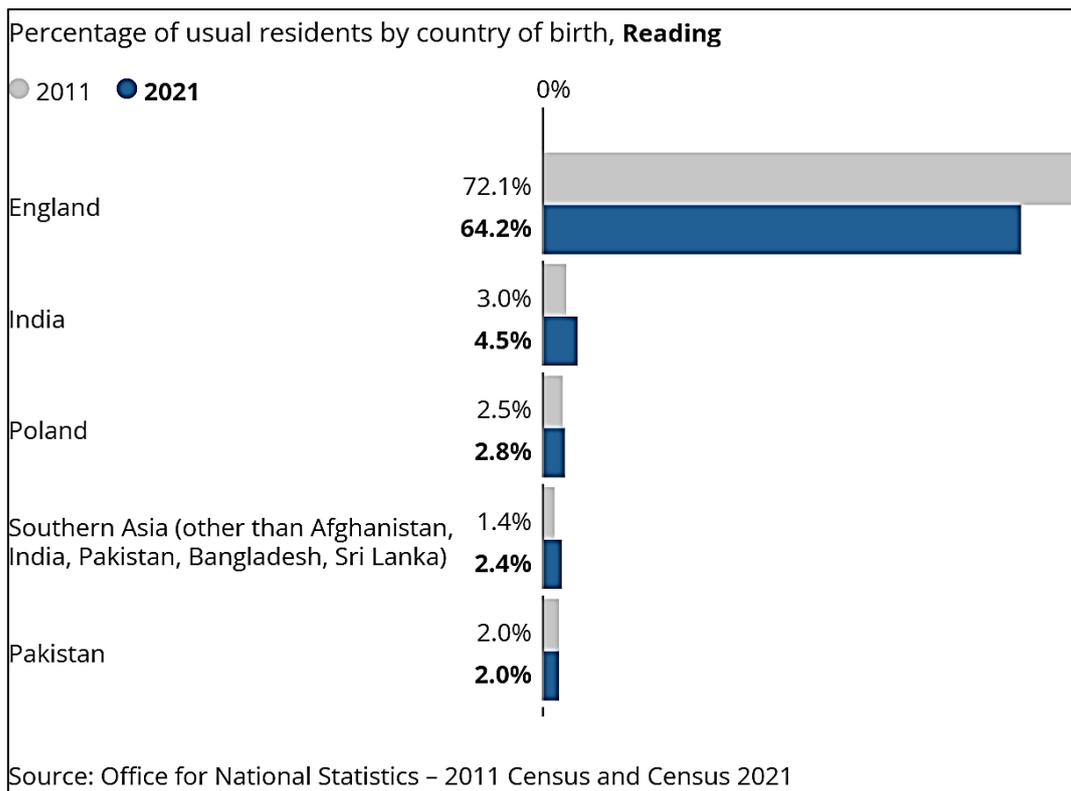
What the population data tells us:

Increases in residents born abroad suggests that we need to ensure that homelessness and rough sleeping services, interventions and housing pathways are culturally responsive. This includes access to information and services through translated materials, culturally sensitive outreach, and partnerships with voluntary and community sector organisations that support legal migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers to ensure early access to housing support and early intervention services.

Disability in Reading[1]

In 2021, 6.2% of Reading residents identified as being disabled and 'limited a lot', down from 7.8% in 2011. The proportion identifying as 'limited a little' remained stable at around 9.7%. The percentage of residents identifying as not disabled increased marginally to 84.1%.

What the population data tells us:

While the overall proportion of residents identifying as disabled has declined, there remains a significant need for maintaining and enhancing accessible homelessness and support services. This includes ensuring physical accessibility, targeted support across varying levels of disability and for those with fluctuating or less visible needs and embedding inclusive design and service delivery across all homelessness preventions and interventions.

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[1] Age-standardised proportions are used throughout this data. This enables comparisons between populations over time and across geographies, as they account for differences in the population size and age structure.

Health in Reading[2]

In 2021, 46.8% of Reading residents reported being in very good health – an increase from 44.3% in 2011 – while the proportion reporting bad or very bad health slightly declined[3].

Despite this, in 2021, the town ranked in the bottom 30% of local authorities in England for overall health, with a Health Index Score of 94.0 where a score of 100 represents average levels of health in England in 2015 and a higher number means better health and a lower number means worse health. People identified as homeless in the 2021 Census were more than twice as likely to report poor health or disability compared to the general population.

What the population data tells us:

There is a continued need to integrate health and housing support, recognising the link between poor health and housing instability. This includes strengthening partnerships with adult social care and health services, embedding wellbeing support across strategic priorities, developing preventative interventions for individuals at risk of homelessness due to health-related vulnerabilities and maintaining and improving accessibility standards.

Behavioural risk factors and support needs

Behavioural risk factors, according to Health Index definitions, include alcohol misuse, drug misuse, healthy eating, physical activity, sedentary behaviour, sexually transmitted infections, and smoking.

Drug and alcohol misuse in Reading remain difficult to measure accurately due to underreporting and changes in data collection during the pandemic. However, Reading's Health Index Score for behavioural risk factors improved from 98.3 in 2015 to 107.0 in 2021, moving the area from being among the worst 40% of local authority areas, closer to the national average. This improvement was largely driven by increased physical activity and a reduction in sexually transmitted infections.

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[2] These data reflect people's own opinions in describing their overall health on a five-point scale, from very good to very bad.
[3] Census 2021 was conducted during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. This may have influenced how people perceived and rated their health and therefore may have affected how people chose to respond.

Reading's Health Index value for "behavioural risk factors" improved by 8.6 points in the six years between 2015 and 2021

Health Index values for the "behavioural risk factors" subdomain, Reading, the South East and England, 2015 to 2021

Source: Health Index for England from the Office for National Statistics

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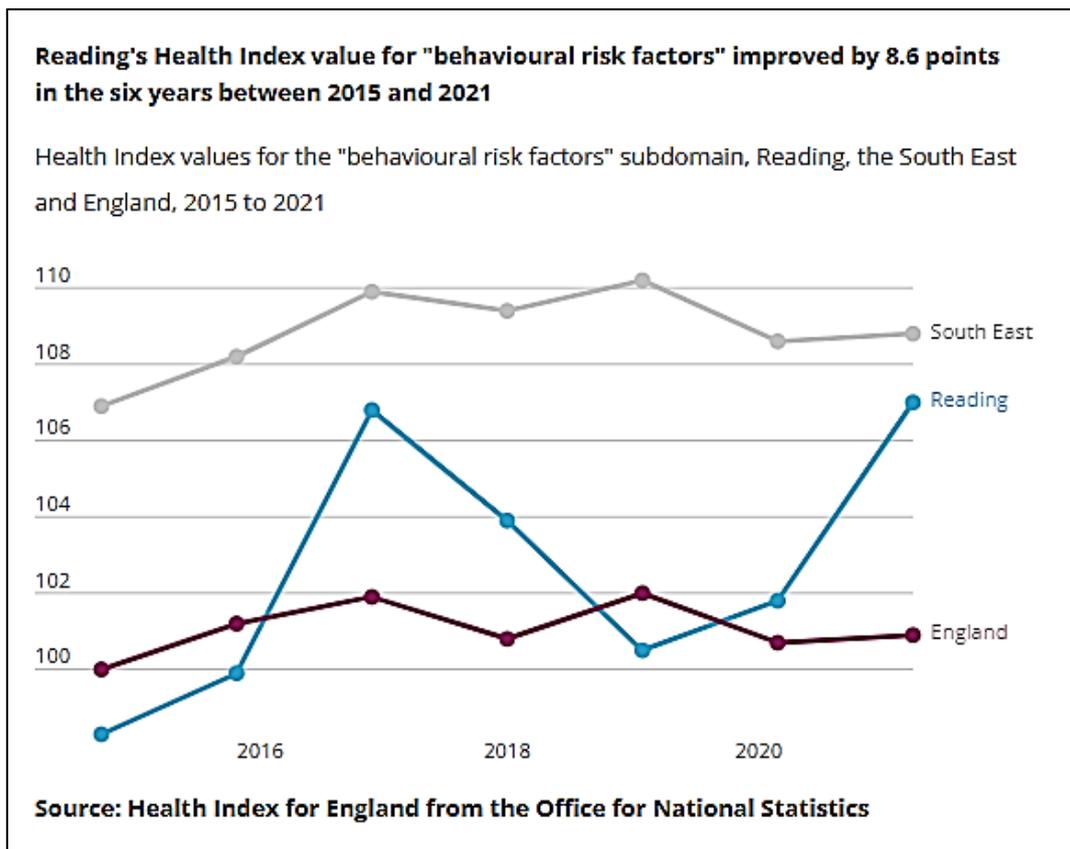
What the population data tells us:

Recognising the link between behavioural health and housing vulnerability is crucial in preventing homelessness and rough sleeping. This includes proven links between co-morbidities, substance misuse and early deaths due to experiences of rough sleeping. There is a continued need to invest in preventative adult social care and health services, as well as working alongside health partners to deliver targeted support for substance misuse.

Reading's population will continue to change and grow over the next 10 years

According to the Office of National Statistics[4], the national population is projected to grow by 4.9 million (7.3%) between mid-2022 and mid-2032, rising from 67.6 million to 72.5 million when considering factors such as migration, decreases in births and life expectancy improvements. The age structure of the population is expected to shift significantly, with the number of people at state pension age projected to increase by 1.7 million (13.8%) over the same period. This demographic change, alongside continued population growth, will place increasing pressure on housing, health, and social care systems.

While the 2021 Census offers insight into emerging patterns and potential housing demand in Reading over the next decade, it is not without limitations. A range of national and international factors, such as economic conditions, migration trends, and policy changes, may influence how these projections unfold.

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https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationprojections/bulletins/nationalpopulationprojections/2022based

Wider determinants of homelessness

Poverty and homelessness are deeply interconnected. They often form a self-perpetuating cycle, where economic hardship increases the risk of housing instability, and poor housing or homelessness in turn undermines opportunities for employment, education, and wellbeing. More information on wider determinants of homelessness can be on the Reading Data Observatory: https://reading.berkshireobservatory.co.uk/.

Impact of the cost-of-living crisis

The ongoing cost-of-living crisis – characterised by rising inflation, energy bills, and housing costs – has placed significant financial pressure on households across England. For many, especially those on low incomes or in insecure housing, this has increased the risk of homelessness and rough sleeping. Local authorities and support services have seen growing demand, as more individuals and families struggle to afford basic living costs and maintain stable accommodation. The cost-of-living crisis has compounded the level and number of households experiencing deprivation in England.

Household deprivation in Reading

The economic success of Reading does not reach all communities in Reading. According to the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) 2019, Reading ranks as the 141st most deprived local authority out of 317 in England – placing it in the middle nationally (where 1st is the most deprived). However, this overall ranking conceals significant variation within the borough. For comparison, Oxford ranks 166th and Milton Keynes 170th - both less deprived than Reading – while Slough (107th), Luton (70th), and Southampton (55th) are more deprived. Although Reading is less deprived than some towns with similar demographics, it still faces notable challenges. Five of its Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs) – small neighbourhood-level geographies used for statistical reporting – are among the 10% most deprived in the country. This indicates a high level of disadvantage within these neighbourhoods of Reading, where residents are more likely to experience poverty – especially child poverty – unemployment, poor health, lower educational attainment, exposure to crime, and barriers to housing and services.

An estimated 15.6% of children in Reading – around one in six – are growing up in relative low-income families, a figure that rises significantly in the borough's neighbourhoods identified among the 10% most deprived in England (IMD 2019).

Index of Multiple Deprivation Deciles for LSOAs

	0 to 10% most deprived	(5)
	11 to 20% most deprived	(5)
	21 to 30% most deprived	(14)
	Above 30% most deprived	(66)
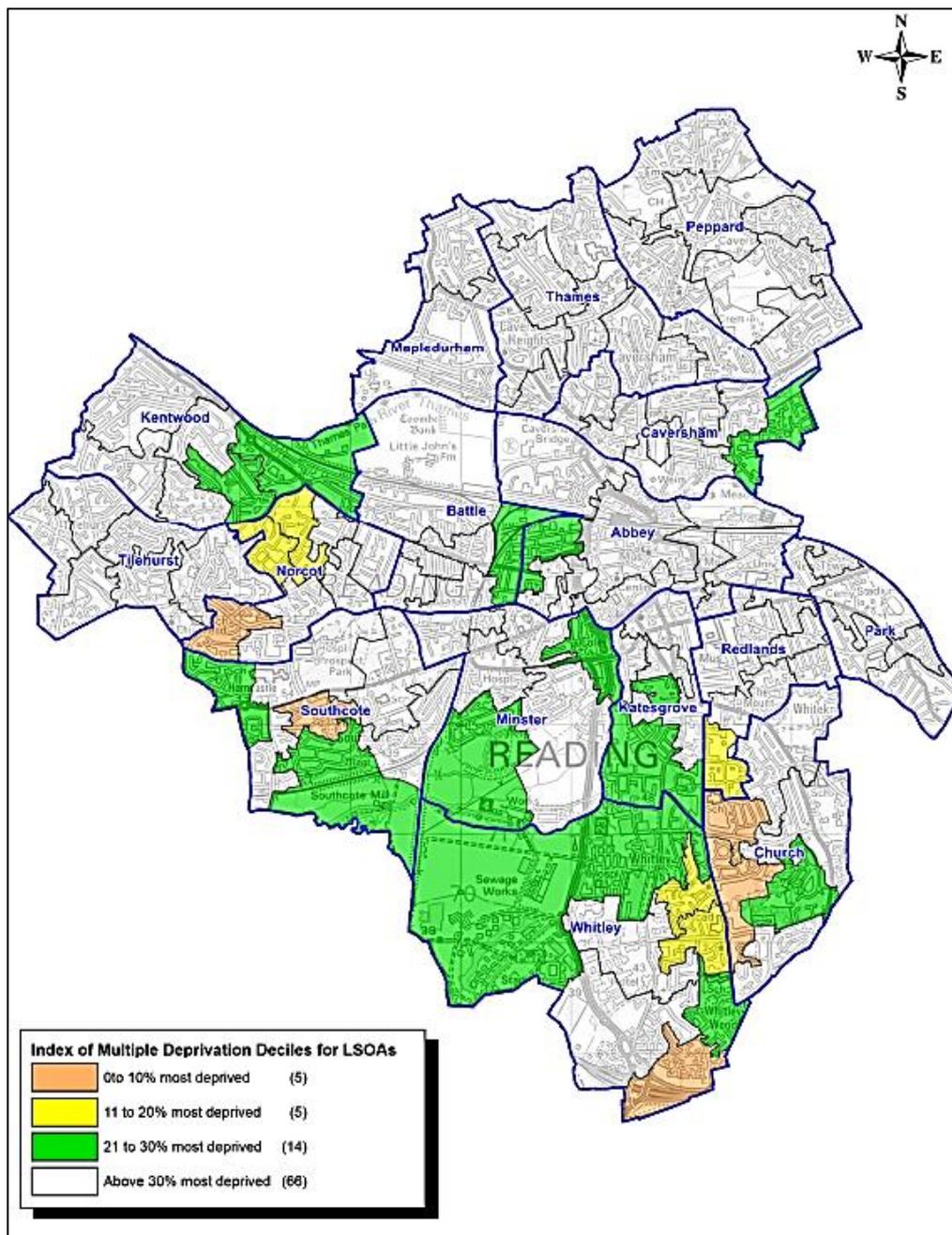
Source: Reading Borough Council website (IMD 2019)

Reading's Social Exclusion Analysis 2024

Access to housing remains a significant element of social exclusion in Reading and the Social Exclusion Analysis supports the housing market issues and wider household deprivation in Reading already outlined. Evidence from this analysis suggests that access to housing for lower income families is hindered by affordability and availability, rather than barriers to accessing services.

The quality of the living environment, which includes housing conditions, air quality, and road traffic accidents, has shown some improvement. Reading is now ranked 119th nationally in this domain, and no LSOAs fall within the 5% most deprived, compared to three in 2015. However, the analysis supports that overcrowding remains an issue, with 10.1% of households

having an occupancy rating of -1 or less, indicating insufficient space. The proportion of non-decent homes has improved slightly, falling to 11.5% in 2024 from 13.9% the previous year, but remains a concern. Additionally, 2.1% of households lack central heating, a figure higher than both the South East and national averages. Abbey, Church, and Park wards exhibit the highest levels of overcrowding and heating inadequacy.

Housing challenges intersect with other areas of social exclusion. Fuel poverty affects 11% of households in Reading, disproportionately impacting those in the private rented sector and in older, less energy-efficient homes. Food poverty is also linked, with rising housing costs reducing disposable income and increasing reliance on emergency food parcels and local low-cost pantry-type services operated by the VCFS. Health outcomes are similarly affected, with poor housing conditions contributing to respiratory illnesses, mental health issues, and higher rates of infant mortality and dental decay.

Digital exclusion is a related concern. Poor housing conditions often correlate with limited digital access, and two LSOAs in Reading are among the 10% most digitally excluded nationally. Older people and disabled residents face compounded housing challenges, including accessibility issues and income deprivation. Pension Credit claimant data shows concentrations in more deprived wards, highlighting the place-based dimension of housing-related exclusion.

What the wider determinants of homelessness data tells us:

To break the cycle of poverty and homelessness in Reading, a targeted, place-based approach should focus on the borough's most deprived neighbourhoods to address inequalities, prevent homelessness, and improve housing standards. Poverty reduction support should be embedded into homelessness prevention services. Services must be co-produced with communities and delivered through multi-agency, place-based outreach that address the wider determinants of homelessness – health, education, and financial insecurity. This would ensure that support is both holistic and locally responsive and that safe, stable accommodation becomes a foundation for economic participation and social mobility.

The Social Exclusion Analysis 2024 shows that housing in Reading is a critical factor in understanding and addressing social exclusion. The borough faces significant challenges in affordability, tenure security, and housing quality, all of which are closely linked to broader issues of poverty, health, and inequality. Addressing these interconnected issues will require coordinated, multi-agency strategies that prioritise prevention, affordability, and inclusive access to safe and secure housing.

The extent of homelessness in Reading: Demand for services and accommodation needs

Understanding the extent of homelessness

Homelessness manifests in many forms, often making it challenging to capture its full extent. To ensure this review presents as complete a picture as possible, we have adopted as broad and inclusive approach as possible.

The categories considered in this analysis are:

- Households to whom we owe a statutory duty to prevent or relieve homelessness.
- Households for whom we have accepted a Main Housing Duty.
- Households currently residing in temporary accommodation.
- Households on the General Register for social housing, prioritised in the highest preference bands.
- Individuals experiencing rough sleeping.
- Those facing hidden homelessness, such as sofa surfing or living in insecure or unsuitable housing.

By examining these specific, but interconnected groups, we aim to better understand the pressures on our housing system and identify strategic opportunities for intervention and support.

Local authorities are legally required to support eligible households who are either homeless or at imminent risk of homelessness – defined as being within 56 days of losing their accommodation. This duty includes both preventing homelessness before it occurs and helping those already homeless to secure suitable housing. Importantly, this support is provided regardless of whether a household meets the criteria for priority need or being deemed intentionally homeless. In Reading, this statutory duty is fulfilled by the Homelessness Prevention Team at Reading Borough Council.

If the Council is unable to prevent or relieve a household's homelessness, a further assessment is carried out to determine whether the household qualifies for the main homelessness duty under the Housing Act 1996. This duty is triggered when a household is found to be eligible, in priority need, unintentionally homeless, and has a local connection. Once these criteria are met, the Council is legally required to secure suitable accommodation for the household. This represents the most substantial form of support available under homelessness legislation.

Local economic context: Understanding financial pressures and inequality in Reading

This section provides a snapshot of economic vulnerability and financial resilience in Reading, highlighting key indicators such as deprivation, employment, earnings, and benefit claims. Understanding the local labour market is essential for shaping recovery strategies and long-term planning. Economic growth, employment trends, and financial pressures all influence housing stability and the risk of homelessness.

Economic growth and jobs

Reading has consistently maintained a higher job density than both the South East and England, rising from 1.04 in 2010 to 1.14 in 2021, before a slight dip in 2022 and 2023. The total number of jobs in Reading has steadily increased from approximately 108,000 in 2010 to 138,000 in 2025, reflecting sustained growth in line with national and regional trends.

Employment and earnings

Employment levels among Reading residents aged 16 and over (excluding full-time students) remained stable between 2011 and 2021 at around 60%, outperforming regional and national averages, which saw slight declines. Unemployment fell from 4.3% to 3.2% over the same period, and the proportion of retired residents also declined slightly, indicating a strong and active local labour market.

According to the Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE), gross annual pay for full-time workers living in Reading is approximately £40,988 – slightly above the national and regional average – reflecting proximity to high-paying sectors and a resilient employment base.

Unemployment trends

Following historically low unemployment, Reading saw a sharp rise in unemployment benefit claims during the Covid-19 pandemic, with the rate increasing from 2.1% in 2019 to 5.2% in 2021 – but still below the national average. By 2025, unemployment had fallen to 3.5%, though it remains above pre-pandemic levels.

Educational and skills gaps

Census 2021 data shows that 34.5% of people experiencing homelessness in Reading reported having no qualifications, compared to 18.8% in the general population. This limits access to stable employment and, consequently, sustainable housing.

What the economic and financial resilience data tells us:

Economic vulnerabilities: While Reading maintains a high employment rate (83.0%) and above England average earnings (£40,988), rising Universal Credit claims (up 14% in July 2025, compared to August 2024) and a slight increase in unemployment (4.4% in August 2025) point to growing financial pressure. The local employment rate has declined since mid-2022, diverging from the stable upward trend seen in comparative areas. This suggests weakening labour market conditions and increased strain on residents, particularly those in low-paid or insecure jobs.

Pockets of deprivation: While Reading ranks mid-range nationally for overall deprivation, 3.09% of its neighbourhoods fall within the most deprived 10% in England – primarily due to income-related challenges – that will impact housing stability. This points to concentrated areas of need that require targeted support.

Support dependency: Nearly 5% of adults receive Council Tax Support, indicating a notable proportion of low-income households relying on local assistance.[5]

Reading's homelessness strategy needs to respond to rising financial strain, localised deprivation, and reliance on support services – factors that increase the risk of housing instability and rough sleeping. This can be addressed through targeted prevention in high-need areas, improved access to affordable housing, and co-ordinated services such as benefits advice, mental health support, and employment assistance for residents at risk.

In summary:

Reading has experienced sustained economic growth and high labour demand over the past decade, putting pressure on the local housing market. Affordable housing remains limited, so many workers live outside the town and commute in to access employment. A strong local labour market attracts inward migration and increases demand for housing and support services. Strong job density and a growing employment base can mean an opportunity to create inclusive employment pathways for those at risk of homelessness, and to integrate early intervention services that connect individuals to work to increase income and housing stability.

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[5] LGA Research, Local Government Association, 2025.

Local Housing Context: Access, affordability, and barriers to housing stability

This section of the report brings together a number of metrics to provide an overview of the affordability of housing, the availability of social housing and the number of households experiencing difficulties paying for their housing.

Factors affecting access to stable housing

Increased numbers of larger sized households

Census 2021 data shows a shift in Reading's household composition toward larger households. While nationally 35.9% of households consist of three or more people, in Reading this figure is higher at 40.2%. This is driven by an increase in three-person households (17.1%) and households with four or more people (23.1%), indicating a decline in the proportion of smaller households made up of single people or couples.

Household size

2021

☐ Reading | (England)

1 person in household **28.5%** (30.1%)

2 people in household **31.3%** (34.0%)

3 people in household **17.1%** (16.0%)

4 or more people in household **23.1%** (19.9%)

% of all households

Source: Office for National Statistics - Census 2021

Small area: Output area
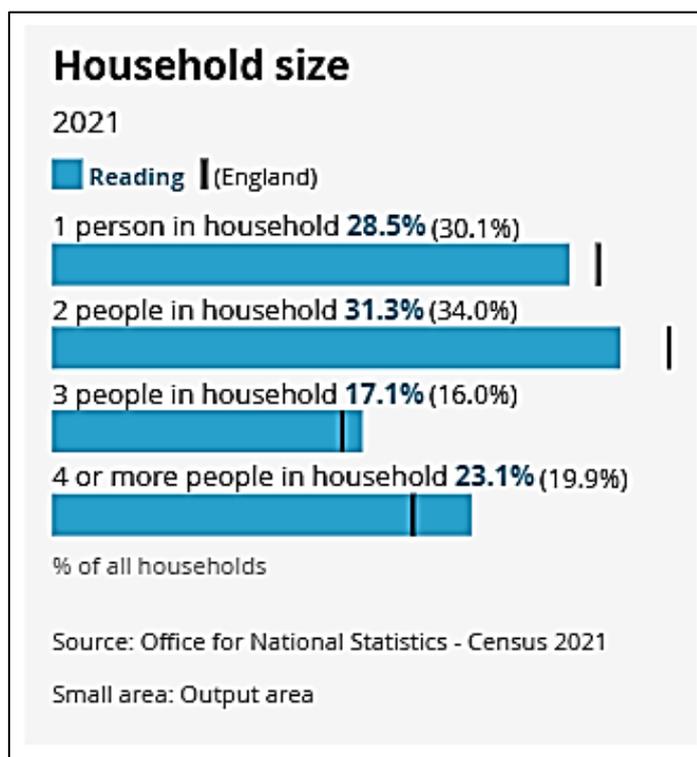
Larger households who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, who require three or more bedrooms, are more difficult to accommodate in Reading due to a limited supply of suitably sized homes, low turnover rates, and development constraints that restrict the construction of larger properties. These homes are more expensive to build and maintain, and the affordability gap broadly widens with property size, making them less accessible to low-income families.

Social housing supply

In 2024, according to MHCLG Local Authority Housing Statistics (LAHS), Reading had 6,982 local authority dwellings, 4,709 private registered provider dwellings and 63,164 private sector dwellings – a total of 74,855 dwellings in Reading. Only 16% of all dwellings in Reading were social or affordable housing let by the local authority or a registered social housing provider.

The graph below shows the proportion of social housing compared to homeownership and private rented sector tenants.

Percentage of households by housing tenure, **Reading**

● 2011 ● **2021** 0%

	2011	2021
Owns outright or with a mortgage or loan	54.8%	**50.4%**
Shared ownership	1.8%	**1.3%**
Social rented	16.3%	**16.1%**
Private rented	26.1%	**31.9%**
Lives rent free	1.0%	**0.2%**

Source: Office for National Statistics – 2011 Census and Census 2021
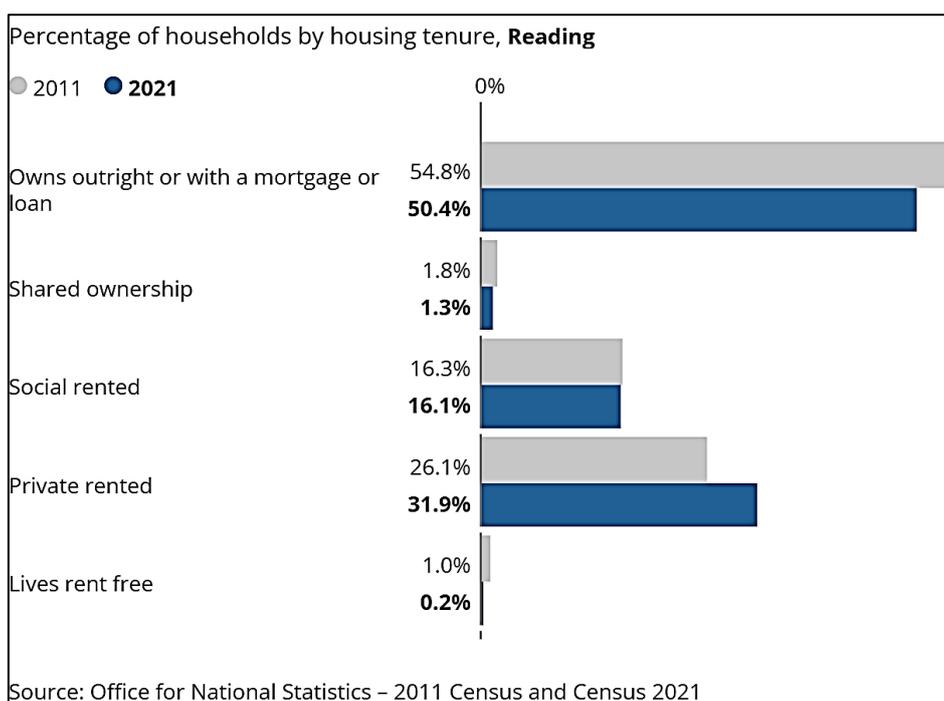
Social housing demand

By the end of 2024/25, 4,462 households were on Reading's Housing Register, rising to 4,675 by July 2025, with an average of 160 new applications submitted each month. Only 374 households were successfully housed in 2024/25 - fewer than 9% of applicants. Between April and July 2025, 645 new applications were received, while just 166 households were housed.

The majority of applicants (77%) fall into Band 4 or "No Priority for Housing," with 1% in Band 1 (urgent need). Demand is highest for smaller homes, with 69% of applicants requiring one- or two-bedroom properties, and 7% of households registered as having a need for four or more bedrooms. This highlights limited availability for larger households. The adapted housing register – whilst ensuring best use of stock – creates the further pressure of 91 households requiring accessible homes.

All these figures – long waiting lists, high levels of new applications and few re-lets – highlight a persistent gap between demand and available social housing, with only a small proportion of applicants successfully accommodated.

What the factors affecting access to stable housing data tells us:

Reading's increase in larger households outlines the need for access to larger, affordable family homes and a housing strategy that reflects the borough's demographic demand for social rented. Reading's homelessness and rough sleeping strategy should strengthen support for people in private rented housing and prevent homelessness through early intervention. The Social Exclusion Analysis 2024 highlights that social housing is concentrated in wards such as Whitley, Norcot, and Southcote, while private renting is most prevalent in Abbey, Katesgrove, and Redlands. These patterns reflect broader inequalities in housing access and stability and highlight the opportunities for place-based targeted interventions in homelessness prevention.

Housing affordability in Reading

New Homes & Homeownership

Reading has seen a steady increase in the number of new, permanent homes completed since 2020, with 1,021 new builds available at the end of 2023-24.[6] While this compares favourably to our nearest geographical neighbours, we know that Reading's constrained boundaries mean that the vast majority of these new homes are flats with no more than two bedrooms, located in premium blocks. Only 21% of these properties were affordable homes.[7], meaning that four fifths of these properties, including the majority of Build to Rent units, do not increase the number of affordable homes available for Reading residents and most likely contribute to local rent rises.

The Census 2021 found the percentage of households who own their own home in Reading had decreased since 2011, and this was relatively low at 50.4% compared to 61% in England, and 66% across the South East. Houses have become considerably less affordable, locally, and regionally, especially for first time buyers. The cost-of-living crisis and increased interest rates also make housing affordability more challenging. While earnings have grown modestly, house prices have increased at a much faster rate, widening the affordability gap. The housing affordability ratio compares local house prices to residents' annual earnings. A higher ratio means homes are less affordable. In 2024, Reading's ratio was 8.30, higher than the ONS nearest neighbour average figure of 7.70 and lower than the South East region figure of 9.54. This rose to over 10:1 by 2025, indication that house prices are more than 10 times the average annual income – well above traditional affordability thresholds. This suggests that homes are comparatively unaffordable for residents compared to similar areas.

Private rented sector

Increases in households privately renting

Between 2011 and 2021, Reading experienced the South East's second-largest increase in privately rented homes, rising from 26.1% to 31.9%, with only Slough seeing a greater rise. This growth highlights a shift in housing tenure, driven in part by affordability challenges and

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[6] Indicators of House building, UK: permanent dwellings started and completed by local authority - Office for National Statistics

[7] Planning Committee Annual Monitoring Report 2023-24

limited access to social housing. For many lower-income households, homeownership remains out of reach, and high demand for social housing means the private rented sector is often the only available option.

However, renting privately in Reading comes with significant cost pressures. In the financial year ending March 2023, private renters spent an average of 35.3% of their gross monthly income on rent. This exceeds the 30% affordability threshold used by the Office for National Statistics (ONS), meaning that housing costs are stretching household budgets. Compared to both the national and South East regional averages, Reading ranks among the less affordable areas outside of London for privately renting. This combination of rising demand, limited affordable alternatives, and high rental costs contributes to ongoing housing insecurity for many residents.

Increases in average private sector rents in Reading

Private rents in Reading rose to an average of £1,543 in June 2025, an annual increase of 9.0% from £1,415 in June 2024. This was higher than the rise in the South East (6.4%) over the year. Average rent for one bed properties rose by 9.8%, while the average for four-or-more bed properties increased by 7.5%.

The graphs below show how high Reading's average private rented sector rents are, when compared regionally and nationally, and the significant % increase in average rents in Reading by number of bedrooms.

Average rent in Reading compared with the South East

Average rental price, June 2025

Source: Price Index of Private Rents from the Office for National Statistics

Northern Ireland rents data are entirely for advertised new lets.

Change in average rents by bedroom number in Reading

Monthly private rental price, annual inflation, June 2025

Source: Price Index of Private Rents from the Office for National Statistics

The average rent in Reading is £1,552 per month, while the average full-time salary is £40,988 a year. After tax, this means people are spending over half (57%) of their take-home pay just on rent. 70% of rent for private tenants is not covered by housing benefit support (Local Housing Allowance), leaving low-income renters unable to pay their bills and at risk of arrears or losing their home.

The growing gap between LHA and private rented sector rents

Local Housing Allowance (LHA) is designed to support low-income households with the cost of renting in the private sector. However, in Reading, average private rents are consistently higher than LHA rates across all property sizes, with monthly shortfalls ranging from over £300 for a one-bedroom property to over £600 for a three-bedroom home. This gap places significant financial pressure on tenants, many of whom must cover the difference from limited income, increasing the risk of rent arrears and eviction. To help bridge this gap, local authorities often rely on temporary measures such as Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs), though these are not a long-term solution. Landlord incentive schemes are also used to encourage landlords to let to tenants on benefits, but the affordability gap can still deter participation. Compounding the issue, LHA rates have remained largely static for several years — frozen from 2020 to 2024 and now set to remain unchanged until at least 2026. Although there was a one-off uplift in April 2024 based on rental data from September 2023, this did not keep pace with rising rents, leaving many households struggling to afford suitable accommodation.

The graph below clearly highlights LHA shortfalls in Reading, accurate as of February 2025.[8]

Average Rent vs LHA Rate and Shortfall
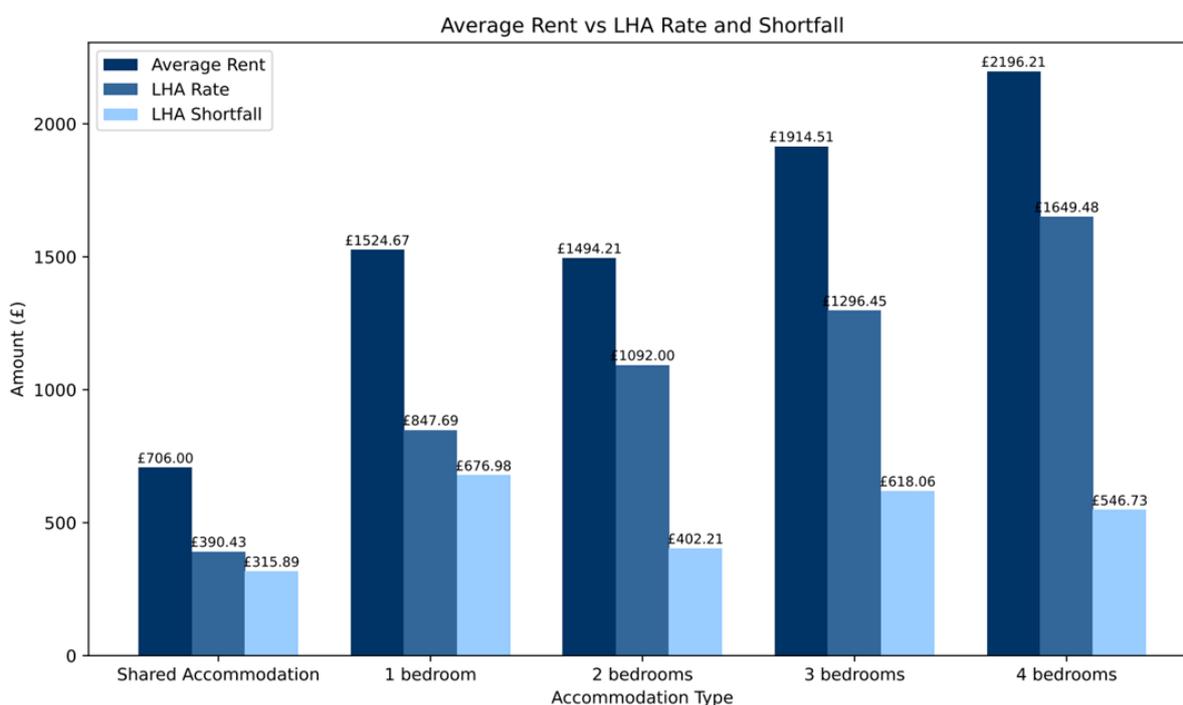
The LHA shortfall has a disproportionate impact on households entitled to the shared accommodation rate; that is, single applicants under the age of 35. For this group, average Reading rent is 180% of the LHA available to them. For family accommodation, the least

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[8] Compiled from local private rented market snapshots in February 2025, with 1 bedroomed properties comprising both 'true' 1 beds and studio flats.

affordable size is a 3 bedroomed property, with average Reading rent at nearly 150% of the available LHA.

Additional pressure on the local private rented sector

The increased quota of dispersed accommodation in Reading for national programmes supporting refugees, asylum seekers (via the Home Office), and prison leavers (through CAS3) – has placed additional pressure on the local private rented sector. These national providers often operate outside LHA constraints, offering higher rents and faster turnaround times, which makes the market more competitive and reduces the availability of affordable properties for local authority use. In Reading, the Home Office have stated their intention to acquire an additional 414 units of accommodation, with 356 achieved to date. As a result, the Council faces challenges in securing PRS accommodation for homelessness prevention and relief duties, including being outbid by providers not bound by LHA rates. This has likely disrupted local supply chains, increased costs, and reduced the effectiveness of procurement efforts – impacting the Council's ability to meet local housing need and placing further strain on temporary accommodation resources.

What the housing affordability data tells us:

Reading faces growing housing affordability pressures that must inform its strategy. Homeownership has declined, and house prices now exceed ten times the average annual income, making ownership increasingly out of reach. At the same time, the private rented sector has expanded but remains unaffordable for many, with renters spending over 35% of their income on rent. Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates have remained largely static since 2020 and fall well short of actual rents, leaving tenants to cover large gaps from limited income. This increases the risk of arrears and eviction, and places pressure on local support such as Discretionary Housing Payments and landlord incentive schemes. Reading's strategy should prioritise linking to the Council's Housing Strategy to increase access to genuinely affordable housing that reflects the need for access to larger, affordable family homes, strengthening tenancy support for renters at risk of eviction or financial hardship and advocating for LHA reform.

Barriers to housing stability

Housing Benefit and Universal Credit (housing costs) recipients in Reading

In 2025, 6.52% of households in Reading received housing benefit - above the South East average (4.75%) and ONS nearest neighbour average (6.44%). A further 7.95% of households received Universal Credit, although data regarding the proportion of these claims which included housing costs is not available regionally. This reflects a high level of financial need compared to similar areas.[9]

Reading's higher rate of housing benefit and Universal Credit claims show that many households struggle with rent. Reading's homelessness and rough sleeping strategy should include financial help such as support with rent, continuing to work and build relationships with landlords to prevent evictions, and early identification of risk and the need for tenancy

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[9] Department for Work and Pensions, Housing Benefit, Proportion of households in recipient of housing benefits ; Households in receipt of Universal Credit by Local Authority Data updated: 26 Aug 2025.

sustainment support for people before they lose their homes – especially where Reading are not in a position to develop large-scale social housing and are heavily reliant on the private rented sector for housing supply.

Impact of Welfare Reform on household income

As of May 2025, 673 households in Reading had their income reduced due to the benefit cap. The cap limits the total amount of benefits a household can receive, currently set at £1,835 per month for couples and lone parents with children, and £1,229 per month for single adults without children. This shows a growing pressure on families in receipt of Universal Credit.

The majority of affected households in Reading are families with children, with 65% headed by single parents. These families often face significant shortfalls in their housing support. For example, a couple with one child renting a two-bedroom property may be entitled to £2,129 per month in benefits, but due to the cap, their Universal Credit is reduced by £294, leaving them with £1,835 – the maximum allowed. This reduction makes both private rented and social housing unaffordable for many.

Households are exempt from the benefit cap if someone in the household is working and earning above a set threshold – currently around £722 per month. This means that entering paid employment or increasing working hours can remove the cap, making work a key route to financial stability and housing security for affected families.

The cap also interacts with other policies like the two-child limit, which affects over 1,000 households in Reading and contributes to 28% child poverty locally. Families with more than two children lose £3,455 per year per child, further deepening financial hardship and housing insecurity[10].

Rent arrears in Reading

At the end of 2023/24, tenants in Reading owed £1.6 million in rent, higher than the South East average of £1.4 million. This total excludes other bills like council tax and utilities.[11]

The high level of rent arrears in Reading shows many tenants are struggling to pay rent. Reading's strategy should include early tenancy sustainment support, access to debt advice, and financial support and early advice to prevent arrears from leading to eviction.

Mortgage and landlord possession claims in Reading

Reading shows steady housing stress, with possession claim rates consistently above the South East and ONS nearest neighbour averages.

Landlord possession rates ranged from 10.6 to 15.8 per 10,000 households – often twice the South East figure and higher than ONS statistical nearest neighbour rates which ranged from 9.2 – 11.5. Mortgage claims also increased, reaching 2.9 per 10,000 in Q2 2025, slightly above the regional and ONS nearest neighbour averages of 2.5.

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[10] Benefit cap - Reading Borough Council

[11] MHCLG, Local Authority Housing Statistics (LAHS), Current tenants' cumulative arrears of rent at the end of the last full collection period excluding arrears of council tax, water rates and heating/service charges (in £s) , Data updated: 01 Jul 2025.

In the same quarter, Reading recorded 79 landlord and 19 mortgage possession claims, highlighting financial strain and the risk of housing loss for many residents. Both landlord and mortgage claims show spikes in Q3 and Q4 of each year.[12] The data points to ongoing pressure, particularly in the private rented sector, though less severe than in similar urban areas.

Reading's strategy should focus on preventing evictions in the private rented sector, offering mortgage support and debt advice to households under financial strain, and responding to seasonal spikes in possession claims with timely interventions.

What the barriers to housing stability data tells us:

Reading's housing data shows high financial vulnerability among residents. More households receive housing benefit than the regional average, and rent arrears total £1.6 million, indicating widespread difficulty in meeting housing costs. Possession claims – both landlord and mortgage – are consistently above average, with seasonal spikes suggesting recurring financial stress. These trends highlight the need for Reading's strategy to focus on early intervention, tenancy sustainment, debt advice, financial support, and stronger engagement with landlords to prevent evictions, especially in the private rented sector.

In summary:

Reading faces significant housing challenges, with high rents, limited affordable housing, and a long waiting list for social housing. Many low-income households rely on the private rented sector and struggle to pay rent, as shown by high housing benefit claims and rising arrears. Reading's homelessness and rough sleeping strategy should focus on increasing access to affordable housing where possible, strengthening tenancy sustainment, offering financial, debt and mortgage support, and continuing to work with landlords to prevent evictions - especially given Reading's reliance on the private rented sector and limited capacity for large-scale development of social housing.

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[12] Ministry of Justice, Mortgage and Landlord Possession Statistics, **Data updated:** 14 Aug 2025.

Local homelessness overview

Households seeking homelessness support

In Q4 2024/25, 397 households in Reading were owed a homelessness prevention or relief duty. Of these, 142 were homeless and 195 were at risk – highlighting the scale of housing vulnerability in the area.

Reading consistently sees higher levels of homelessness-related need than the South East average, with particularly sharp spikes in Q4 2023/24 when 763 households were assessed and 655 were either homeless or at risk – more than double the regional average of 318 assessments and 275 combined homeless/threatened cases.

Even in Q4 2024/25, numbers remained elevated, with 397 households owed a duty, including 142 homeless and 195 threatened with homelessness, compared to regional averages. These figures reflect sustained housing vulnerability and seasonal surges in demand.[13]

Reading's strategy must therefore scale up early intervention and prevention efforts, prepare for predictable seasonal pressures, and ensure resources match consistently high demand.

Households assessed as a result of a referral

This chart compares who referred households for homelessness assessments in Reading and the South East. In 2023/24 – most referrals in Reading came from agencies not obligated by the Duty to Refer.[14]

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[13] Calculated by LG Inform, Data updated: 08 Aug 2025.

[14] Calculated by LG Inform, Data updated: 30 Oct 2024.
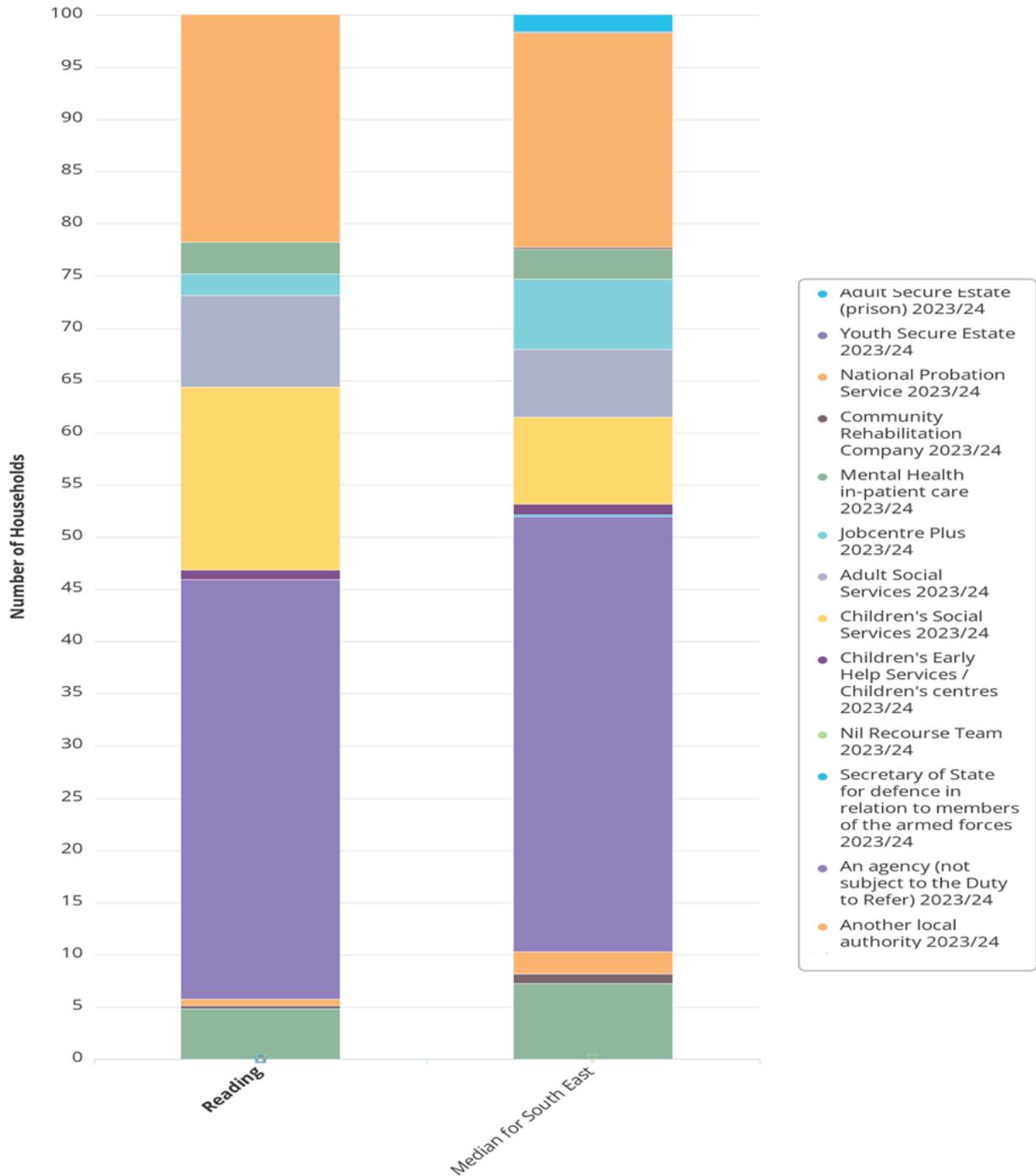
The graph compares the number of households referred under the Duty to Refer in Reading with the South East regional median across various statutory and non-statutory services in 2023/24.

Reading has a high overall volume of referrals from Jobcentre Plus, National Probation Service, Youth Secure Estate, and Children's Services, indicating strong engagement from these agencies. Referrals from Adult Social Services and Mental Health in-patient care are broadly in line with the regional median, while Community Rehabilitation Company and Adult Secure Estate (prison) referrals are lower, suggesting potential gaps in justice-related referral pathways.

Hospital A&E, urgent treatment centres and in-patient care referrals are significantly lower in Reading compared to the South East and ONS statistical nearest neighbour area medians. This suggests the need to strengthen referral pathways from hospitals, particularly given their frequent contact with individuals at risk of homelessness.

This pattern suggests that Reading has developed effective referral mechanisms with mainstream services, especially those working with families, young people, and individuals in contact with the criminal justice system. However, the lower engagement from prison, rehabilitation, and hospitals indicates areas where inter-agency collaboration could be strengthened to ensure more consistent identification and support for households at risk of homelessness.

Characteristics of main applicants owed a homelessness duty (prevention or relief)

This section presents an overview of the personal characteristics of the main applicants within each household that has been assessed as owed a prevention or relief duty in Reading during the financial year 2023/24.

Age of main applicant

Data shows the age breakdown of main applicants in households assessed for homelessness support in Reading, compared to the average, median, and highest figures for Reading's ONS nearest neighbours and the wider South East region. The largest age group in Reading is 25–34 years, followed by 35–44 years, which is consistent across both comparison sets. Reading has a slightly higher number of younger applicants aged 18–24 than both its statistical neighbours and the South East average. Older age groups (55+) are less represented in Reading than in areas with the highest figures. Very few applicants are aged 16–17 or 75+, and the "Not known" category is minimal, suggesting good data quality. This suggests homelessness in Reading is most common among young to middle-aged adults, especially those aged 25–44, with a slightly higher proportion of younger adults than in similar areas across both datasets.[15] This could inform targeted prevention and support strategies for younger people at risk of homelessness to reduce approaches and intervene earlier.

Ethnic group of main applicant

The chart below shows the proportion of main applicants from each household assessed as owed a prevention or relief duty by their ethnic group. In 2023/24, the significant proportion of main applicants assessed for homelessness support in Reading were from ethnic minority backgrounds, with White applicants making up 52%, compared to 67% of Reading's general population (ONS Census 2021). Black, Mixed, and Other ethnic groups were all overrepresented in homelessness assessments compared to their share of the population. For example, Black applicants made up 14% of those assessed in 2023/24 and 17% in 2024/25, while they represent only 7.2% of the population.[16] In 2023/24, those identifying as Asian were significantly underrepresented in terms of duties owed. However, in 2024/25 they are now represented at 16% of duties owed, proportionate to Reading's population data from

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[15] Calculated by LG Inform, N/A, **Data updated:** 30 Oct 2024.

[16] Calculated by LG Inform, N/A, **Data updated:** 30 Oct 2024.

the Census 2021. This suggests that ethnic minority groups in Reading may face greater risks of homelessness, possibly due to barriers in accessing housing, economic pressures, or systemic inequalities.
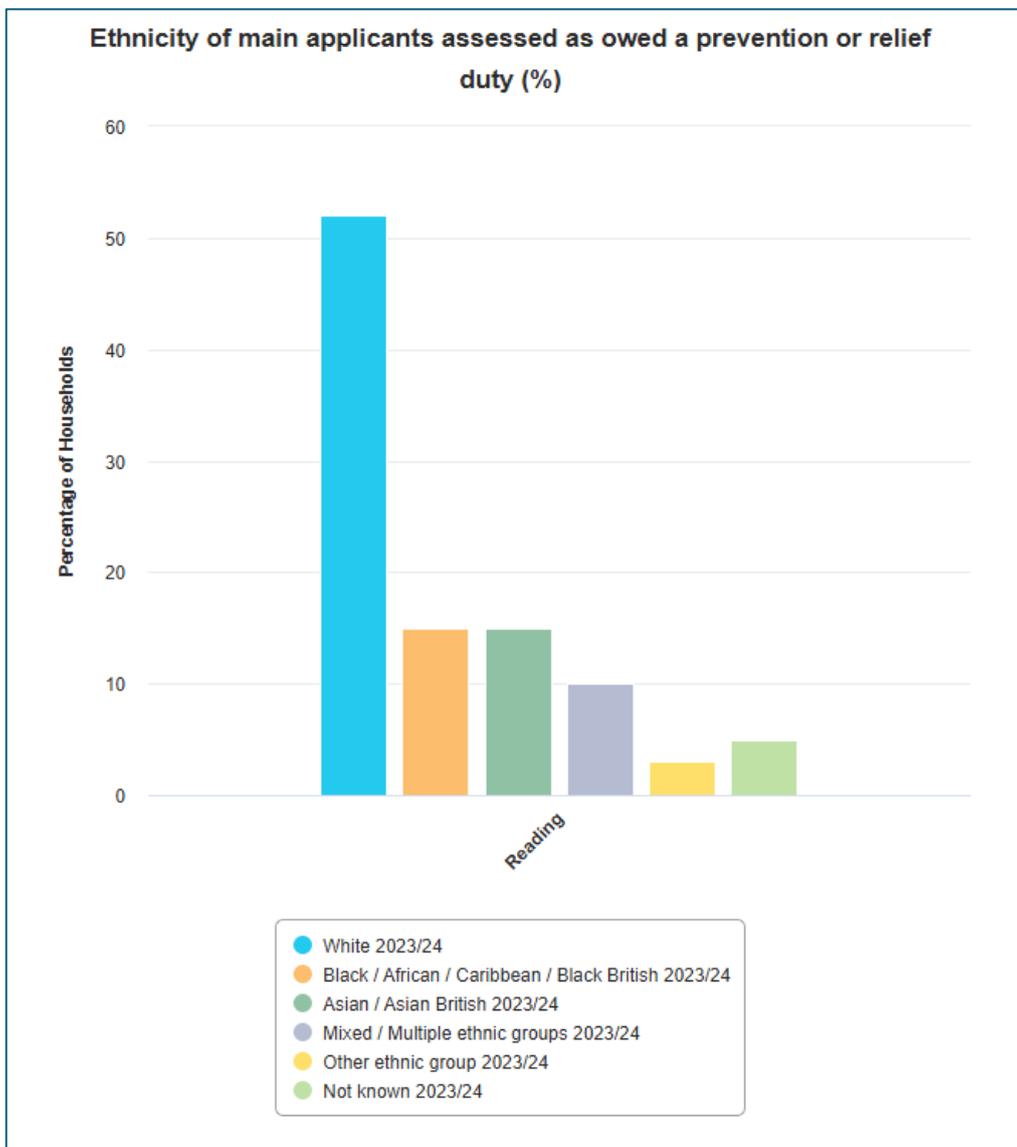
To respond to the overrepresentation of ethnic minority groups in homelessness data, Reading's strategy should include actions to make services fair, accessible, and inclusive. This could involve working with community groups, improving cultural awareness in frontline services, and checking for any barriers or bias in housing support. Tracking outcomes by ethnicity can help identify gaps and improve support for those most at risk.

Nationality of main applicant

This chart shows the proportion of main applicants from each household assessed as owed a prevention or relief duty by their nationality groupings.

In 2023/24 the highest represented nationality among main applicants in Reading was UK.

The chart below showing the nationality of main applicants assessed as owed a prevention or relief duty in 2023/24 indicates that around 70% were UK nationals, followed by approximately 20% from non-EEA countries. Smaller proportions were recorded for applicants from EEA states that joined since 2004 (around 5%), other EEA countries (about 2%), and those whose nationality was not known (less than 1%). Irish nationals represented the smallest group. When compared to the ONS Census 2021 data for Reading Borough, where 64.2% of residents were born in England and 21.8% identified with a non-UK national identity, the homelessness duty data broadly reflects the local population's nationality makeup. The presence of non-EEA and EEA nationals in both datasets highlights Reading's diverse demographic profile.[17]

Nationality of main applicants assessed as owed a prevention or relief duty (%)

Legend:
- UK 2023/24
- Ireland 2023/24
- EEA states to have joined since 2004 2023/24
- Other EEA 2022/23
- Non-EEA 2023/24
- Non known 2023/24

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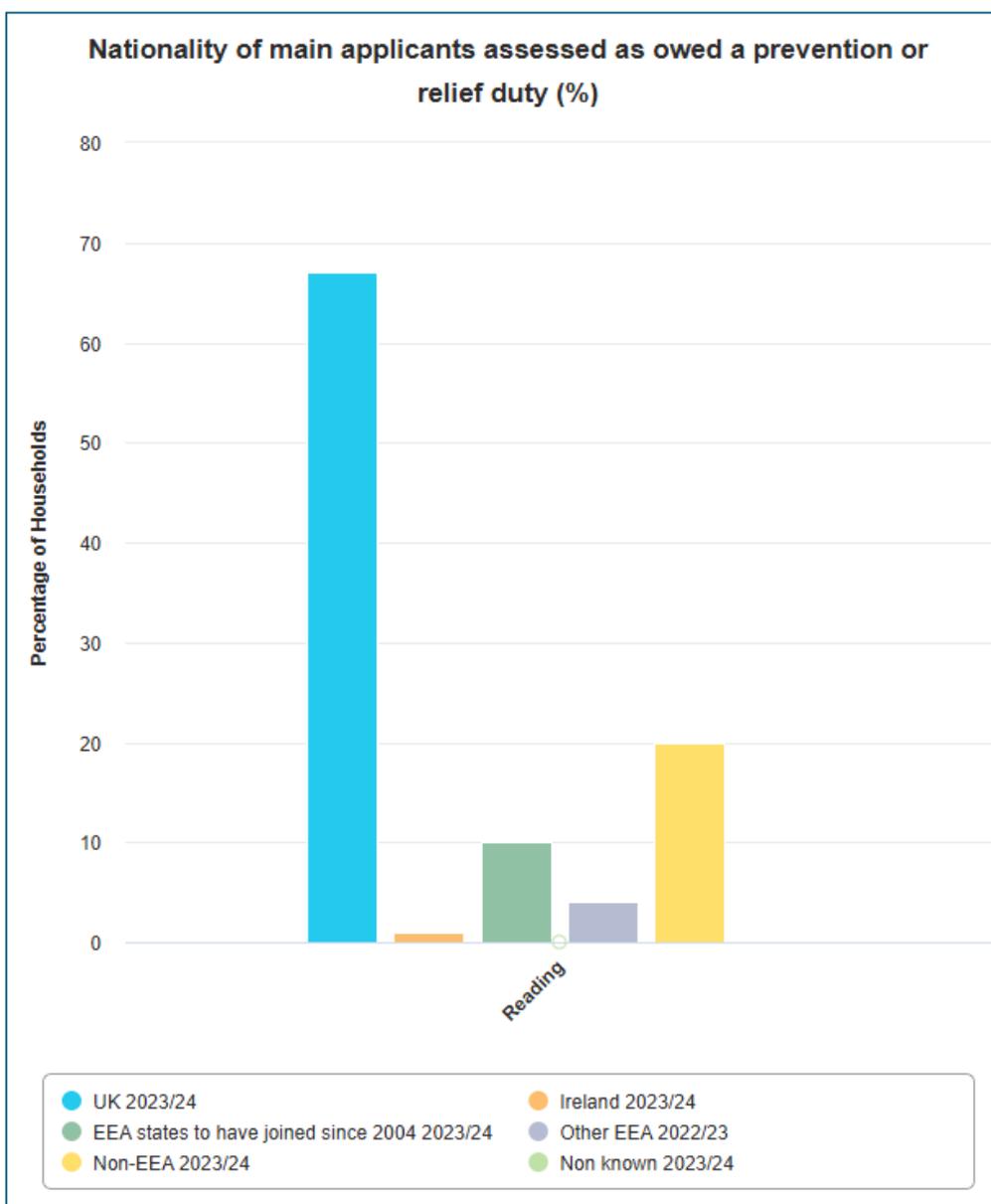
[17] Calculated by LG Inform, N/A, UK, Data updated: 19 Feb 2025.

Reading's strategy should recognise Reading's diverse population and ensure homelessness services are inclusive and accessible to all nationalities. With around 30% of applicants from non-UK backgrounds, the response should include culturally competent support, translated materials, and partnerships with migrant-focused organisations. It should also address barriers such as immigration status or lack of documentation, ensuring equitable access to prevention and relief services.

Support needs of main applicant

Examining data across the ten most prevalent support needs of households owed a prevention or relief duty from 2020/21 to 2024/25 the key findings are that:

- **Mental health problems** consistently rank as the most common support need, peaking at 17% in 2020/21 and 2022/23, and remaining the top issue across all years.

- **Physical ill health and disability** is the second most common support need after mental health. The proportion of individuals owed a duty due to disability has notably increased, rising from 5% to 14% between 2020/21 and 2024/25.

- Other notable support needs include:

    - Substance misuse

    - Domestic abuse

    - Offending history

    - Budgeting difficulties

    - Young people (18–25) needing support to live independently

    - Repeat homelessness

    - Access to education, employment, or training

    - Former asylum seeker status

The data shows a consistent demand for mental health and physical health-related support, indicating the importance of integrated health and housing services, accessible housing, and inclusive support services. Emerging or persistent needs such as domestic abuse, substance misuse, and budgeting difficulties suggest the need for multi-agency collaboration and tailored interventions. The presence of young people and repeat homelessness highlights the importance of early intervention and tenancy sustainment efforts.

Spotlight on members of the armed forces and risk of homelessness

In Reading, veterans are under-identified in homelessness services. Between 2020 and 2025, no individuals owed a homelessness duty were recorded as having served in HM Forces. In 2024/25, just 0.58% of Housing Register applicants identified as veterans – below the national estimate of 3.3%. Two veterans were offered social housing that year, representing 0.53% of total lets. Local data shows no veterans identified in rough sleeping counts between May 2023 and June 2024.

National evidence suggests veterans are twice as likely to sleep rough as the general population, with factors such as PTSD, difficulty adjusting to civilian life, and reluctance to seek help, all contributing to hidden homelessness. However,

Reading's strategy needs to commit to improving data capture, developing veteran-specific support pathways, and ensuring services are inclusive and accessible to the Armed Forces community. While not raised as a significant issue in consultation, the strategy's action plan should include measures to raise awareness and ensure veterans can access appropriate support when needed.

Households owed a main duty

Households at risk of homelessness within 56 days are entitled to prevention support from the local authority. If they become homeless, the authority must work to relieve it. The main homelessness duty applies when someone is unintentionally homeless, eligible for help, and has priority need – a definition unchanged by the 2017 Homelessness Reduction Act. However, this duty now only applies if earlier prevention or relief efforts were unsuccessful.

In Q4 of 2024/25, 43 households in Reading were accepted as having priority need and owed the main duty, including 14 vulnerable households. The graph below shows quarterly data from 2023/24 Q1 to 2024/25 Q4, comparing Reading with the South East regional average for households owed a main homelessness duty and those identified as vulnerable. Reading consistently reports higher numbers than the regional mean, with a peak of around 100 households accepted under the main duty in Q4 2023/24. Vulnerable households in Reading also rose over time, especially in 2024/25 Q4, though they remain fewer than main duty acceptances.

This trend indicates that Reading is facing greater homelessness pressures, with a consistently high number of households meeting the criteria for the main duty. The rise in vulnerable households may reflect increased identification or growing complexity of needs, reinforcing the importance of targeted support and early intervention strategies.

Total households owed a main duty (acceptances) & Total vulnerable households for Reading

Source:
Calculated by LG Inform, N/A, Total households owed a main duty (acceptances) , Data updated: 08 Aug 2025
Calculated by LG Inform, N/A, Total number of vulnerable households , Data updated: 08 Aug 2025
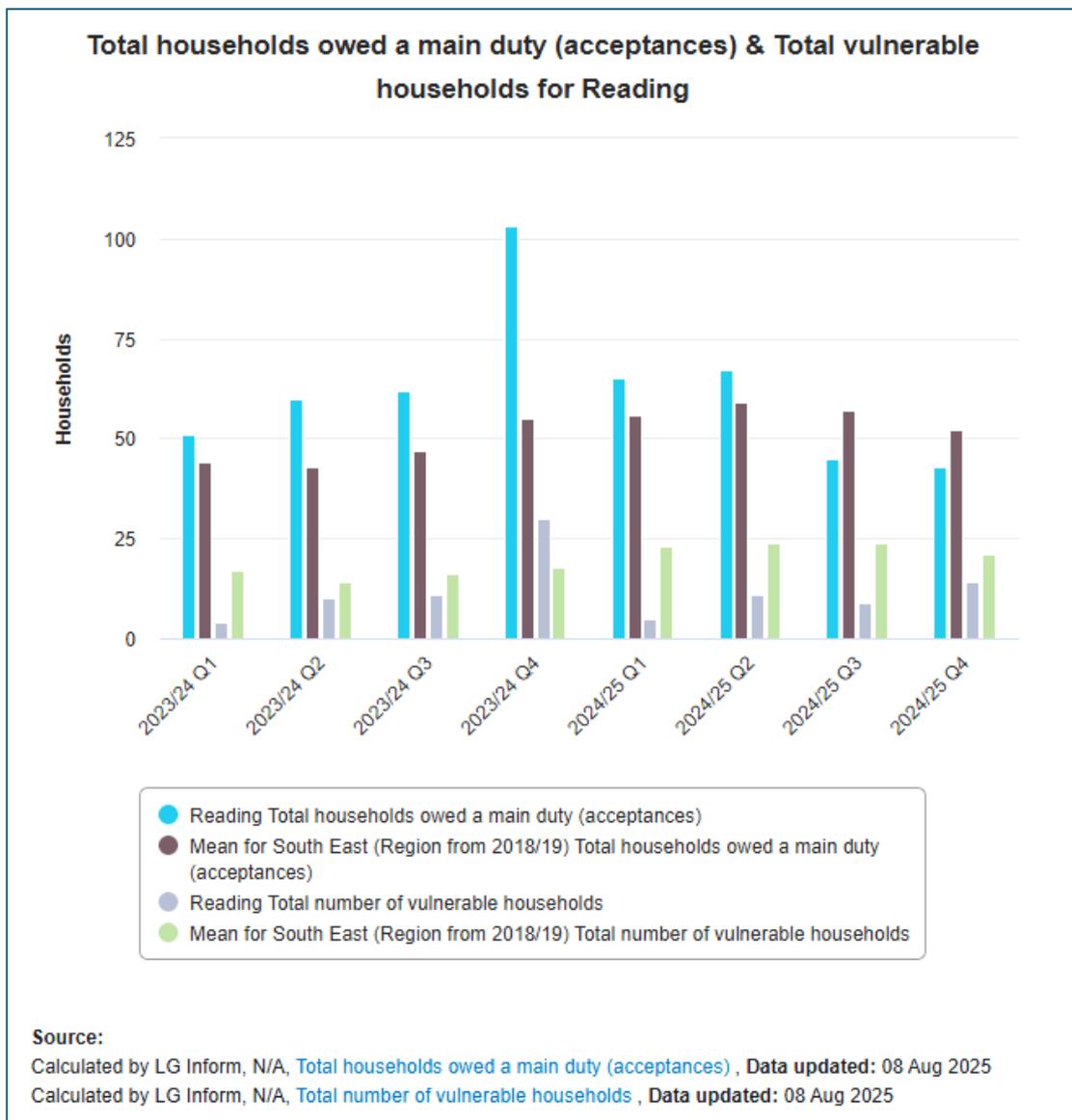
Priority Need category of households owed a main duty

The largest priority need group owed a main duty in Reading was "Household includes dependent children," making up 75.76% of all priority needs households in 2023/24 – higher than the national median of approximately 60%. Other categories in Reading include dependent children with additional priority needs (around 10%), pregnancy (about 5%), physical disability or ill health (around 5%), and mental health problems (also around 5%).

Compared to the national figures, Reading has a notably higher proportion of cases involving dependent children and a lower proportion involving physical disability or ill health. Domestic abuse appears as a relatively small category in both Reading and nationally, suggesting it is less frequently recorded as the primary reason for priority need, though it remains a significant factor in some cases. Overall, the data indicates that families with children form the largest group owed a main duty in Reading.[18]

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[18] Calculated by LG Inform, Data updated: 30 Oct 2024.

Reading's strategy should focus on supporting families with children, who make up the largest group owed a main duty in Reading. It should also ensure accessible services for those with physical or mental health needs and maintain strong pathways to specialist support for those affected by domestic abuse.

Number of households living in temporary accommodation

Temporary accommodation refers to housing provided by the council for homeless households. Most are placed under the main homelessness duty until suitable housing is found.

Nationally, temporary accommodation levels have reached record highs, with 123,100 placements and 78,420 families affected, including the highest number of children ever recorded in such housing. A total of 18,380 households are currently placed in Bed & Breakfasts (B&Bs), and 3,770 families have exceeded the statutory six-week limit for placement in temporary accommodation with shared facilities – an increase of 50.2% from the previous year. These figures highlight the growing strain on households and the financial pressures faced by local authorities. Trends over time show a continued rise in temporary accommodation use, despite efforts in prevention and relief.[19]

In Q4 2024/25, 402 households were in temporary accommodation in Reading — a rate of 6.11 per 1,000 households, which is higher than the South East average of 3.98, but lower than the ONS statistical nearest neighbour average of 6.80.

The graph below shows how the number of households in temporary accommodation per 1,000 households has changed in Reading compared to its ONS statistical nearest neighbours from Q1 2023/24 to Q4 2024/25. Reading's rate starts lower but rises steadily, reaching around 6.5 per 1,000 households, consistently staying above the average for similar areas.

This suggests that housing pressures in Reading are increasing faster than in comparable local authorities, with more households needing temporary accommodation over time.

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[19] MHCLG Webinar, 2025

Total number of households in temporary accommodation per 1,000 households for Reading

Source:
Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, Statutory homelessness live tables, **Data updated: 08 Aug 2025**
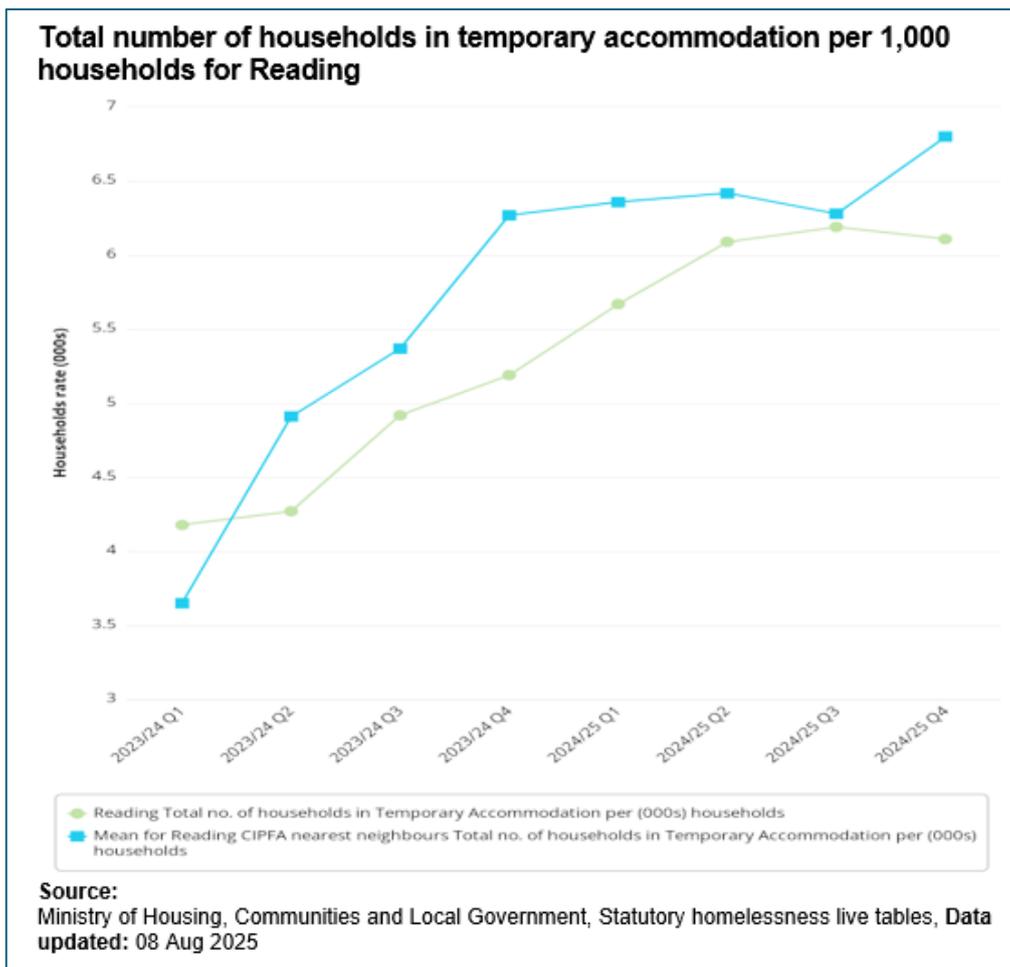
Given the rising number of households in temporary accommodation, Reading's homelessness and rough sleeping strategy should focus on preventing homelessness early, supporting vulnerable groups, and increasing supply of housing options. This includes working with landlords to prevent evictions, offering advice and financial help to those at risk, and improving access to affordable housing.

To meet growing demand, the strategy could explore ways to increase temporary accommodation, such as partnering with housing associations, using modular or repurposed buildings, converting unused council properties, or leasing homes from the private sector. It should also ensure placements are suitable, as cost effective as possible and well-managed, while strengthening links with services like mental health, probation, and support for families whilst people are temporarily housed.

Composition of households in temporary accommodation

In Q4 2024/25, the majority of households in temporary accommodation in Reading were single female parents with children (36%) and couples with children (27%), both notably higher than the averages for Reading's statistical nearest neighbours and the wider South East region. In contrast, single male adults made up just 8% of households in Reading's

temporary accommodation, compared to 20–23% in similar areas.[20] This suggests that single male adults are less likely to be placed in temporary accommodation in Reading.

One likely reason is the presence of well-funded supported accommodation pathways that primarily accommodate single men, such as hostels, supported housing projects, and Housing First. These services are likely contributing to diverting single male adults away from temporary accommodation and into more appropriate, tailored support settings. This approach helps reduce pressure on temporary accommodation and better meets the needs of individuals with complex support requirements, while allowing temporary accommodation to focus more on families and those with dependent children.

Reading's strategy should continue investing in supported accommodation pathways for single adults, particularly men, where these support pathways appear to be successfully diverting this group from temporary accommodation. At the same time, the strategy should strengthen support for families – especially single female parents and couples with children – who make up the majority of households in temporary accommodation. This includes ensuring access to suitable housing, family-focused services, and early intervention to prevent homelessness.

In summary:

Reading's homelessness and rough sleeping strategy should focus on scaling up early intervention, preparing for seasonal pressures, and aligning resources with consistently high demand. It should strengthen inter-agency collaboration, particularly with prisons, hospitals, and rehabilitation services, to improve identification and support for those at risk. Targeted strategies for young people and ethnic minority groups will be important, including culturally competent services, community partnerships, and monitoring outcomes by ethnicity. The strategy must also ensure services are inclusive for non-UK nationals, addressing barriers like proving immigration status. Support for families, especially those with children, should be prioritised, alongside accessible services for those with health needs and survivors of domestic abuse. To meet rising demand, the strategy could expand temporary accommodation through partnerships and innovative housing solutions, while continuing to invest in supported pathways for single adults.

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[20] Calculated by LG Inform, Data updated: 08 Aug 2025.

Experiences of households owed a prevention duty

If a household is at risk of homelessness within 56 days, the local authority must help prevent it. This includes support to stay in their current home or find somewhere else to live. The prevention duty lasts 56 days and can be extended if needed. Data in the next section is taken from 2023/24 H-CLIC submissions and comparators are ONS statistical nearest neighbours.

Reason for loss of last settled home for households owed a prevention duty

- The **total number of households owed a prevention duty** in Reading (1,032) is substantially higher than both the mean (770) and median (623), indicating **greater overall demand**.[21]

- **Reading consistently reports higher figures** than the mean and median of its statistical nearest neighbours across most categories.

- The **end of assured shorthold tenancy (AST)** is the most common reason for prevention duty in Reading (376 households), significantly above the median (255) and mean (315) of statistical neighbours.

- **Family or friends no longer able to accommodate** is also a major driver (196 households), again above the median (129).

- **Domestic abuse** and **eviction from supported housing** are slightly above the average, while **leaving asylum support accommodation** is notably lower in Reading (6 vs. mean of 43).

Reading faces high demand for homelessness prevention, driven primarily by the loss of private rented tenancies and breakdown of informal living arrangements. While domestic abuse and supported housing evictions are slightly above average, asylum-related cases are relatively rare. The data highlights the need for targeted interventions in the private rented sector, improved tenancy sustainment, and support for households relying on informal accommodation.

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[21] Calculated by LG Inform, Data updated: 30 Oct 2024.

Spotlight on care experience and risk of homelessness

Young people leaving care are disproportionately at risk of homelessness and rough sleeping. Many face the challenges of independent living earlier than their peers and often without the family support networks others rely on. Despite statutory duties under the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 and the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, care leavers can still fall through the gaps – particularly when transitions are poorly planned or support ends abruptly at age thresholds.

Under the Housing Act 1996, care leavers aged 18–20 are automatically considered to have priority need if homeless. Recent legislation – the Allocation of Housing (Qualification Criteria for Victims of Domestic Abuse and Care Leavers) (England) Regulations 2025 – removes local connection requirements for care leavers under 25, improving access to social housing and supporting more stable transitions into adulthood.

In Reading, care leavers made up 2% of those owed a prevention or relief duty in 2024/25, and local rough sleeping data (April 2022 – June 2024) identified six individuals under 25 with care experience. According to the charity Become, care leavers are nine times more likely to be homeless than their non-care-experienced peers. Care-experienced young people are more likely to have experienced trauma, instability, and disrupted education, which can affect their ability to sustain tenancies or engage with employment and training. They may also struggle with mental health, financial insecurity, or a lack of trust in services. Without tailored, trauma-informed support and access to safe, affordable housing, many face cycles of temporary accommodation, hidden homelessness, or rough sleeping.

Reading's strategic response must ensure that housing pathways for care leavers are stable, flexible, and integrated with wraparound support, particularly during key transition points. The accompanying action plan should include specific actions to improve data quality, strengthen joint working, and ensure care-experienced young people are explicitly considered in service design, delivery, and monitoring.

Reason for end of assured shorthold (AST) private rented tenancy for households owed a prevention duty

- The **most common reason** in Reading is **landlords wishing to sell or re-let** (228 households), significantly above the median (148) and mean (196), though still below the maximum (614).

- **Other / not known reasons** also feature prominently in Reading (92), higher than both the mean (58) and median (47).

- **Rent arrears due to budgeting issues** (25) are more common in Reading than the average, suggesting financial vulnerability among tenants.

- **Illegal eviction**, **tenant complaints**, and **abandonment** are relatively low in Reading, consistent with ONS statistical nearest neighbour averages.

- **Rent arrears due to benefit changes or employment income reduction** are less frequent in Reading than in comparator areas.[22]

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[22] Calculated by LG Inform, Data updated: 30 Oct 2024.

Reading's data suggests that landlord-driven tenancy endings are the dominant cause of homelessness risk, followed by unclear or other reasons and financial difficulties. Whilst unclear or other reason may signify some data quality issues, overall, there is a highlighted need for targeted prevention efforts around private rented sector stability, tenant financial support, and landlord engagement.

Reason for end of social rented tenancy for households owed a prevention duty

- **Reading has a higher number of cases** attributed to **"Other reasons / not known"** (20 households) than both the mean (8) and median (7), and even slightly above the maximum (19), suggesting possible gaps in data recording or more varied causes.

- **Rent arrears** are the most common reason in Reading (16), above the mean (12) and median (8), but well below the maximum (51).

- **Breach of tenancy not related to rent arrears** is relatively low in Reading (4), consistent with neighbour averages.[23]

This data suggests that rent arrears and unclear or miscellaneous reasons are the leading causes of social tenancy loss in Reading. The high number of "other/not known" cases may indicate a need for improved data capture or more detailed categorisation to better inform prevention strategies.

Reason for eviction from supported housing for household owed a prevention duty

- In **Reading**, the most common reason for eviction is **"Other reasons / not known"** (26 households), which is higher than both the mean (19) and median (12), but below the maximum (90). This may suggest either a broader range of causes or gaps in data recording.

- **Rent arrears** in Reading (10) are **above the mean (5)** and **median (2)**, but well below the maximum (22), indicating financial challenges are a notable factor locally.

- **Breach of tenancy not related to rent arrears** is **lower in Reading (7)** than the mean (17), but slightly above the median (6), suggesting fewer behavioural or rule-based evictions compared to other areas.[24]

Reading sees a relatively high number of evictions from supported housing due to unclear or miscellaneous reasons and rent arrears, while tenancy breaches are less common than in many neighbouring authorities. This points to a need for improved data clarity and targeted financial support within supported housing settings to prevent evictions for this reason and reduce cyclical rough sleeping.

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[23] Calculated by LG Inform, Data updated: 30 Oct 2024.

[24] Calculated by LG Inform, Data updated: 30 Oct 2024

Accommodation at time of application for households owed a prevention duty

- **Private rented sector** is the most common accommodation type for applicants in Reading (404 households), higher than the mean (344) and median (281), though well below the maximum (970).

- **Living with family** (200) and **living with friends** (86) are also significant in Reading, both above the median and mean, indicating strong reliance on informal housing arrangements.

- **NASS accommodation** (128) is notably higher in Reading than in comparator areas (mean: 39, median: 28), reflecting a larger asylum-seeking population.

- **Social rented sector** (99) is above average, while **owner-occupiers**, **temporary accommodation**, and **refuge** cases are relatively low but still present.

- **No fixed abode** and **rough sleeping** are recorded as zero in Reading, consistent with most neighbours.[25]

Reading sees a high number of prevention duty cases from the private rented sector, informal arrangements such as living with family or friends, and NASS accommodation, highlighting the importance of targeted support in these areas. The high figures for those living with family or friends suggest a level of hidden homelessness, where individuals lack secure housing but are not visibly rough sleeping. The social rented sector also contributes significantly, indicating that tenancy sustainment work with Registered Providers is essential. The absence of rough sleeping in this dataset reflects the nature of the prevention duty, which applies before someone becomes street homeless – these individuals are more likely to be captured under relief or from outreach service data and statistical returns.

Spotlight on overcrowding

According to Census 2021 data Reading had an overcrowding rate of 6.2%, meaning that 6.2% of households had fewer bedrooms than required based on the Bedroom Standard. This is slightly higher than the England average of 4.4%. Overcrowding was more prevalent in rented accommodation and among certain ethnic and religious groups.

The higher proportion of larger households in Reading likely contribute to increased overcrowding, especially where Reading has limited housing stock and affordability issues. Likewise, housing affordability pressures will lead to overcrowding and shared living arrangements. ONS Census 2021 data shows that overcrowding was more prevalent in private rented accommodation and among certain ethnic and religious groups, reflecting broader inequalities in housing access and affordability.

Reading's strategy should monitor and address overcrowding as a key indicator of housing stress where there are households requiring a prevention intervention, target interventions to identify overcrowding in high-risk areas and communities and promote access to suitable, affordable housing to reduce overcrowding and its impacts.

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[25] Calculated by LG Inform, Data updated: 30 Oct 2024.

Household type at time of application for households owed a prevention duty

- **Single adults** dominate the data in Reading, with **443 male** and **357 female** applicants – **well above** the mean and median for both categories. This suggests a high level of housing instability among individuals living alone.

- **Single female parents with dependent children** (115) are also a significant group, closely aligned with the median (114) but below the mean (165).

- **Couples with dependent children** (63) and **couples without children** (29) are lower than the averages, indicating fewer prevention duty cases among partnered households.

- **Three or more adult households** are relatively rare in Reading, especially those without children.

- No cases were recorded under "not known" or "other/gender not known" categories in Reading, suggesting consistent data recording.[26]

Reading's prevention duty caseload is heavily weighted toward single adults, particularly those without children, highlighting the need for tailored support for individuals living alone. The presence of single female parents also reinforces the importance of family-focused services. Lower figures for multi-adult and couple households may reflect different housing pressures or support pathways. The high numbers of single adults – especially those living with family or friends – may also indicate hidden homelessness, where individuals lack secure housing but are not visibly rough sleeping. This underscores the importance of early intervention and outreach to those in informal or unstable living arrangements.

Reason for household's prevention duty ending

- **Securing accommodation for 6+ months** is the most common successful outcome in Reading (72 households), though slightly below the mean (84) and median (92), suggesting room to improve long-term housing solutions.

- **Homelessness after prevention duty** (65 households) is higher in Reading than both the mean (54) and median (50), indicating challenges in preventing homelessness effectively.

- **Contact lost** (37 households) is significantly above the average, pointing to issues with engagement or follow-up during the prevention process.

- **Withdrawals or deceased applicants** (9) and **cases where 56 days elapsed with no further action** (15) are broadly in line with comparator areas.

- No households in Reading refused accommodation, refused to cooperate, or were found ineligible – positive signs of engagement and eligibility clarity.[27]

The data suggests that while many households in Reading successfully secure accommodation, a relatively high number still become homeless or lose contact during the prevention duty. This highlights the need for stronger engagement strategies, improved follow-up, and more effective housing outcomes to reduce homelessness risk.

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[26] Calculated by LG Inform, Data updated: 30 Oct 2024.

[27] Calculated by LG Inform, Data updated: 08 Aug 2025.

Type of accommodation secured for households at end of prevention duty

- **Total households securing accommodation** in Reading (72) is **below the mean (84)** and **median (92)**, suggesting potential to improve overall prevention success rates.[28]

- **Private rented sector** is the most common accommodation outcome in Reading (46 households), **above both the mean (36)** and **median (33)**, indicating strong reliance on private tenancies for prevention success.

- **Social rented sector** placements (23 households) are **slightly below the mean (28)** but **above the median (13)**, suggesting moderate access to social housing compared to peers.

- **Staying with family or friends** is notably low in Reading (1 household each), compared to the mean (6 and 2 respectively), which may reflect limited informal housing options or cultural/demographic factors.

- **Owner/occupier** outcomes are absent in Reading (0 households), consistent with the median (0) and low across comparators, indicating this is a rare pathway.

- **Other accommodation types** (1 household) are in line with comparator averages, showing typical use of alternative housing solutions.

- **Not known** outcomes are **zero in Reading**, compared to a mean of 10 and a maximum of 62, highlighting **excellent data quality and recording practices**.

Reading shows strong performance in securing private rented accommodation and maintaining high data quality, but overall prevention success is slightly below average. The low number of prevention duties which are resolved by staying with or returning to a family household and social tenancies may indicate areas for strategic focus. Enhancing access to social housing and encouraging community-based solutions, for housing and tenancy sustainment, from our VCFS partners could help boost outcomes and reduce homelessness risk.

Main prevention activity that resulted in accommodation secured for households at end of prevention duty

- **Accommodation secured or organisation delivering housing options service** was the most common prevention activity in Reading (104 households), **above the median (96)**, showing strong direct intervention by housing services.

- **Help securing accommodation found by applicant** was evenly split between **with financial payment (52)** and **without financial payment (53)**—both significantly **above the medians (22 and 43)**, indicating proactive support for self-sourcing accommodation.

- **Supported housing provided** (26 households) is **more than double the median (12)**, suggesting good access to supported housing options in Reading.

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[28] Calculated by LG Inform, Data updated: 08 Aug 2025.

- **Negotiation/mediation to return to family or friends** (19 households) and **to prevent eviction/repossession** (33 households) are **well above the medians (6 and 18)**, reflecting strong use of advocacy and mediation strategies.

- **Discretionary Housing Payments** (1 household) are in line with the median (1), showing typical use of this financial tool.

- **Other financial payments** (14 households) are **well above the median (4)**, suggesting additional financial support is being used effectively to prevent homelessness.

- **Other activities** (34 households) and **advice/information only** (31 households) are **above the medians (21 and 16)**, indicating a broad range of interventions and good engagement with advice services.[29]

Reading demonstrates a diverse and proactive approach to homelessness prevention, with high levels of direct housing support, financial assistance, and mediation. The data suggests strong service delivery and engagement, particularly in helping applicants secure their own accommodation and accessing supported housing. Continued investment in these varied strategies appears to be yielding positive outcomes in securing accommodation and preventing homelessness.

Destination of households with alternative accommodation secured at end of prevention duty

- **Most households remained within Reading** after securing alternative accommodation (205 households), which is **well above the median (157)**, indicating strong local rehousing capacity and retention.[30]

Reading successfully secures alternative accommodation for most households within its own local authority area, demonstrating strong local housing solutions. The data suggests a balanced approach between retaining households locally and using regional/national options when necessary.

Household type of households with accommodation secured at end of prevention duty

- **Total households with accommodation secured** in Reading (367) is **above the mean (317)** and **median (246)**, showing overall strong performance in securing accommodation.[31]

- **Single adult households** dominate the accommodation outcomes in Reading, with **168 male** and **123 female** households – **well above the mean (105 and 63)** and **median (85 and 47)**, indicating a high prevalence of single adult homelessness in the area.

- **Female single parents with dependent children** (39 households) are **below the mean (72)** and **median (49)**, suggesting fewer successful prevention outcomes for this group compared to peers.

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[29] Calculated by LG Inform, Data updated: 30 Oct 2024.

[30] Calculated by LG Inform, Data updated: 30 Oct 2024.

[31] Calculated by LG Inform, Data updated: 30 Oct 2024.

- **Male single parents** (3 households) are also **below the mean (5)** and **median (5)**, indicating limited success or lower representation.

- **Couples with dependent children** (20 households) and **without dependent children** (8 households) are **below the mean (42 and 17)** and **median (25 and 13)**, suggesting fewer successful outcomes for multi-adult households.

- **Households with three or more adults** (5 with children, 1 without) are **in line or below** comparator medians, indicating these household types are less common or harder to accommodate.

- **No unknown household types recorded**, which reflects **strong data quality**.

Reading secures accommodation for a high number of single adult households, particularly males, which may reflect targeted prevention strategies and availability of supported housing options. However, outcomes for families and couples are below comparator averages, suggesting potential gaps in support or housing availability for these groups. The overall total is strong, and data quality appears good, but there may be opportunities to improve outcomes for single parents and multi-adult households.

Summary of household experiences of the Council's response to their prevention duties

Reading Borough Council faces high demand for homelessness prevention, driven mainly by the loss of private rented tenancies and breakdowns in informal living arrangements. Most households supported are single adults, especially males, with some successful outcomes for families and couples. While many secure accommodation – often in the private rented sector – some still become homeless or lose contact during the process. Data shows financial difficulties and unclear tenancy endings are common, highlighting the need for better data capture, stronger landlord engagement, and targeted financial support. To respond effectively, Reading's strategy should focus on stabilising private tenancies, improving support for hidden homelessness, improving social tenancy sustainment for those with a Registered Provider landlord, and tailoring services to single adults and vulnerable families.

Experiences of households owed a relief duty

If a household is legally homeless and needs help finding settled housing, the council must provide a relief duty. This lasts up to 56 days, unless extended – but only if the household is not eligible for the main homelessness duty. Data in the next section is taken from 2023/24 H-CLIC submissions and comparators are ONS statistical nearest neighbours.

Reason for loss of last settled home for households owed a relief duty

- **Total relief duty cases** in Reading (560) are **below both the mean (1,259)** and **median (628)**, suggesting lower overall relief demand compared to peers.[32]

- **End of AST private rented tenancy** is the most common reason for relief duty in Reading (120 households), closely aligned with the **median (118)** but **below the mean (179)**, showing consistent pressure from the private rented sector.

- **Family or friends no longer able to accommodate** (99 households) is **well below the mean (373)** and **median (196)**, but still a significant contributor, indicating hidden homelessness.

- **Domestic abuse** (90 households) is **slightly below the mean (177)** and **median (110)** but remains a key driver of homelessness.

- **Other reasons/not known** (130 households) is **well above the median (27)** and **mean (72)**, suggesting potential issues with data clarity or categorisation.

- **Evictions from supported housing** (26) and **leaving institutions** (23) are **below comparator averages**, but still notable.

- **Leaving asylum support accommodation** is **very low in Reading** (3 households vs. mean of 118), indicating fewer asylum-related cases.

Reading's relief duty caseload is driven mainly by private rented tenancy endings and breakdowns in informal arrangements, with domestic abuse also a key factor. The high number of "other/not known" cases points to a need for better data capture. While overall relief demand is lower than in comparator areas, the data highlights the importance of targeted support for renters, hidden homelessness, and improved recording practices to inform future strategy.

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[32] Calculated by LG Inform, **Data updated:** 30 Oct 2024.

Spotlight on Domestic Abuse and homelessness

Domestic abuse is a leading cause of homelessness, particularly among women and families. Survivors often face the urgent need to flee their homes to escape violence or coercive control, frequently with nowhere safe to go. This can result in both visible homelessness and hidden forms, such as sofa surfing or staying in unsafe temporary accommodation. The trauma of abuse, combined with barriers like financial dependence, lack of affordable housing, and limited access to specialist support, can make it extremely difficult for survivors to secure stable housing. Survivors from marginalised communities – such as those with insecure immigration status, disabilities, or language barriers – often face additional challenges in accessing support.

Reading's strategic response must prioritise trauma-informed, culturally competent, and gender-sensitive approaches, ensuring that safe and sustainable housing options are available. By addressing domestic abuse as a root cause of homelessness, we can better protect vulnerable residents and break the cycle of housing insecurity. We must link with the Domestic Abuse and Accommodation Strategy 2023 – 26.

Reason for end of assured shorthold (AST) private rented tenancy for households owed a relief duty

- **Total relief duty cases due to AST tenancy ending** (120 households) are **close to the median (118)**, suggesting typical levels of demand from this group.[33]

- The **most common reason** for AST tenancy ending in Reading is **landlords wishing to sell or re-let** (44 households), **above the median (33)** but **below the mean (68)**, showing landlord decisions are a key driver of homelessness.

- **Other reasons/not known** (38 households) are **above the median (26)**, suggesting potential gaps in data clarity or categorisation.

- **Rent arrears due to budgeting issues** (12 households) and **changes in personal circumstances** (11 households) are **in line with comparator averages**, indicating financial vulnerability is a consistent factor.

- **Illegal evictions** and **breaches of tenancy** (4 households each) are slightly below average but still present.

- **Tenant abandonment** (6 households) is lower than the mean (17), and **complaints about disrepair** are not reported at all in Reading.

Reading's relief duty cases from AST tenancy endings are mainly driven by landlord decisions and financial challenges, with a notable number of cases recorded under unclear reasons. This highlights the need for better data capture, continued landlord engagement, and targeted financial support to prevent homelessness among private renters.

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[33] Calculated by LG Inform, Data updated: 30 Oct 2024.

Reason for end of social rented tenancy for households owed a relief duty

- **Rent arrears are the most common** reason for social tenancy loss in Reading (7 households), in line with the mean (7) and above the median (5), indicating financial pressures are a consistent issue.

- **Breach of tenancy (non-rent related) is lower in Reading** (2 households) than both the mean (7) and median (6), suggesting fewer behavioural or compliance-related tenancy failures.

- **Other reasons/not known** (8 households) are below the mean (12) but above the median (6), pointing to some gaps in data clarity or categorisation.[34]

Social tenancy loss in Reading is mainly driven by rent arrears, with fewer cases linked to tenancy breaches. The presence of "other/not known" reasons suggest a need for better data recording to inform targeted prevention strategies. Strengthening financial support and tenancy sustainment efforts with social landlords could help reduce these cases.

Reason for eviction from supported housing for those owed a relief duty

- **Rent arrears** (9 households) are the **most common reason** for eviction from supported housing in Reading, **slightly above the mean (7)** and **median (7)**, indicating financial pressures are a key issue.

- **Breach of tenancy/licence (non-rent related)** is **much lower in Reading (6 households)** than both the **mean (55)** and **median (49)**, suggesting fewer behavioural or compliance-related evictions compared to peers.

- **Other reasons/not known** (11 households) are **well below the mean (30)** and **median (21)**, but still notable, pointing to some gaps in data clarity or categorisation.[35]

Evictions from supported housing in Reading are mainly due to rent arrears, with relatively few cases linked to tenancy breaches. The lower figures for "other/not known" reasons suggest better data recording than many peers, though further clarity could still improve prevention efforts. The data highlights the need for targeted financial support within supported housing settings to reduce eviction risk – there should be a more stringent focus in provider specifications, KPIs and performance monitoring on this, as well as in-reach attempts from homelessness prevention teams to improve early intervention and engagement regarding arrears.

Accommodation at time of application for households owed a relief duty

- **No fixed abode (99 households)** and **rough sleeping (69 households)** are major accommodation types at the point of relief duty application in Reading, showing high levels of housing instability and visible homelessness.

- **Living with family (80 households)** and **friends (58 households)** are also common, indicating significant **hidden homelessness** and reliance on informal arrangements.

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[34] Calculated by LG Inform, Data updated: 30 Oct 2024.

[35] Calculated by LG Inform, Data updated: 30 Oct 2024.

- **Private rented sector (73 households)** is a notable source, though **below the median (142)** and **mean (170)**, suggesting fewer relief cases from this sector than in comparator areas.

- **NASS accommodation (73 households)** and **refuge placements (26 households)** are relatively high, pointing to specific needs among asylum seekers and survivors of domestic abuse.

- **Social rented sector (23 households)** and **temporary accommodation (8 households)** are lower than comparator averages, possibly reflecting limited availability or different referral pathways.

- **Departure from institutions (39 households)** is below the mean (84) but still significant, highlighting the need for better transition planning.[36]

Reading's relief duty caseload reflects a mix of visible and hidden homelessness, with many applicants coming from unstable or informal living arrangements. Fewer cases originate from the private rented sector than in other, comparable areas, indicating Reading's effectiveness in preventing homelessness where applicants are losing private sector accommodation. There is a notable presence of asylum seekers, people sleeping rough, and those leaving institutions. The data highlights the need for early intervention, targeted outreach, and specialist support for vulnerable groups, particularly those without secure housing or relying on informal accommodation.

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[36] Calculated by LG Inform, Data updated: 30 Oct 2024.

Spotlight on homelessness from institutional settings

In 2023–24, homelessness stemming from institutional settings remained a significant issue in the East of England, South East, and South West. Key sources included individuals leaving Home Office accommodation (3,330), custody (2,740), hospital care (610), and the care system (450). While many areas have effective partnerships in place, improvements are needed in early referrals, information sharing, and coordinated support. Institutional homelessness is also vulnerable to sudden spikes, particularly due to asylum and resettlement backlogs, early prison releases, and seasonal hospital discharge pressures.

Departure from institutions as the reason for people approaching the Council at prevention and relief stages of homelessness duty, are low – and national statistics, rough sleeping figures and applications to supported accommodation for people with offending histories, suggest this is not representative of demand in Reading.

Leaving institutions is often underrepresented in homelessness data because individuals frequently apply for support after leaving, meaning their accommodation is recorded as something else – such as "no fixed abode" or "staying with friends or family." Data systems like H-CLIC typically capture the current accommodation at the time of application, rather than the housing history, which can make it harder to identify recent institutional discharge as a contributing factor. This is especially common when people stay temporarily with others, making their homelessness less visible.

In many cases, opportunities for early intervention may be missed due to challenges in coordination between institutions and housing services, or because individuals do not seek help until they are already at risk. Prevention duties ideally begin before someone exits an institution, but this depends on timely referrals and awareness of available support.

Reading's strategic response must strengthen early intervention and coordination to prevent homelessness linked to institutional discharge. Improved referral pathways, consistent data recording, and multi-agency working are key to identifying and supporting individuals before they leave institutions. The strategy's action plan should reflect the need for services to be flexible in responding to sudden pressures, such as asylum backlogs, early prison releases, and seasonal hospital discharges.

Household type at time of application for households owed a relief duty

- **Single adult households dominate relief duty applications** in Reading, with 286 male and 167 female applicants – above the median (386 and 130) but below the mean (648 and 238), reflecting a high level of individual homelessness.

- **Single parents with dependent children**, especially households headed by females (63), are **well below the mean (183) and median (117),** suggesting fewer family-based applications.

- Couples and multi-adult households are significantly lower than comparator averages, indicating different housing pressures or support pathways.[37]

Relief duty in Reading is primarily driven by single adults, especially males, with fewer families and couples presenting for support. This points to a need for tailored services for individuals, while also exploring ways to better engage and support family and multi-adult households who may be underrepresented in applications.

Reason for households' relief duty ending

- **Securing accommodation for 6+ months** is the most common successful outcome in Reading (66 households), **matching the median** but **below the mean (82)**, suggesting room to improve long-term housing solutions.

- **56 days elapsed without resolution** (62 households) is **well below the mean (195)** and **median (122)**, which may reflect quicker case closure or fewer unresolved cases.

- **Contact lost** (32 households) is **slightly above the median (31)**, indicating challenges with maintaining engagement during the relief duty.

- **Refusals and withdrawals** (3 refused accommodation, 7 withdrew or deceased) are **in line with comparator averages**, showing typical levels of disengagement or case closure.

- **Very few cases** involved **referrals to other local authorities (1)** or **ineligibility (2)**, and **no cases** were recorded as **intentional homelessness** or **refusal to cooperate**, suggesting good eligibility screening and engagement.

- **Total relief duty cases ended** in Reading (173 households) is **below both the mean (333)** and **median (225)**, indicating lower overall relief duty activity compared to peers.[38]

Reading shows solid performance in securing accommodation and resolving relief duty cases efficiently but still faces challenges with contact loss and slightly lower overall success rates. The data suggests a need for stronger engagement strategies, follow-up support, and continued focus on long-term housing outcomes to reduce homelessness risk.

Type of accommodation secured for households at end of relief duty

- **Private rented sector** is the most common accommodation outcome for households whose relief duty ended in Reading (34 households), **above both the mean (27)** and **median (21)**, showing strong reliance on private tenancies.

- **Social rented sector** placements (23 households) are **below the mean (40)** but **in line with the median (24)**, indicating moderate access to social housing.

- **Informal arrangements** like **staying with family (0)** and **friends (2)** are **very low**, suggesting limited use of informal housing solutions.

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[37] Calculated by LG Inform, Data updated: 30 Oct 2024.

[38] Calculated by LG Inform, Data updated: 08 Aug 2025.

- **Other accommodation types** (5 households) are slightly above the median (2), showing some diversity in housing outcomes.

- **No households** secured owner-occupied housing, which is consistent with comparator areas.

- **Total households securing accommodation** (66) is **equal to the median** but **below the mean (82)**, suggesting average performance in securing housing under the relief duty.[39]

Reading performs well in securing private rented accommodation for households under the relief duty, with moderate success in accessing social housing. The low use of informal arrangements and below-average total outcomes suggest opportunities to expand housing options and improve overall success rates. Continued focus on private sector engagement and social tenancy access will be key to strengthening relief duty outcomes.

Main relief activity that resulted in accommodation secured for households at end of relief duty

- **Accommodation secured or delivered by the housing needs service** is the most common relief activity in Reading (70 households), though **below the median (128)**.

- **Help securing accommodation found by the applicant** is split between **with financial payment (30 households)** and **without financial payment (26 households)**—both **above the median (19)**, indicating strong support for self-sourcing housing.

- **Supported housing provision** (49 households) is **above the median (45)**, showing good access to specialist accommodation.

- **Accommodation secured by other activity** (27 households) and **no activity (7 households)** are **in line with comparator medians**, reflecting typical levels of alternative or minimal intervention.[40]

Reading demonstrates a balanced and proactive approach to relief duty, with strong support for applicants securing their own accommodation and good access to supported housing.

Destination of households with alternative accommodation secured at end of relief duty

- **Most households (174)** who secured alternative accommodation under the relief duty in Reading remained **within the same local authority**, which is **slightly below the median (199)**, but still shows strong local rehousing capacity.

- **Placements in another local authority within the same region (11)** and **in another region (16)** are **above the medians (8 and 4)**.

- **Destination not known** (8 households) is **below the median (11)**, indicating relatively good data recording.[41]

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[39] Calculated by LG Inform, Data updated: 08 Aug 2025.

[40] Calculated by LG Inform. Data updated: 30 Oct 2024.

[41] Calculated by LG Inform. Data updated: 30 Oct 2024.

Reading successfully rehoused most households locally under the relief duty. The data suggests a need to balance local capacity with support for out-of-area moves, ensuring continuity of care and housing stability.

Household type of households with accommodation secured at end of relief duty

- **Single adult households** dominate relief duty outcomes in Reading, with **106 male** and **55 female** households securing accommodation – **close to the median (109 and 36)** and **below the mean (168 and 62)**, reflecting a strong focus on individual homelessness.

- **Single female parents** (34 households) are **above the median (22)** but **below the mean (40)**, showing moderate success in supporting family households.

- **Couples and multi-adult households** (6 or fewer households each) are **well below comparator averages**, suggesting limited accommodation outcomes for these groups.

- **Total households securing accommodation** (209) is **equal to the median (176)** but **below the mean (312)**, indicating average performance in relief duty outcomes.[42]

Relief duty outcomes in Reading are primarily driven by single adults, with moderate success for single parents and limited outcomes for couples and multi-adult households. The data suggests a need to strengthen support for families and shared households, while continuing to tailor services for individuals at risk of homelessness.

Summary of household experiences of the Council's response to their relief duties

Reading's relief duty caseload is shaped by private rented tenancy endings, informal arrangement breakdowns, and domestic abuse, with many applicants being single adults. While accommodation is often secured in the private sector, overall success rates are slightly below average, and contact loss remains a challenge. Evictions from social and supported housing are mainly due to rent arrears, and a high number of cases are recorded under unclear reasons, highlighting the need for better data capture. To strengthen its strategy, Reading should focus on landlord engagement, financial support, tailored services for individuals and families, and improved data quality to inform targeted interventions.

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[42] Calculated by LG Inform, Data updated: 30 Oct 2024.

Experiences of households owed a main duty

Outcome of main duty decisions for eligible households

- **43 households** in Reading were found to be **homeless, in priority need, and unintentionally homeless**, meaning they were accepted for the **main homelessness duty –** this is **below the mean (124)** and **median (77)**, but still a significant group.

- **Intentional homelessness cases** (10 households) are **above the mean (6)** and **median (3)**, suggesting more households in Reading are losing accommodation due to actions deemed within their control.

- **Households without priority need** (10) are **well below the mean (53)** and **median (36)**, indicating fewer applicants fall outside the priority need criteria.

- **No households were found not to be homeless**, which aligns with the median (0), showing accurate initial assessments.[43]

Reading accepts a moderate number of households for the main homelessness duty, with a higher-than-average rate of intentional homelessness decisions, which may reflect stricter assessments or specific local challenges. The low number of non-priority cases suggests most applicants meet the threshold for support. This highlights the need for early intervention, tenancy sustainment, and targeted support to reduce intentional homelessness outcomes.

Number of households owed a main duty by priority need

- The **majority of households owed a main duty in Reading** include **dependent children (27 households)**, though this is **below both the mean (62)** and **median (34)**, suggesting fewer family-based cases compared to peers.

- **Mental health vulnerability** (7 households) and **physical disability/ill health** (4 households) are the most common non-family priority needs, though both are **below comparator averages**, indicating moderate representation of health-related vulnerabilities.

- **Domestic abuse**, **young applicants**, and **other reasons** each account for **1 household**, showing limited but present diversity in priority need categories.

- **No households** were owed a main duty due to **pregnancy**, **old age**, or **emergency homelessness**, which may reflect local demographics or referral patterns.

- **Total households owed a main duty** in Reading (43) is **well below the mean (124)** and **median (77)**, indicating lower overall demand or stricter eligibility outcomes.[44]

Reading's main duty caseload is primarily made up of families with children, with smaller numbers of households presenting with health-related vulnerabilities or domestic abuse. The overall number is lower than comparator areas, suggesting either fewer eligible cases or effective prevention earlier in the homelessness pathway. The data highlights the need for continued support for families, alongside tailored services for individuals with complex needs.

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[43] Calculated by LG Inform, Data updated: 08 Aug 2025.

[44] Calculated by LG Inform, Data updated: 08 Aug 2025.

Number of households whose main duty ended by reason for duty end

- **Most households in Reading (35)** ended their main duty by **accepting a social housing offer**, which is **below the mean (63)** and **median (47)**, but still the dominant outcome.

- **Private rented sector offers accepted** (6 households) are **slightly below the median (7)**, showing limited use of this pathway.

- **No households refused offers** of social or private rented housing.

- **Voluntary departures (7 households)** and **refusals or lost contact (2 households)** are **in line with or below** comparator medians, indicating relatively low disengagement.

- **Intentional homelessness from temporary accommodation** (1 household) is **below the median (2)**, showing few cases of tenancy breakdown in temporary settings.

- **Total households no longer owed a main duty** in Reading (51) is **below both the mean (102)** and **median (75)**, reflecting lower overall throughput or demand.

Reading's main duty outcomes are largely driven by social housing placements improved by ringfencing 50% of property vacancies on the housing register for homeless households to bid on. There is minimal disengagement, indicating effective offer matching and applicant co-operation. The data suggests a need to increase access to housing options, particularly in the private rented sector, and maintain strong engagement to support successful exits from homelessness.

Summary of household experiences of the Council's response to their main duty owed

Reading accepts a moderate number of households under the main homelessness duty, mostly families with children, with few non-priority cases – indicating that applicants generally meet support thresholds. A higher-than-average rate of intentional homelessness decisions suggests a need for early intervention and tenancy sustainment. Outcomes are largely driven by social housing placements, with low refusal and disengagement rates, showing effective offer matching and strong engagement. Reading's strategy should expand private rented sector access, maintain tailored support for vulnerable groups, and continue focusing on prevention and family support.

Rough Sleeping in Reading

Rough sleeping data sets

National data on rough sleeping in England is collected and published through three main sources, each offering different insights into its scale, nature, and trends. Together, these datasets help build a picture of rough sleeping across England, regions, and local authority areas. Below is a summary of the national and local data sources that inform our understanding of people sleeping rough in Reading:

Annual rough sleeping snapshot figure

Each year all local authorities in England count or estimate the number of people sleeping rough on a single 'typical' night between 1st October and 30th November. For the purposes of the snapshot, rough sleeping is defined as individuals who are sleeping or about to bed down in open-air locations such as streets, parks, doorways, and bus shelters, or in places not designed for habitation like tents, makeshift shelters, cars, and derelict buildings. The snapshot does not include people in hostels, shelters, campsites, squats, organised protests, or traveller sites. Local authorities choose the date and use one of three methods – a count-based estimate, an evidence-based estimate, or an evidence-based estimate with a spotlight count. It is considered best practice to involve outreach teams, local charities, and community groups working with people sleeping rough to determine the final number.

Figures are verified independently by an organisation called Homeless Link and are published in the February of the next year. The purpose of the figure is to provide a consistent year-on-year measure of rough sleeping across England. While it enables us to set a benchmark and show comparators over time, there are limitations to this data. It captures those people seen or believed to be sleeping rough on a specific night but excludes hidden homelessness and people in hostels or temporary accommodation who meet the broader definition of homelessness and may be intermittently sleeping rough.

Rough Sleeping Data Framework

This is monthly data and management information collected by the MHCLG from all local authorities in England via a system called DELTA. It intends to provide more frequent and detailed comparative data to understand the flow of people onto and off the streets, and to monitor prevention and accommodation efforts – especially the effectiveness of those interventions funded by MHCLG issued grants. This data framework better captures seasonal and dynamic patterns of rough sleeping, including those who may not be visible on a single night, and those who are intermittently rough sleeping.

Office for National Statistics (ONS) Reports

The ONS provides UK-wide analysis via aggregate data from local authorities and provides broader insights into trends and characteristics of rough sleeping, compared to wider population data.

Data collected from Reading's Rough Sleeping Outreach Service

Information is systematically collected and analysed following each street shift conducted by Reading's local rough sleeping outreach team. These 'Street Shift Diaries' capture records of individuals actively engaged on the streets by the team and form the basis of Reading's

monthly submissions to the Rough Sleeping Data Framework. They also feed into Power BI dashboards designed to monitor hotspot areas, encampments, and evolving trends in demographics and locations over time.

Additional insights are gathered through Reading's multi-agency Access Panel – a weekly forum for reviewing new referrals into supported housing and prioritising available vacancies – as well as through quarterly key performance indicator (KPI) submissions from the outreach service. These sources provide valuable data on outcomes such as successful accommodation placements and reconnection efforts.

National overview of rough sleeping trends

Nationally, rough sleeping continues to rise despite ongoing Government investment in support and accommodation. In September 2024, 3,667 people were recorded as sleeping rough, with 34% experiencing long-term homelessness, 33% newly homeless, 14% returning (30% of whom had previously been in settled accommodation), and 8% recently discharged from institutions. Most individuals were seen rough sleeping for short periods, with 28% seen only once and 23% seen over ten nights. Accommodation outcomes remained largely unchanged from June to September 2024, with around 3,500 people not accommodated each month and only 400–500 moving into accommodation, highlighting ongoing gaps in suitable accommodation and support provisions.[45] The national data highlights the need to reduce demand, better support those with complex needs, and create sustainable pathways to prevent repeat homelessness.

Annual rough sleeping snapshot – what the data tells us

In 2024, an estimated 4,320 people were sleeping rough across England on a typical night, marking a 28% increase (933 more people) compared to 2023. In the South East region, 764 individuals were recorded as sleeping rough, representing a 38% rise (an additional 211 people) from the previous year.

In 2024, Reading's official and declared snapshot night figure was 57 individuals. For the six months prior to the 2024 snapshot night, Reading's monthly rough sleeping average was 42 people – denoting a 17% increase and a more typical reflection of local need. The official snapshot figure was inflated due to SWEP being active, but delaying either SWEP or the count risked breaching the 'typical night' criteria or deaths on the streets due to cold weather. The decision to activate SWEP and submit a higher annual figure followed good practice and saved lives, with the Council confident that the decision was appropriate. Regardless, the figures align with the national upward trend in rough sleeping.

Among our ONS statistical nearest neighbour comparator local authorities, Reading had the second highest rough sleeping snapshot figure in both 2023 and 2024. However, two other authorities saw significantly larger percentage increases this year, reflecting the wider national trend of rising rough sleeping.

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[45] MHCLG webinar, 2025.

ONS Statistical Nearest Neighbour (South) rough sleeping snapshot data for 2023 & 2024 with % change

[Bar and line chart showing 2023 and 2024 rough sleeping counts with % change for ONS Statistical Nearest Neighbour (South) areas:
- Portsmouth: 2023 = 11, 2024 = 26, % change = 136%
- Milton Keynes: 2023 = 16, 2024 = 35, % change = 119%
- Reading: 2023 = 36, 2024 = 57, % change = 58%
- Bracknell Forest: 2023 = 7, 2024 = 10, % change = 43%
- Bristol, City of: 2023 = 67, 2024 = 77, % change = 15%
- Swindon: 2023 = 15, 2024 = 17, % change = 13%
- Slough: 2023 = 34, 2024 = 36, % change = 6%
- Southampton: 2023 = 24, 2024 = 22, % change = -8%]

Legend: 2023, 2024, % change

The 2024 rough sleeping snapshot highlighted some key themes:

- **Barriers to accessing accommodation from the streets due to immigration status and local connection**
  Only 44% of people sleeping rough had both a local connection to Reading and access to public funds; 37% had unresolved or unknown immigration status, preventing access to housing or income and 19% had no local connection to Reading and were not engaging with reconnection efforts.

  This means over half of people sleeping rough in Reading are outside the scope of either statutory or local housing support due to legal or local connection barriers. This leaves individuals at high risk of long-term rough sleeping if there are not non-statutory, flexible, and innovative interventions.

- **Environmental and behavioural factors contributing to sustained rough sleeping in Reading**
  Rough sleeping in car parks and encampments can become hotspots for anti-social behaviour – which in turn reinforces patterns of rough sleeping. Begging activity often sustains substance misuse and can reduce individuals' willingness or ability to engage with support services, making it harder to break the cycle of street homelessness.

- **Cyclical homelessness of individuals and couples with multiple and complex needs**
  Rent arrears and unacceptable behaviours that lead to eviction – primarily linked to substance misuse and usually connected to unmet mental health and neurodivergent needs – often result in repeated homelessness.

Rough Sleeping Data Framework[46] – what the data tells us

Monthly snapshot figures

When Reading's monthly rough sleeping figures are compared to its ONS statistical nearest neighbour authorities – including those in the South and those with both the smallest and largest populations – it highlights that while Reading does not have the highest absolute numbers, it faces more sustained higher levels of rough sleeping than many of its statistical neighbours.
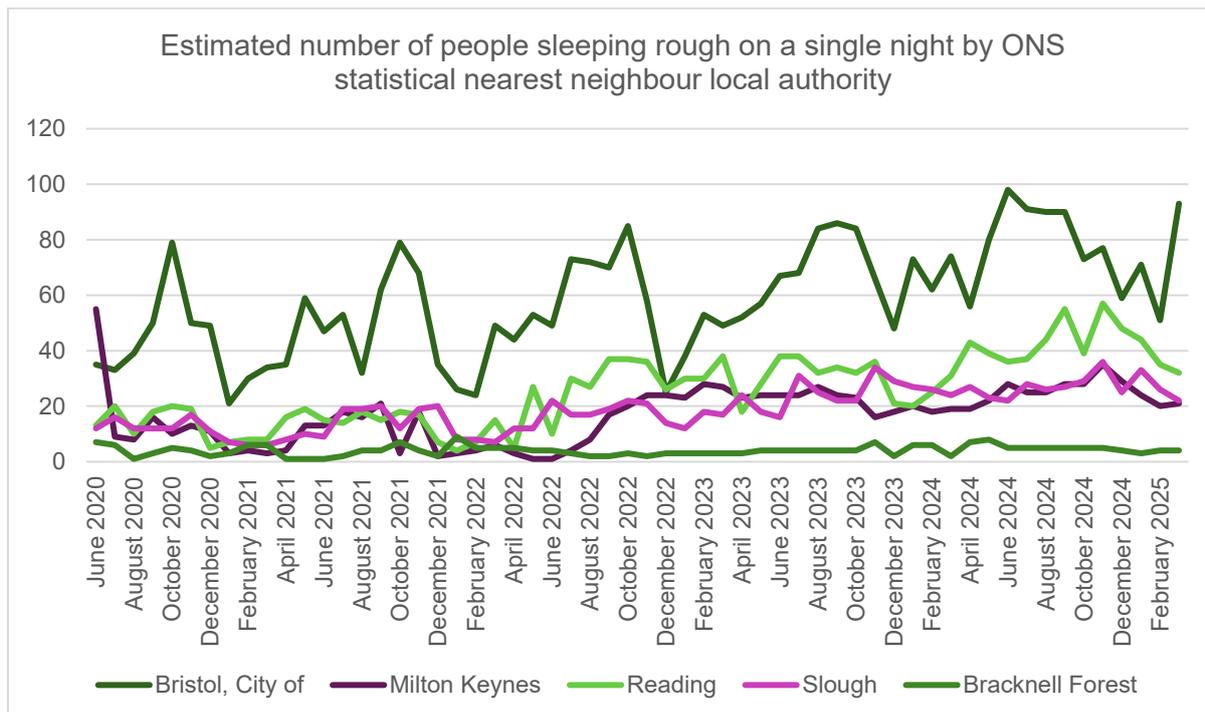
The most recent six months of published data (October 2024 to March 2025) show an average of 43 unique individuals sleeping rough on a single typical night each month in Reading.

Rough sleeping numbers over the month

Total numbers: National and local comparison

The following two graphs show the number of unique individuals recorded as sleeping rough each month in both England and Reading, from October 2020 to March 2025.

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[46] MHCLG **Rough Sleeping Data Framework, March 2025**

Estimated number of people sleeping rough over the month in England

Estimated number of people sleeping rough over the month in Reading

National, South East and local data show an upward trend over time, with clear peaks in the months June – October, most likely indicating that off-the-streets offers and interventions are increased during the winter months, and that engagement with accommodation offers and reconnections is higher during colder weather. Since April 2023, the number of people sleeping rough has grown significantly – both nationally and in Reading – with Reading seeing some recent months at, or nearing, 100 individuals.
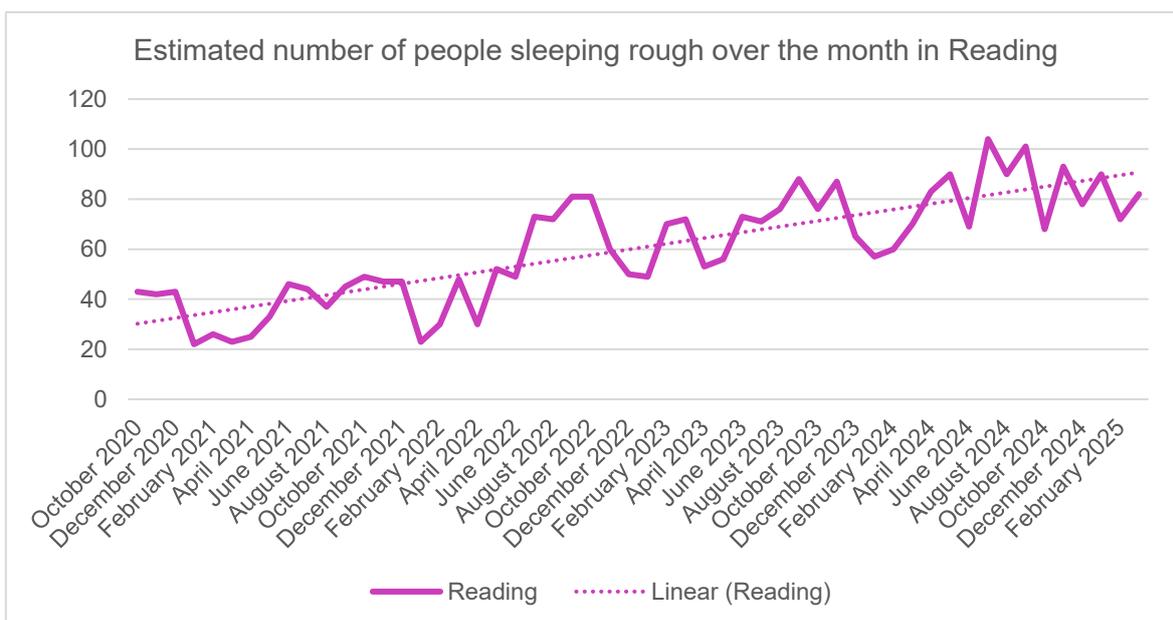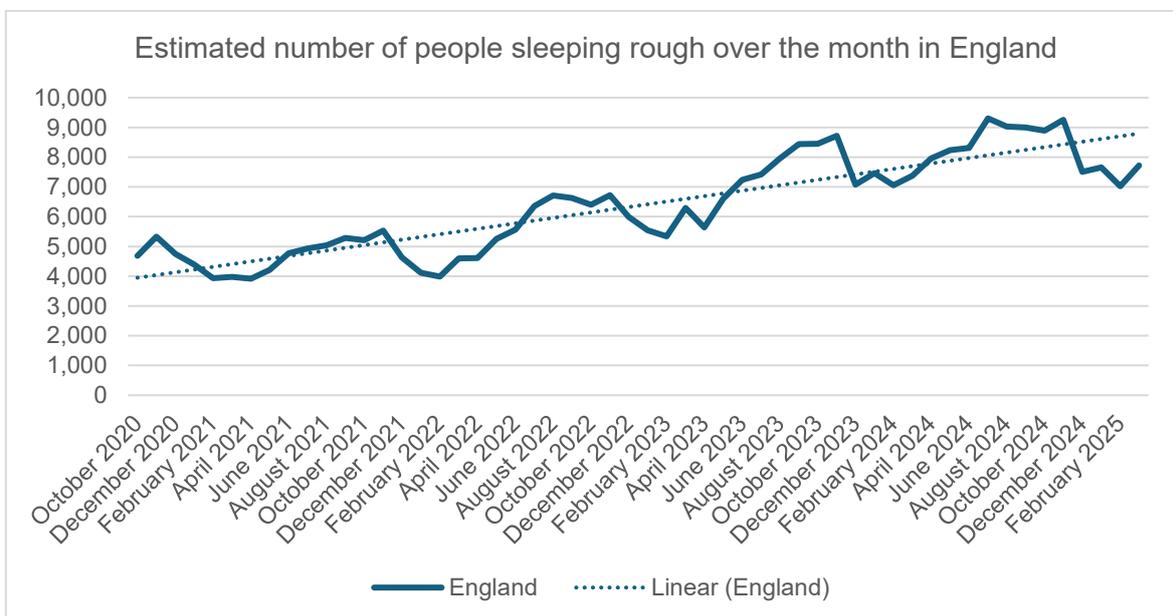
The most recent six months of published data (October 2024 to March 2025) show an average of 81 unique individuals verified as sleeping rough each month in Reading.

Rough sleeping rates per 100,000 people each month - statistical nearest neighbour comparison

The graph below compares the rate per 100,000 people across Reading's statistical nearest neighbour group, highlighting both the smallest and largest local authority populations within the cohort.

Estimated rate of people sleeping rough over the month per 100,000 people, for statistical nearest neighbour local authorities (in the South) by largest and smallest populations
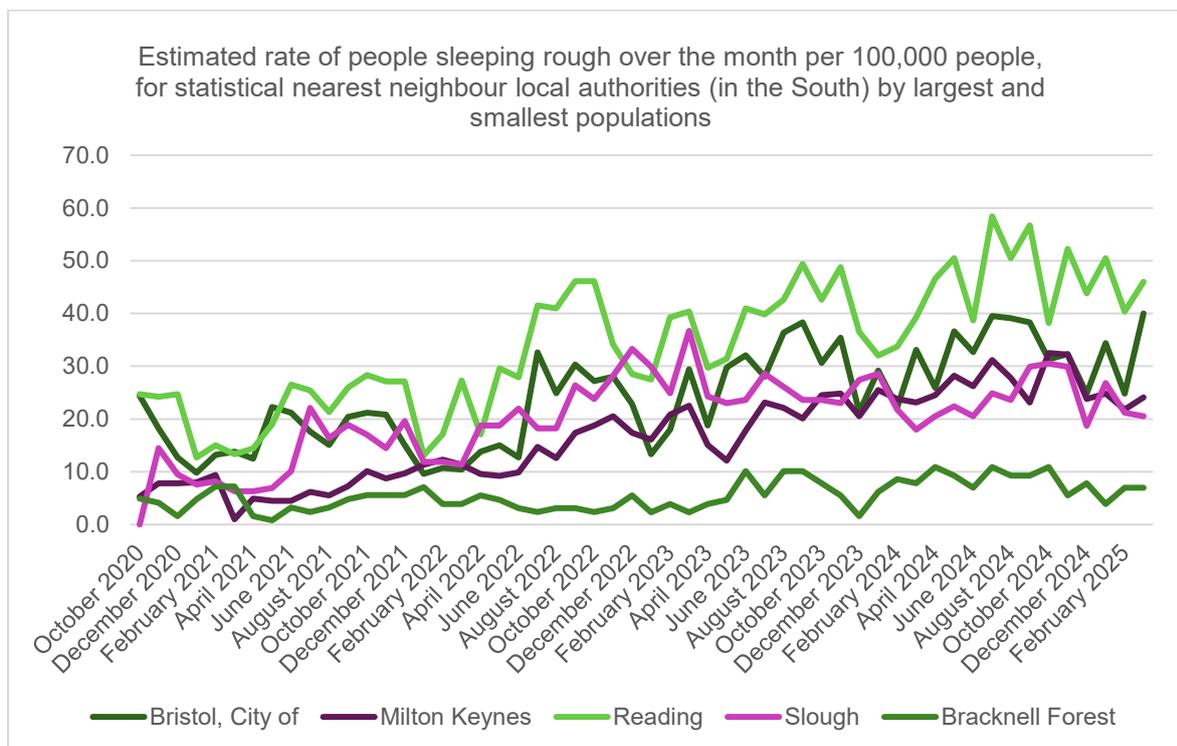
Although Reading does not record the highest annual rough sleeping snapshot figures compared to its ONS statistical nearest neighbour authorities such as Bristol, monthly data shows that Reading has the highest rate of people sleeping rough per 100,000 population.

New people sleeping rough over the month

The graphs below illustrate the estimated number of new individuals sleeping rough each month in both England and Reading. In Reading, peaks in the number of new people sleeping rough – notably in July 2023 and November 2024 – closely align with spikes in the overall monthly figures. This indicates a direct correlation, showing how those newly arriving to the streets can significantly influence the total number of people sleeping rough in any given month.

Estimated number of new people sleeping rough over the month in England

Estimated number of new people sleeping rough over the month in Reading
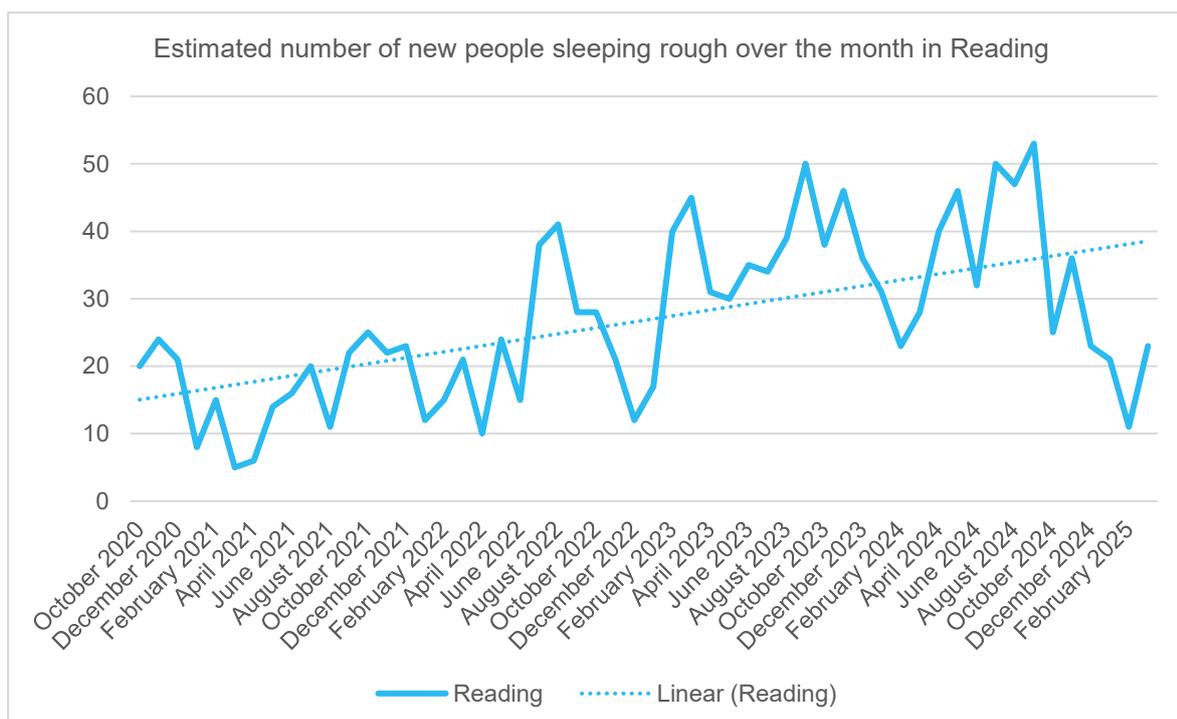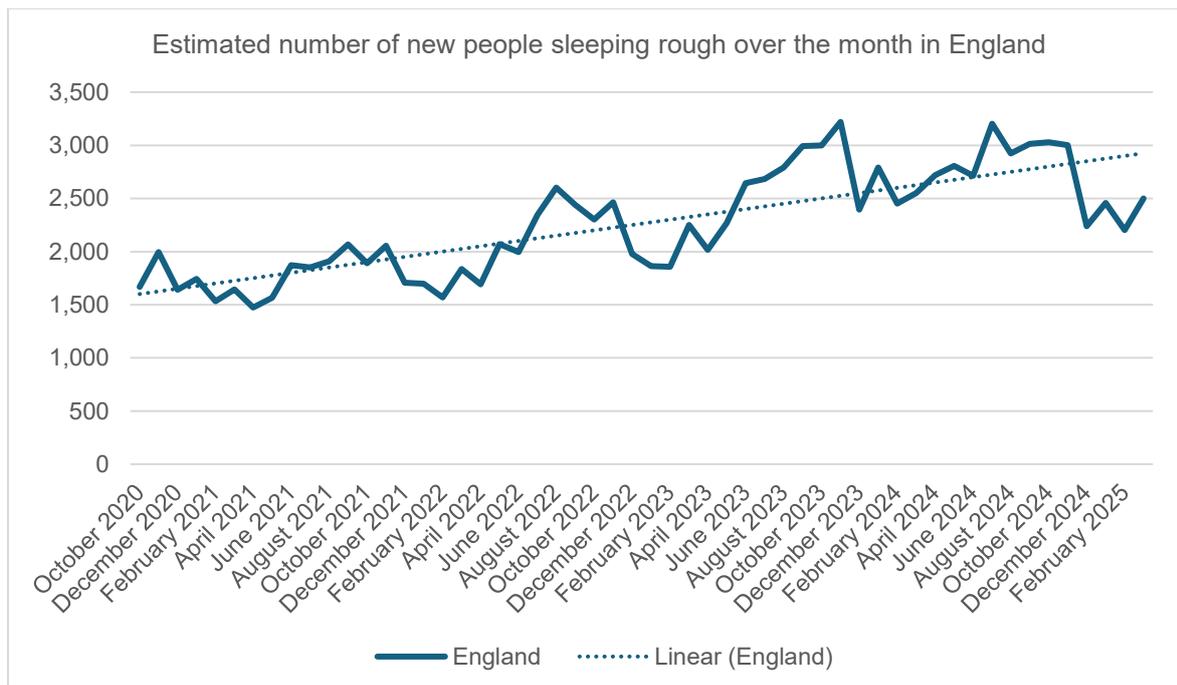
Care leavers

The estimated number of people sleeping rough over the month who are under 25 and are care leavers in Reading shows very minimal data – and no more than 10 individual care leavers were identified bedding down between April 2022 and March 2025.
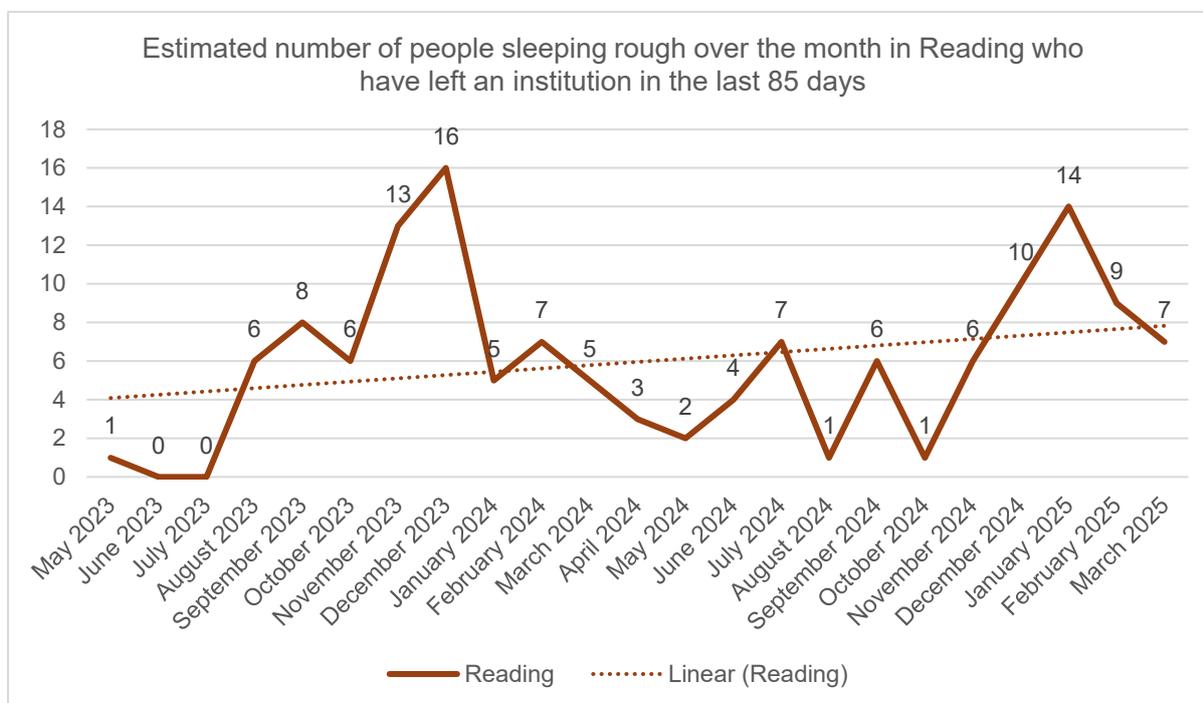
Institution leavers

Aggregated data in the graph below highlights a growing challenge in supporting individuals transitioning out of institutional settings – including prisons, approved premises, CAS3 accommodation, general and psychiatric hospitals, the UK Armed Forces and Asylum Support accommodation (formerly referred to as NASS).

Estimated number of people sleeping rough over the month in Reading who have left an institution in the last 85 days

Notably, there are clear seasonal peaks in rough sleeping in November 2023 and January 2024, suggesting increased pressure during the winter months. However, the specific institutional drivers behind these peaks remain unclear.

Several factors may be contributing, including a possible rise in Home Office decisions before the Christmas period, particularly with the reversion to 28 days' notice on NASS accommodation, which could increase the number of people at risk. Winter pressures on the NHS may lead to more hospital discharges, potentially without adequate housing plans in place. The impact of early prison release programmes may also be influencing the upward trend. Overall, the data points to an absence of resettlement planning and support for people before they leave and/or a widening gap in post-institution support – reinforcing the need for more coordinated discharge and release planning.

Breaking this data down into institution type, as per the graph below, shows that Asylum Support (NASS accommodation) coming to an end consistently accounts for the highest number of people sleeping rough across the month who have left an institution in the last 85 days – with noticeable peaks around December 2023 and February 2025. Prison and Hospital discharges contribute smaller numbers but there are notable peaks, likely due to the reasons already noted. UK Armed Forces discharges are minimal, with only very occasional instances of rough sleeping showing in the data. The data shows fluctuations over time, but the dominance of asylum-related discharges suggests a potential gap in support pre- and post-accommodation for this group – but most likely short notice periods from Asylum Support accommodation being a significant contributing factor.

Estimated number of people sleeping rough over the month who have left an institution in the last 85 days in Reading - by institution type
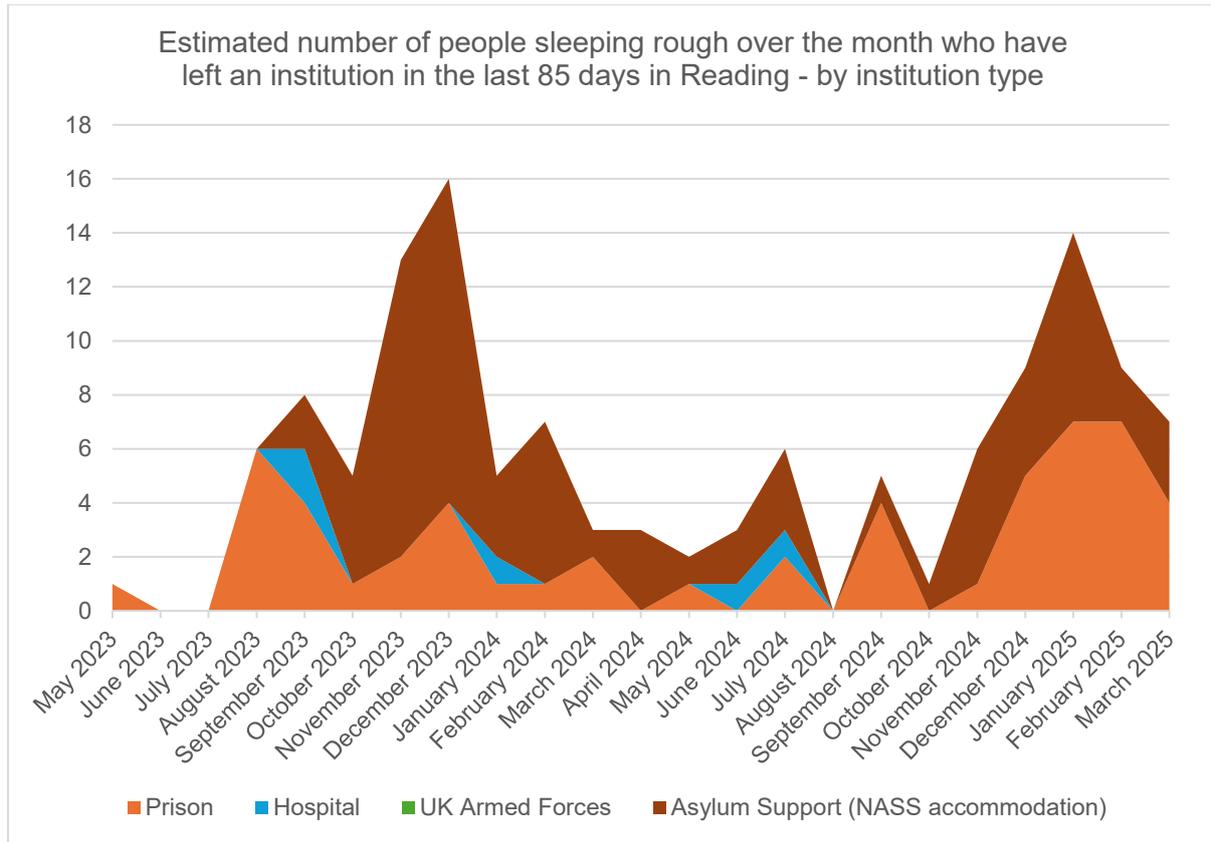
Length of time sleeping rough

The graph below illustrates the distribution of rough sleeping durations in Reading over a six-month period from June 2024 to March 2025, showing how many nights individuals were found bedded down during each month.

Number of nights over the last 6 months an individual found bedded down had slept rough in Reading
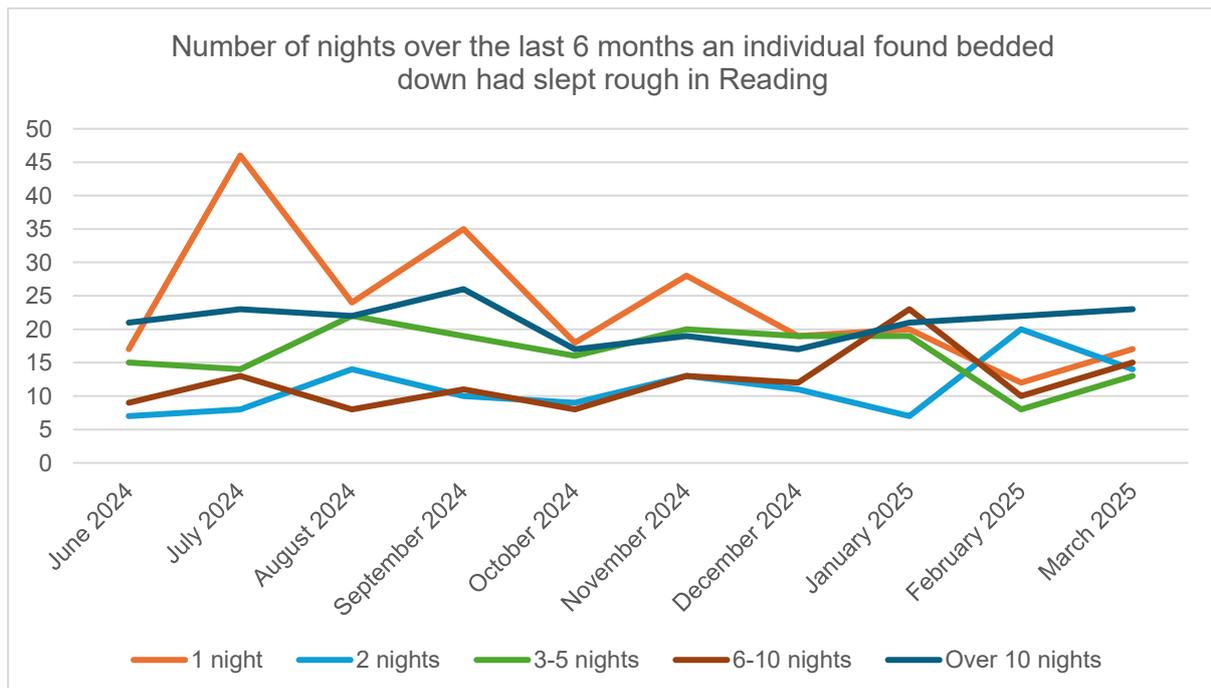
The number of people found sleeping rough on a single night, and no others, has consistently declined – but with notable peaks in July, September, and November 2024. This could be attributed to improved immediate off-the-streets responses, or improvements in data capture. There is a peak in the number of people sleeping rough for 6 – 10 nights in January 2025, but this is congruent with the previously mentioned spikes in Asylum Support accommodation leavers at this same time.

Those sleeping rough for more than 10 nights indicates entrenched rough sleeping. There was a slight increase in this number in February and March 2025.

Fairly constant levels of people sleeping rough for 10 or more nights aligns with data collated on those people sleeping rough longer term in Reading – where longer term is defined as people who have been seen sleeping rough in three or more months out of the last 12 months. The graph below presents the monthly number of people sleeping rough long-term in Reading from June 2023 to January 2025.
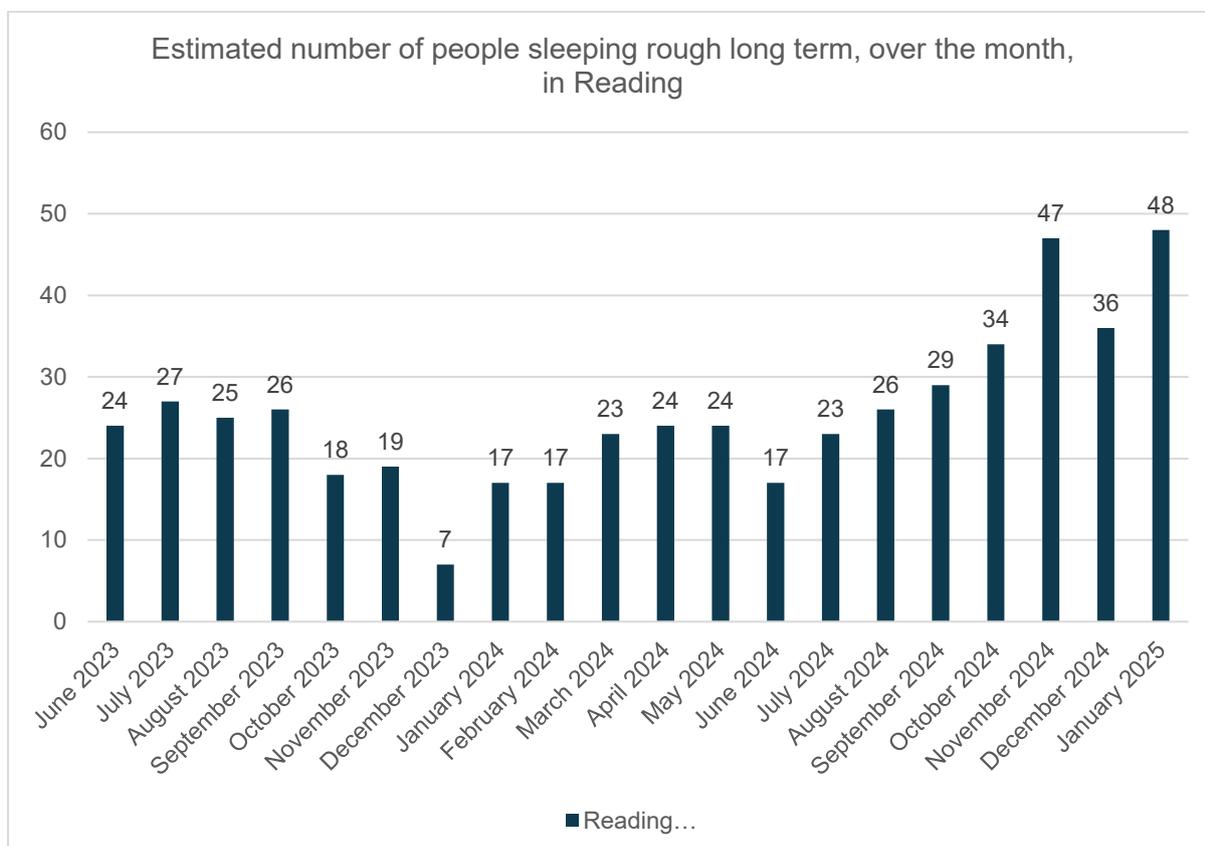
The number of people sleeping rough long term initially rises from 24 in June 2023 to 26 in September, before dropping sharply to just 7 by January 2024. There is another increase in spring 2024, with peaks in April and May (24 each), followed by a dip in summer (17 in June and July). From August 2024 onward, the numbers climb steadily, reaching a notable spike in November (47) and peaking at 48 in January 2025. The pattern shows seasonal variation, points at which new interventions are implemented to reduce numbers, and the overall impact of systemic pressures that have already been outlined in this needs analysis.

Repeated homelessness: Returns to rough sleeping

The graph below tracks the monthly number of people returning to rough sleeping in Reading from June 2023 to March 2025 – where returning is defined as an individual who has previously been recorded as sleeping rough and is seen sleeping rough again after a period of being off the streets.

Estimated number of people sleeping rough over the month who are returning to sleeping rough, by region and local authority

Number of people over the month who returned to rough sleeping who had previously moved into settled accommodation within the last 12 months in Reading
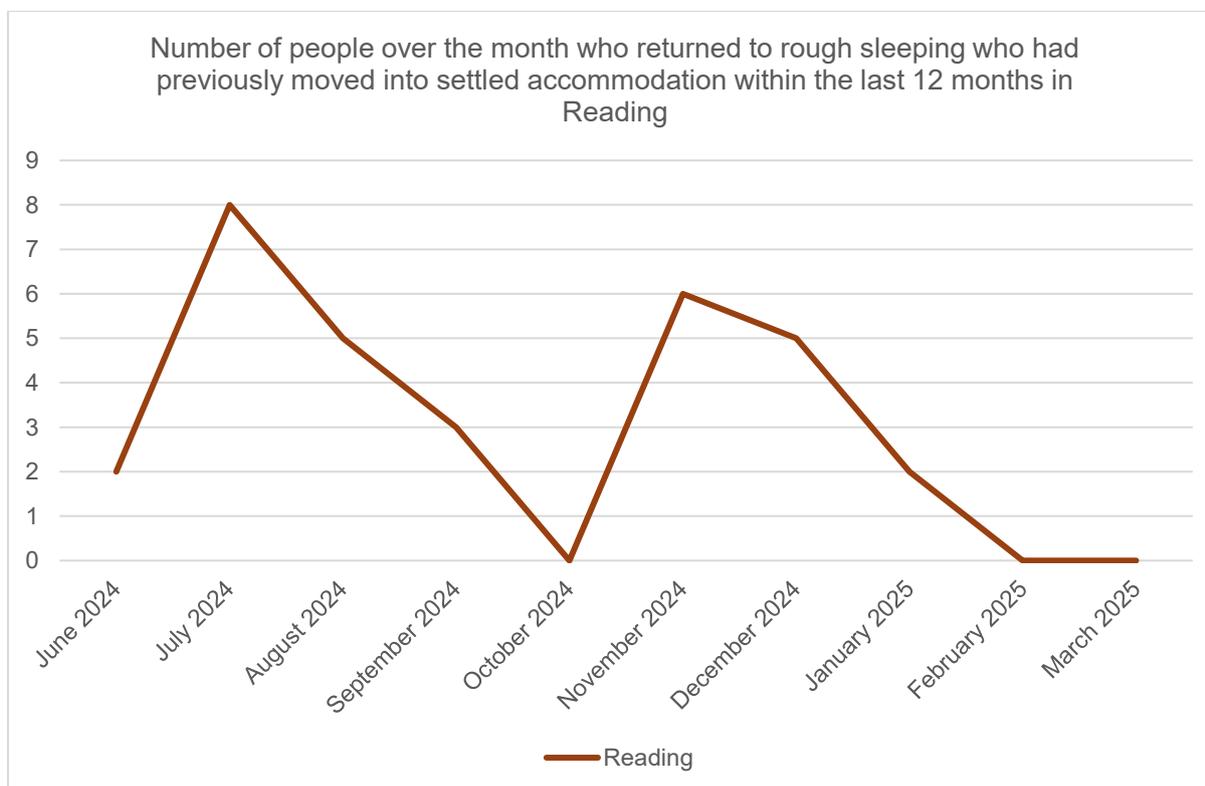
The graph directly above shows the monthly number of people in Reading who returned to rough sleeping after previously moving into settled accommodation within the past 12 months, covering the period from June 2024 to March 2025.

Both sets of data show an overall reduction in repeat rough sleeping following peaks in July and November/December 2024. We know there is a pattern of recurring rough sleeping for some complex individuals and couples – but the data also suggests gaps in long-term support, or challenges in sustaining accommodation after initial interventions. This links to needs analysis findings on homelessness duty data where people are losing supported accommodation due to rent arrears. This data is useful for evaluating the effectiveness of move-on support and identifying periods where people are more vulnerable to returning to the streets.

Demography of rough sleeping in Reading[47]

Age

Snapshot and locally held data show that people under 25 rarely sleep rough, and when they do, it is typically for short periods – likely because of access to an immediate off-the-streets offer (crash pad) facility for those aged 18 – 24 and a specialist 40-bed supported housing provision for this group. The majority of people sleeping rough are aged 30–49, consistent with national trends. ONS data shows age-related disparities in mortality, with the average age at death for people sleeping rough being just 45.4 years for men and 43.2 for women – decades below the national life expectancy. This shows the need for targeted interventions for middle-aged individuals, who are disproportionately affected by chronic homelessness and health decline. Reading commissions several supported accommodation bed spaces to meet these specific gender and age needs.

Gender

Year on year, since 2022, national annual rough sleeping snapshot data shows an increase in single females/females in couples sleeping rough. In Reading, this trend is reversed with numbers captured in the snapshot being minimal, and proportionately declining, compared to single males. The Reading trend can be attributed to the commission of female specific and couple's specialist supported accommodation for those with complex and multiple needs and the strategy will seek to ensure that grant funded services to meet this gender-specific need are maintained. Those sleeping rough in Reading are predominantly male - consistently around 85%. No pregnant females, nor families with children are captured in the same rough sleeping data. This demonstrates that outreach support services and homelessness prevention services are significantly responsive to these priority needs.

Gender identities and sexual orientations

National research, including from Stonewall, Crisis, and the Albert Kennedy Trust (akt), shows that LGBTQ+ individuals are disproportionately affected by homelessness. Among young people, 77% cite family relationship breakdown, abuse, or being asked to leave home as the primary cause. LGBTQ+ youth are also twice as likely to experience hidden homelessness, such as sofa surfing or squatting.

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[47] MHCLG Annual Rough Sleeping Snapshot, February 2025

Ethnicity and nationality

In Reading, available data on rough sleeping captures nationality, rather than ethnicity of those verified. Autumn 2023 and 2024 annual rough sleeping snapshot data shows consistency, at 46% and 47% respectively, in the proportion of EU and non-EU nationals verified on that night, compared to those with a UK or unknown nationality. This highlights a disproportionate number of people from both EU and non-EU countries sleeping rough in Reading, many of whom lack access to public funds. This contrasts with the broader population of Reading, where Census 2021 data shows that 64% were born in the UK and 36% were born outside the UK.

Religious beliefs

Currently, religious affiliation is not recorded for individuals rough sleeping or owed a homelessness duty in Reading, making it difficult to assess whether any particular religious group is disproportionately affected. However, given the ethnic diversity of those owed duties, and the likelihood that religion is an integral part of identity for many migrants and asylum seekers, there is a clear need for culturally responsive services that respect and accommodate religious practices.

Physical health

We know from prior health needs data collation that people experiencing rough sleeping disproportionately have physical ill-health, especially musculoskeletal and respiratory conditions. Regarding mental ill-health, learning disabilities and neurodivergent conditions, these tend to be suspected by professionals working with people sleeping rough in a supportive capacity, but are often not diagnosed.

Demand for support and accommodation services

In 2024/25 the Rough Sleeping Outreach Service received a total of 783 reports of rough sleeping – some of these will have been repeat referrals, about the same individual of concern, but each referral will have required a response of some description, with many requiring site attendance to offer support. On average the team were supporting over 100 people consistently or intermittently bedding down on the streets of Reading.

There are over 290 commissioned bed spaces available within supported accommodation services in Reading, offering a range of intensive and lighter-touch support for people who are rough sleeping, or at risk of it.

There were 326 unique referrals to the Rough Sleeping Initiatives team in 2024/25 to be considered for supported accommodation and there were 62 positive move-ons from services into semi or fully independent living. 72% of those referrals identified as male and 79% stated they were UK Nationals. To date in 2025/26, referral levels suggest a similar, if not increased level of referrals to supported accommodation services. Highest demand is from people sleeping rough, or who would be rough sleeping coming out of prison, coming out of Asylum Support accommodation, or where a less supportive environment has not been sustainable. The most prevalent support needs are offending histories, substance misuse, mental ill-health, and budgeting skills/managing money – all of which are significantly interlinked.

There were 143 referrals for tenancy sustainment support showing high demand for support to find accommodation, resettle and prevent homelessness. These referrals are in addition to referrals that the floating support service receives directly through their thrice weekly drop-ins.

In summary:

Reading continues to experience a sustained rise in rough sleeping, with monthly figures sometimes approaching 100 individuals. While Reading does not have the highest absolute numbers among its statistical neighbours, it consistently records one of the highest rates of rough sleeping per 100,000 population. This indicates a persistent and systemic challenge that requires targeted and sustained intervention.

A significant concern is the growing number of individuals experiencing long-term or repeated rough sleeping. Many of these individuals have complex needs, including mental ill-health, substance misuse, neurodivergence, and histories of offending. These needs are often undiagnosed or unsupported by other statutory services, contributing to tenancy breakdowns and cycling back into homelessness. The data also shows that a substantial proportion of people sleeping rough return to the streets after previously being housed, highlighting gaps in tenancy sustainment and move-on support when longer-term housing options are acquired.

The data shows a notable increase in rough sleeping among individuals recently leaving prisons, hospitals, and particularly from Asylum Support (NASS) accommodation. These peaks suggest a lack of coordinated planning and support.

Demographically, the majority of people sleeping rough in Reading are males aged 30–49, aligning with national trends. There is an overrepresentation of EU and non-EU nationals, many of whom face legal and eligibility barriers to accessing housing and support. In contrast, the number of young people and women sleeping rough remains low, likely due to the availability of targeted services such as a crash pad and gender-specific supported accommodation.

The data also shows seasonal patterns, with rough sleeping peaking between June and October. This may reflect reduced engagement with services during warmer months, and increased uptake of accommodation offers during winter. While many individuals sleep rough for only one or two nights, there is a growing proportion who are sleeping rough for over 10 nights, indicating more entrenched rough sleeping, particularly for those who have initially slept rough in Reading with no local connection.

To address these challenges, Reading's strategy should prioritise expanding housing-led and high-need services, including 24/7 supported accommodation and Housing First models. Strengthening discharge planning from institutions will be essential. The strategy should also enhance early intervention and tenancy sustainment services, and maintain targeted support for overrepresented groups, including middle-aged men and non-UK nationals. Commissioning decisions should be data-driven, using all available national data and local outreach intelligence to ensure responsive and effective service provision.

Learnings from Everyone In: March 2020

The Everyone In initiative, launched in March 2020 as a response to the Covid-19 pandemic, rapidly provided emergency accommodation to over 37,000 people sleeping rough or at risk of homelessness in England. It demonstrated the effectiveness of swift, coordinated action and cross-sector collaboration in addressing homelessness, significantly reducing Covid-19 transmission and mortality among people sleeping rough. The initiative also revealed the scale of hidden homelessness, gaps in data and policy – particularly for those with no recourse to public funds – and showed the need for inclusive and preventative rough sleeping strategies moving forward.

Hidden homelessness

There is no UK-wide definition of "hidden" homelessness. The term can mean different things to different people, and it is often applied inconsistently. Therefore, there are groups of people who are homeless but not routinely captured within data. This can include people who are living in overcrowded situations, insecure or uninhabitable conditions, people living in squats, people sofa surfing, or people or families living with friends or family because they cannot afford their own home.

Hidden homelessness refers to individuals who lack stable, secure housing but are not visible in official homelessness statistics or supported by local authorities. This includes people who are:

- Sofa surfing (staying temporarily with friends or family)
- Living in overcrowded or unsafe housing
- Staying in non-residential buildings (e.g., sheds, garages, or squats)
- Residing in temporary or insecure accommodation (e.g., hostels, B&Bs, or short-term lets)
- Avoiding contact with services due to stigma, fear, or lack of entitlement (e.g. migrants with no recourse to public funds)
- Women escaping domestic abuse, who often remain hidden for safety.
- Young people and ethnic minorities, who are disproportionately affected and underrepresented in data.

The hidden nature of their housing situation makes it difficult to measure the true scale of homelessness and to provide targeted support.

Reading's strategy should prioritise early intervention and tailored support for sectors of the population vulnerable to hidden homelessness and include a commitment within the strategy's action plan to expand our understanding of homelessness beyond statutory definitions and improve data and outreach to identify and support hidden groups in Reading.

Existing Council interventions to tackle homelessness and rough sleeping

Statutory support and assistance to prevent and relieve homelessness in Reading

Reading delivers statutory support in line with the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, offering tailored advice and assistance to individuals who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. The council's Homelessness Prevention Service provides early intervention through the Prevention Duty, which applies to anyone threatened with homelessness within 56 days. This includes help to remain in current accommodation or secure alternative housing, often through negotiation with landlords or family, referrals to floating support services, and access to financial assistance such as Discretionary Housing Payments.

If homelessness cannot be prevented, the council applies the Relief Duty, which involves helping eligible individuals secure suitable accommodation within 56 days. This includes emergency accommodation for those in priority need, support with deposits or rent guarantees, and referrals to specialist housing such as supported accommodation or refuges. Each applicant receives a Personalised Housing Plan (PHP), outlining the steps both the council and the individual will take to resolve their housing situation.

Reading Borough Council goes beyond statutory obligations using the following proactive and innovative approaches:

- **Duty to refer**: Active engagement with public bodies under the Duty to Refer, ensuring that individuals identified by services such as hospitals, prisons, and job centres are connected to housing support early. Non-statutory and commissioned services use the same referral mechanisms to alert the homelessness prevention service early and facilitate access to services.

- **"Click Before You Evict" website**: Encourages landlords to seek support before starting eviction proceedings. It provides practical advice on managing rent arrears, tenancy breaches, and property issues, and signposts tenants to relevant support services. The scheme aims to resolve problems early, reduce evictions, and prevent homelessness through collaboration between landlords, tenants, and the council.

- **Early intervention and multi-agency collaboration**: Close working with health services, probation, children's and adult social care, and voluntary sector partners to identify individuals and families at risk before they reach crisis point. This includes joint working protocols and shared case management for complex needs – including tailored support for transitioning care leavers.

- **Housing Needs Customer Access Team:** Plays a key frontline role in homelessness prevention. As part of the wider Homelessness Prevention Service, they are often the first point of contact for individuals who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. When someone contacts the council – online, by phone, email, or in person – they are initially assessed by a Housing Needs Customer Access Officer. This officer conducts a short triage assessment to understand the situation and gather basic information. If the person is homeless on the day of contact, their case is escalated to a Duty Officer for immediate action. If they are at risk of homelessness within 56 days, they are referred for a full assessment and an appointment is arranged with a Homelessness Prevention

Officer to develop a Personalised Housing Plan (PHP). The team also supports individuals by helping them understand their housing options, access emergency accommodation, submit required documentation, complete consent-to-share forms, and navigate applications for financial support such as Discretionary Housing Payments or the Rent Guarantee Scheme.

- **Digital access and self-service tools**: Investment in online portals and digital tools that allow residents to self-refer, upload documents, and track their housing applications, improving accessibility and transparency.

- **Proactive approach to family evictions:** Home visits are used to explore the circumstances behind notices from family members, with mediation and support offered to help young people and young families remain in the family home where appropriate.

- **Pilot to enhance focus on early intervention and temporary accommodation move-on:** A change in service delivery to trial focussed teams working on different elements of the HRA – split into three teams: early intervention, prevention and relief and temporary accommodation move-on. Initially planned to run for six months the pilot began in March 2025, aiming to reduce crisis approaches to the service, improve temporary accommodation throughout and manage demand.

Temporary accommodation provisions

The Council utilises 86 purpose-built temporary accommodation units, offering a mix of studio, one-, two-, and three-bedroom flats across three sites in the borough. This includes 28 two-bedroom modular units. Additionally, 40 studio-style modular units at Caversham Road operate as 24/7 staffed supported accommodation but remain part of the Council's temporary housing stock. Where demand exceeds capacity, permanent housing may be used flexibly to meet temporary accommodation needs.

Support to access the private rented sector

In Reading, the Rent Guarantee Scheme (RGS) facilitates access to affordable private rented accommodation for households threatened with homelessness, offering guaranteed rent at LHA level, a guaranteed deposit in excess of industry standards and ongoing tenancy support. Established in 1999, the Scheme has been recognised as a model of private sector engagement best practice by our MHCLG Advisor. As the gap between the LHA rate and local rents has increased, the Scheme has innovated in order to remain attractive to landlords. The introduction of one-off incentive payments for new tenancies, and as a prevention tool where RGS tenancies were at risk of ending, was piloted in 2023 and brought within the Scheme's budget in 2024 and has brought the total number of tenancies running on the Scheme back up to 2010 levels. While the number of new tenancies signed up each year was reducing towards the end of 2024, this decline is now reversing. That the total number of tenancies has recovered in 2024-25, despite fewer new tenancies being created, illustrates the effectiveness of using incentives to prevent existing tenancies ending.

RGS Tenancies & New Signups
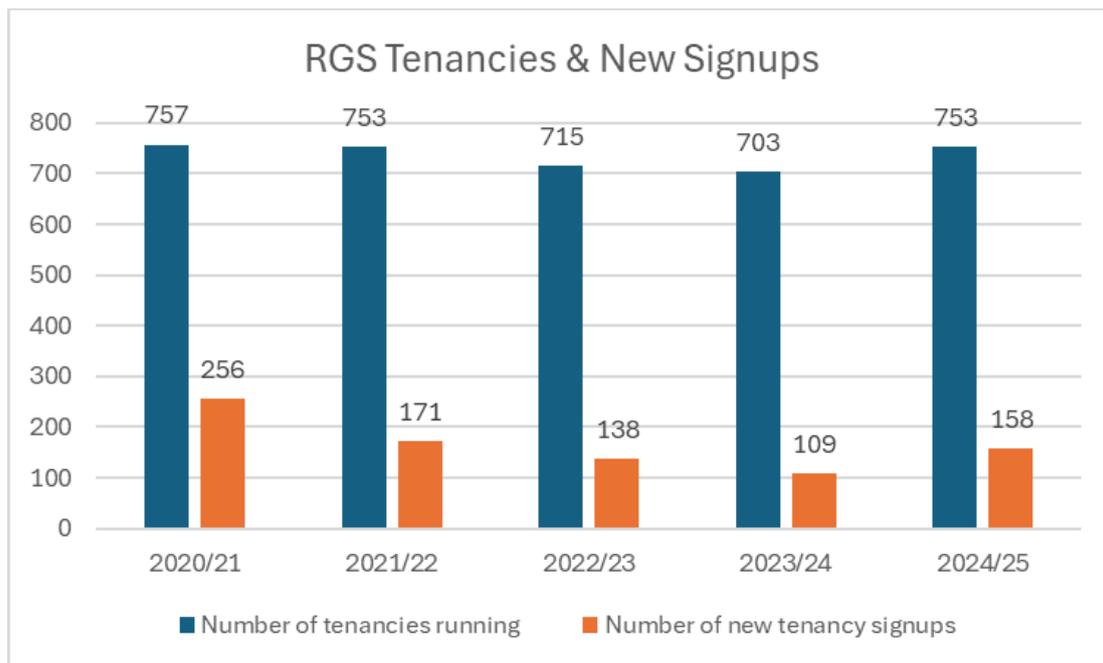
The Rent Guarantee Scheme offers all accepted applicants the opportunity to attend a Workshop, at which they are introduced to money management techniques. Every tenancy signup is followed up with a one-to-one appointment with the RGS Money Advisor, who supports households with debt, budgeting, and priority bills, as well as accessing employment and claiming relevant benefits.

The Rent Guarantee Scheme Workshop also offers advice on how to find suitable and affordable homes to rent in the private sector. Supporting households to identify their own accommodation options is highly effective in Reading, with over 15% of properties brought to the Scheme in this way. The use of the Prevention Fund to help households with the upfront costs of private renting, for properties which are not let via the Rent Guarantee Scheme, resulted in 127 new tenancies secured in 2024-25. Per tenancy created, the amount spent on Rent Guarantee Scheme and Prevention Fund support represents a significant cost avoidance on the use of temporary and emergency accommodation and offers affordable and settled homes for homeless households.

Reading's private sector initiatives remain our primary homelessness prevention tool, and their success can be seen in the most common outcomes for households where Prevention or Relief Duties have been accepted, where Reading outperforms its neighbours in helping to create private sector tenancies. Maintaining this high number of tenancies facilitated involves close monitoring of market developments and upcoming legislation, and continued engagement with local landlords, which must continue as essential threads running through our new Strategy.

Allocation of social housing

Reading Borough Council allocates social housing through its Homechoice at Reading scheme, a Choice-Based Lettings system that enables eligible residents to bid for available properties. The Homechoice scheme is delivered in partnership with Registered Providers (Housing Associations) and other stakeholders to ensure fairness and transparency.

Applicants must meet specific criteria, including being at least 16 years old, not subject to immigration control, and having lived in Reading for at least three consecutive years, although exceptions may apply. Applicants are placed into priority bands from Band 1 (highest priority) to Band 4, or Band NPFH (No Priority for Housing), based on housing need. Factors influencing banding include homelessness status, medical or welfare needs, and risk of harm. Those with rent arrears, antisocial behaviour, or who are deemed intentionally homeless may be placed in Band NPFH.

In 2024, according to MHCLG Local Authority Housing Statistics (LAHS), Reading had a total of 74,855 dwellings, comprising 6,982 local authority dwellings, 4,709 private registered provider dwellings, and 63,164 private sector dwellings. Only 16% of all dwellings in Reading were social or affordable housing let by the local authority or a registered provider, highlighting the limited supply of social housing in the borough. The Council is aiming to provide 362 new council owned homes by 2028/29, including schemes developed in collaboration with Adult Social Care.

By the end of 2024/25, 4,462 households were on Reading's Housing Register, rising to 4,675 by July 2025, with an average of 160 new applications submitted each month. However, only 374 households were successfully housed in 2024/25, representing fewer than 9% of applicants. Between April and July 2025 alone, 645 new applications were received, while just 166 households were housed, further illustrating the gap between demand and supply.

The breakdown of housing need shows that the majority of applicants require one-bedroom properties (39%), followed by two-bedroom (30%), and three-bedroom (23%) homes. Larger properties are in much shorter supply, with only 6% needing four bedrooms, and fewer than 1% requiring five or more bedrooms.

In terms of priority banding, 40% of applicants are in Band 4, indicating lower priority, while 37% are in Band NPFH, meaning they are not currently eligible for housing. Only 1% are in Band 1, the highest priority group, and 8% and 15% are in Bands 2 and 3, respectively. This distribution reflects the significant number of applicants with limited access to social housing due to either lower assessed need or eligibility restrictions.

To help address under occupation and free up larger homes for families in need, Reading Borough Council offers a Tenant's Incentive Scheme for Reading Borough Council tenants. This scheme supports tenants who are living in homes with more bedrooms than they require or in properties with adaptations they no longer need. Eligible tenants – those with a secure tenancy of at least one year and a clear rent account – can receive support to move to a more suitably sized property. The scheme aims to reduce under occupation, alleviate overcrowding, shorten time spent in temporary accommodation, and increase availability of adapted homes. A dedicated officer provides personalised support throughout the moving process, including help to remain in familiar areas close to family or essential services.

Reading Borough Council also operates quota queues for vulnerable groups such as social care clients, refugees, travelling families, and those involved in fostering or adoption. Homeless applicants may receive direct offers of accommodation as part of their Personalised Housing Plan, in line with the Homelessness Reduction Act. Given the high demand and limited supply, the council encourages applicants to explore alternative housing options such as Homefinder UK, sheltered housing, and mutual exchanges.

Adaptations and Disabled Facilities Grants

Reading Borough Council offers Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) to help residents with disabilities live more independently and safely in their homes. These grants can fund a wide range of adaptations, including extensions, stairlifts, level-access showers, ramps, and kitchen modifications. The maximum mandatory grant available is £30,000, however additional discretionary grants are made available because of the Regulatory Reform Order 2002 which are determined by the needs within each Local Authority area. DFGs are funded by the Better Care Fund and are available to those who live in private accommodation, such as owner occupiers, private rented and Registered Provider accommodation.

Eligibility is based on both need and financial circumstances. Adults are subject to means testing, while children under 19 are not. Applicants must intend to remain in the property for a minimum period – 10 years for owner-occupiers and 5 years for tenants.

Council tenants are eligible but are not subject to a means test and this is funded separately from the Housing Revenue Account. Those pursuing Right to Buy, mutual exchange or a move via Homechoice at Reading may be excluded from major adaptations.

The Council offers minor works funding (up to £1,000) and discretionary grants for specific needs such as relocation or health-related improvements. In some cases, if the applicant's financial contribution exceeds the cost of the works, they may still apply but will need to self-fund the adaptation.

Reading Borough Council monitors its DFG programme through key performance indicators (KPIs), including the number of referrals, assessments, approvals, completions, and average timeframes. These metrics help ensure the service is efficient and responsive. Funding demand often exceeds availability, so applications are prioritised using an Adaptations Priority Tool.

Supported accommodation for people at risk of or currently rough sleeping

Reading Borough Council recognises that homelessness cannot be addressed through accommodation alone. Many individuals require a range of housing-related and personal support to overcome challenges such as mental ill-health, substance misuse, domestic abuse, financial hardship, and social isolation.

We deliver a comprehensive, multi-agency response to rough sleeping through our Rough Sleeping Initiatives team and commissioned partners. The team includes specialist officers in partnerships, data and evaluation and contracts and procurement to ensure effective commissioning and monitoring of services, strategic alignment with national funding programmes, data-led decision-making/evaluation, and co-ordination of multiagency panels and access pathways.

Our approach is to commission trauma-informed, gender-sensitive and person-centred support, within psychologically informed environments, tailored to meet the needs of individuals facing complex and multiple disadvantages. Commissioned services include outreach, navigators, complex case workers, off-the-streets emergency accommodation, supported housing, and tenancy sustainment. Staff work closely with health professionals to support clients in accessing mental health services, substance misuse treatment, primary care services and employment and training opportunities. The range of services commissioned

ensures individuals can access tailored support at every stage – from when they are rough sleeping through to sustaining long-term tenancies. These services support the Council in meeting its statutory prevention and relief duties.

Street-based outreach and engagement

- **Rough Sleeping Outreach Service** responds to reports of rough sleeping, engages individuals on the streets, and facilitates access to accommodation or reconnection to their home area. The team works closely with Reading's Multiple Disadvantage Outreach Team (MDOT) and Health Outreach Liaison Team (HOLT), both commissioned by Health to support individuals who are rough sleeping or vulnerably housed and facing challenges related to substance misuse, physical health, and mental ill-health.

Emergency and seasonal provision

These services operate regardless of local connection or access to public funds, ensuring a humanitarian response to immediate risk.

- **Cold Weather SWEP** activated when temperatures fall to zero degrees or below for three consecutive nights, offering emergency accommodation to prevent deaths on the streets.

- **Heatwave SWEP** activated during heat-health alerts, providing water, sun protection, and access to cool spaces. Emergency accommodation may be offered during extreme heat.

- **B4N Winter Shelter**, operated and funded by FAITH with contributions from the Council, provides 20 additional winter bed spaces from January to March.

Supported accommodation pathways

Reading offers a diverse range of supported housing options tailored to different needs – there is capacity to accommodate over 290 people across interventions, plus four bed spaces for those needing an immediate off the streets offer:

- **Nova Project**: 10-bed female-only service with 24/7 staffing, trauma-informed and gender-specific support for women with complex needs.

- **Caversham Road Pods**: 40 self-contained modular units with 24/7 staffing for individuals with histories of rough sleeping and multiple complex needs.

- **Intensive and Engaging Support**: 36 bed spaces rooms (including 4 for couples), 3 emergency overnight beds, and full board catering with 24/7 staffing. It brings together multiple services in one location (a hub) to simplify access to support for people experiencing rough sleeping. 20 beds in shared cluster flats, including self-catering facilities, with staff available during office hours and 24/7 on-call support from the main hub service.

- **Young Person's Service**: 40 units for young people aged 18 – 24, including a crash pad and four young parent flats, with access to training and wellbeing facilities.

- **Housing First and Couples Accommodation Pathway**: 31 units, for 37 people, offering permanent tenancies with wraparound support for individuals and couples with complex needs.

- **Accommodation for Ex-Offenders (AfEO)**: Council-led project supporting prison leavers into private rented accommodation with tenancy sustainment support.

- **Working Towards Independence Accommodation**: 106 bedspaces across 20 properties for individuals needing housing-related support before moving on to independent living.

Tenancy and employment access support

- **Floating Support Service**: Cross-tenure support for tenancy sustainment and resettlement, with tiered levels of intervention and open-access drop-ins.

- **Launchpad 135 Work and Life Skills Centre**: Fully funded by Launchpad Reading, offering training, counselling, and employment support to residents in supported housing.

Relevant service reviews

MHCLG Homelessness Advice and Support Team (HAST) review: April 2023

The Homelessness Advice and Support Team (HAST) visited Reading Borough Council in April 2023 to assess its approach to homelessness and rough sleeping. The feedback provided a detailed evaluation across ten thematic areas, identifying strengths and areas for improvement.

Key findings:

Strategic direction and leadership – Reading Borough Council had a homelessness strategy in place, but it lacked a dynamic delivery plan that reflected local priorities and was co-produced with partners. While corporate leadership supported homelessness services, it was advised there was room for improvement in the strategic use of the Homelessness Prevention Grant (HPG). Accurate H-CLIC data reporting was emphasised as critical for securing funding and informing service development.

Prevention and implementation of the HRA – Staff demonstrated a good understanding of the Homelessness Reduction Act (HRA) and applied prevention tools such as home visits and private rented sector offers. However, the volume and effectiveness of prevention work remained below regional averages. Delays in prevention assessments and high caseloads were identified as contributors to limiting early intervention opportunities and increasing reliance on temporary accommodation.

Access to accommodation and temporary accommodation – Reading has well-developed, innovative private rented sector schemes, including rent guarantees and landlord incentives, and has invested in supported housing options. Despite these efforts, move-on from supported housing remained a challenge. The council was seen to be having some success in avoiding placing families in B&Bs, although the use of nightly paid accommodation was increasing. A need to develop a Temporary Accommodation placement policy was identified.

Partnerships and governance - Partnerships were generally strong and valued by both council staff and external partners. However, many partnerships operated informally without governance structures, posing a risk if key individuals left. It was suggested that the Reading Homelessness Partnership could be leveraged to strengthen statutory homelessness coordination.

Key recommendations:

- Maintain manageable caseloads and ensure regular staff supervision.

- Improve early prevention efforts and align case recording with HRA definitions.

- Guarantee all service users are offered at least one face-to-face interview.

- Develop a formal Temporary Accommodation procurement and placement strategy.

- Enhance public messaging and transparency around homelessness services and successes.

- Use data more effectively to inform KPIs and drive service improvements.

MHCLG Rough Sleeping Deep Dive: March 2025

The deep dive into Reading's rough sleeping response, conducted in April 2025, was structured around the four national pillars: Prevention, Intervention, Recovery, and Systems Support. It was prompted by a significant rise in rough sleeping between July and September 2024 and aimed to explore underlying causes, assess current practice, and identify opportunities for improvement.

Key findings:

Prevention – Reading demonstrated strengths in early identification and support, including effective use of the Duty to Refer and strong links with probation services. However, gaps were identified in consistent homelessness assessments for people sleeping rough. The supported housing pathway was identified as generous but at capacity, with limited provision for those with complex needs. There was also an identified need to improve public messaging and address misconceptions about rough sleeping being a gateway to social housing.

Intervention – Reading's outreach model was identified as flexible and multi-agency collaboration was evident, particularly through partnerships with St Mungo's and other local services. A key strength identified was the "sit-up" service, which provides an immediate off-the-streets bed space for anyone found sleeping rough – even those with restricted eligibility. However, the absence of a universal emergency accommodation offer for those without a local connection was expressed as a concern, as was the delay in reconnections. MHCLG heard from partners that there were challenges in consistency of responses to safeguarding alerts and that access to mental health support remained difficult for some individuals.

A significant challenge identified was the presence of encampments, with around a third of people rough sleeping in Reading residing in these settings. Key findings highlighted the need for improved engagement with landowners to facilitate quicker and more coordinated responses.

Recovery – Reading was seen as having a strong floating support offer and regular progression meetings to support move-on from supported housing. However, partners advised MHCLG they feel there is a lack of long-term support for addiction and mental health, limited detox and rehab access, and the absence of a dedicated multi-disciplinary team for the Target Priority Group (TPG) were noted as areas for development. While returns to rough sleeping were noted as low, partners identified to the MHCLG that stigma and access to adult social care remained barriers to full recovery.

Systems Support – MHCLG found there to be clear leadership commitment, with Housing and Social Care operating under a joint directorate. Reading's Rough Sleeping Strategy was identified as needing to be updated. The need for better integration of lived experience into strategic planning, improved data accuracy, and stronger governance structures (e.g. a dedicated task and finish group and representation on the Safeguarding Adults Board) were key recommendations.

Key Recommendations:

- Ensure all people sleeping rough have a homelessness assessment recorded on H-CLIC.

- Establish a multi-agency task group to develop sustainable accommodation and support for Reading's Target Priority Group.

- Improve pathways for people leaving institutions and Home Office accommodation.

- Expand complex needs accommodation and long-term support for substance misuse and mental health.

- Involve people with lived experience in service design and strategic planning.

- Update and integrate the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategies.

- Offer a time-limited sit-up space to all individuals found rough sleeping, regardless of local connection, while implementing assertive reconnection protocols.

- Develop a coordinated approach to encampments, including proactive engagement with landowners and a balance of support and enforcement.

Women's Rough Sleeping Census 2022 - 25

The Women's Rough Sleeping Census (WRSC) was developed to address the invisibility of women in traditional homelessness data and services. Women often sleep in hidden, unsafe, and transient locations – such as parks, stairwells, or 24-hour venues – to avoid harm, making them less likely to be counted or supported. Conducted across 88 local authorities in 2024, the WRSC used a gender-informed, multi-agency approach to collect data over seven days, identifying over 1,000 women who had slept rough in the previous three months. The 2024 census also captured qualitative insights, revealing widespread experiences of violence, trauma, and barriers to accessing support, particularly for women fleeing domestic abuse or lacking a local connection.

The findings exposed significant gaps in service provision, with most women not engaged with housing or homelessness services and fewer than one in four accessing health support. Many cycled through insecure accommodation, making their homelessness harder to detect and address. The WRSC calls for a redefinition of rough sleeping, improved data collection, dedicated funding for safe and trauma-informed services, and integrated strategies across housing, health, and VAWG services to ensure women are no longer unseen or unsupported.

Reading is scheduled to undertake the Women's Rough Sleeping Census in 2025 and utilise findings to inform commissioning and improve services for vulnerable women.

Joint Targeted Area Inspection (JTAI): February – March 2025

The JTAI of Reading's multi-agency response to children aged 0–7 who are victims of domestic abuse was conducted from 24 February to 14 March 2025. The inspection was carried out by a team of inspectors from Ofsted, the Care Quality Commission (CQC), His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS), and His Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation (HMIP). The JTAI inspectors found that while there are strengths in early protective interventions and pre-birth assessments, there were serious weaknesses in identifying and responding to the needs of children and families affected by domestic abuse. These gaps can contribute to housing instability and increase the risk of homelessness,

particularly where safeguarding and support systems are not effectively coordinated. The inspection highlighted the need for improved strategic oversight, consistent decision-making, and better integration of services – including housing, health, and social care – to prevent vulnerable families from falling into crisis.

Health in All Policies (HiAP) approach

The Health in All Policies (HiAP) approach is a collaborative framework that integrates health considerations into policymaking across all sectors to improve population health and reduce health inequalities. In the context of homelessness and rough sleeping, HiAP recognises that health is both a cause and consequence of homelessness, and that addressing it requires coordinated action beyond the health sector.

Key principles relevant to Reading's strategy include:

- **Cross-sector collaboration:** Encouraging joint working between housing, health, social care, criminal justice, and voluntary sectors to address the complex needs of people experiencing homelessness.
- **Prevention and early intervention:** Embedding health promotion and prevention into housing and homelessness services to tackle root causes such as mental ill health, substance misuse, and domestic abuse.
- **Equity and inclusion:** Prioritising the needs of the most vulnerable and marginalised groups, ensuring equitable access to services and reducing health disparities.
- **Evidence-informed action:** Using data and local insights to shape interventions that address the social determinants of health, such as poverty, unemployment, and insecure housing.

By adopting a HiAP lens, Reading can strengthen its homelessness strategy through holistic, preventative, and person-centred approaches that improve health outcomes and reduce long-term service demand.

Conclusions

Drawing on Census 2021 data, local service intelligence, and national policy developments, the review has outlined the demographic, economic, and housing context in which homelessness and rough sleeping occur. It has highlighted key pressures – including population changes and growth, affordability challenges and health inequalities – that shape demand for services and influence housing stability.

The findings of this strategic needs analysis will support the development of targeted interventions and help ensure that future services are inclusive, responsive, and aligned with the needs of Reading's residents.

This document therefore represents the initial phase in developing a combined Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy for Reading. It brings together a wide range of data and analysis to inform a strategic response that is evidence-based and tailored to Reading's needs. Crucially, it will inform the strategy's priorities and underpin the development of a detailed action plan to guide delivery over the next five years.