

# Homelessness and rough sleeping strategy

2025-2030

November 2024



**WARRINGTON**  
Borough Council

# Contents

|                                                                                                                                                                                   |           |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| <b>Foreword.....</b>                                                                                                                                                              | <b>4</b>  |
| <b>Complimentary strategies and policies .....</b>                                                                                                                                | <b>5</b>  |
| <b>The role of local government in housing.....</b>                                                                                                                               | <b>6</b>  |
| <b>Key findings from the review of homelessness and rough sleeping in Warrington .....</b>                                                                                        | <b>8</b>  |
| <b>Our vision.....</b>                                                                                                                                                            | <b>8</b>  |
| <b>Our pledges .....</b>                                                                                                                                                          | <b>11</b> |
| Pledge 1 - Increasing access to settled homes for people at risk of homelessness and providing more suitable, affordable homes for all, through integrated housing delivery ..... | 11        |
| Pledge 2 - Improving the prevention of homelessness.....                                                                                                                          | 11        |
| Pledge 3 - Ending rough sleeping.....                                                                                                                                             | 12        |
| Pledge 4 - Improving lives .....                                                                                                                                                  | 12        |
| <b>National Context.....</b>                                                                                                                                                      | <b>15</b> |
| Homelessness in England during the five years between 2018 – 2023 .....                                                                                                           | 15        |
| Several factors have contributed to homelessness in recent years.....                                                                                                             | 15        |
| Reducing social housing.....                                                                                                                                                      | 16        |
| Changes affecting the private rented sector .....                                                                                                                                 | 16        |
| Welfare reform .....                                                                                                                                                              | 16        |
| <b>Warrington context.....</b>                                                                                                                                                    | <b>17</b> |
| Overview of housing in the borough .....                                                                                                                                          | 17        |
| Affordability .....                                                                                                                                                               | 18        |
| Homelessness in Warrington .....                                                                                                                                                  | 18        |
| Young people leaving care .....                                                                                                                                                   | 19        |
| Support needs of applicants .....                                                                                                                                                 | 20        |
| Emerging pressures on homelessness and housing.....                                                                                                                               | 22        |
| Refugees.....                                                                                                                                                                     | 22        |
| Family re-union scheme for refugees .....                                                                                                                                         | 22        |
| Early release scheme from prisons.....                                                                                                                                            | 22        |
| Rough sleeping in Warrington .....                                                                                                                                                | 22        |
| <b>Action plan and governance.....</b>                                                                                                                                            | <b>24</b> |
| <b>Next steps .....</b>                                                                                                                                                           | <b>24</b> |





# Foreword

Not having a home can be a devastating experience and have long-lasting effects on individuals and families.

There have been many challenges since our last strategy which has impacted homelessness in Warrington and across the UK, including the reducing supply of social housing, the barriers to accessing the private rented sector and a cost-of-living crisis.

The coronavirus created several challenges for homeless services including delivering covid-safe accommodation to many more people who were rough sleeping and sofa surfing.

Ongoing economic challenges faced by the council has placed many services under increased pressure whilst trying to make the best use of available resources.

External factors have also impacted the demand for housing and accommodation in the borough including the refugees from Ukraine and former asylum seekers.

Between the last two censuses (held in 2011 and 2021), the population of Warrington increased by 4.3%, from around 202,200 in 2011 to around 211,000 in 2021. (Source ONS)

This strategy sets out the direction and priorities we will follow during the next five years to address homelessness in Warrington in a changing, challenging environment.



Councillor Sue Emery

**Cabinet Member for poverty, inequality and protection**



# Complimentary strategies and policies

This strategy is linked and aligned with the following council strategies:

- Warrington Domestic Abuse Strategy: [warrington.gov.uk/domesticabuse](https://warrington.gov.uk/domesticabuse)
- Health and wellbeing strategy: [warrington.gov.uk/health-and-wellbeing-strategy-2024-28-summary](https://warrington.gov.uk/health-and-wellbeing-strategy-2024-28-summary)
- Warrington Housing Strategy: [warrington.gov.uk/housingstrategy](https://warrington.gov.uk/housingstrategy)
- Childrens Services: [warrington.gov.uk/news/warrington-set-childrens-social-care-transformation](https://warrington.gov.uk/news/warrington-set-childrens-social-care-transformation)
- Children in Care and Care Leavers Strategy: [warrington.gov.uk/care-leavers](https://warrington.gov.uk/care-leavers)
- Safeguarding: [warrington.gov.uk/our-safeguarding-commitment](https://warrington.gov.uk/our-safeguarding-commitment)
- Vacant Homes Strategy: [warrington.gov.uk/vacant-homes-strategy](https://warrington.gov.uk/vacant-homes-strategy)
- Equality, diversity and inclusion: [warrington.gov.uk/vacant-homes-strategy](https://warrington.gov.uk/vacant-homes-strategy)



# The role of local government in housing

Local authorities have a wide range of public law housing duties, which they are obliged to carry out for the whole community. These include allocating social rented housing, assisting homeless households, and regulating private sector housing. For these functions to be administered efficiently, there needs to be a robust strategic approach to housing, complimented by specialist housing activities.

All local housing authorities are responsible for administering a range of public law housing duties and powers, which they are obliged to carry out for the whole community. These include:

| Legislation                                                                                  | Duties and powers                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | Statutory documents                                                                                   |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Housing Act 1996, Part 7                                                                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Allocation of social rented housing</li> <li>Housing register</li> <li>Allocation scheme</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Housing Allocation Policy</li> <li>Tenancy Strategy</li> </ul> |
| Housing Act 1996, Part 7<br><br>Homelessness Act 2022<br><br>Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Homelessness</li> <li>Housing advice</li> <li>Applications for assistance</li> <li>Eligibility for assistance</li> <li>Interim duty to accommodate</li> <li>Duty to assess every eligible applicant's case and agree a plan</li> <li>Duties to persons found to be homeless or threatened with homelessness</li> <li>Referral to another local authority</li> <li>Review of decision</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Homelessness Review</li> <li>Homelessness Strategy</li> </ul>  |
| Environmental Protection Act 1990, Part 3                                                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Private Sector Housing</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy</li> </ul>            |



| Legislation                                                                                    | Duties and powers                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | Statutory documents                                                                                                                                                                      |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>Housing Act 1985</p> <p>Housing Act 2004</p> <p>Housing &amp; Planning Act 2016, Part 2</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enforcement of housing standards</li> <li>• Improvement notices</li> <li>• Prohibition orders</li> <li>• Hazard awareness notices</li> <li>• Emergency measures</li> <li>• Demolition orders</li> <li>• Slum clearance declarations</li> <li>• Licensing of houses in multiple occupation</li> <li>• Selective licensing</li> <li>• Management orders</li> <li>• Empty dwelling management orders</li> <li>• Overcrowding notices</li> <li>• Mobile homes</li> <li>• Tenancy Deposit schemes</li> <li>• Energy efficiency</li> <li>• Disabled facilities grant</li> <li>• Rogue landlords and property agents</li> <li>• Rent repayment orders</li> <li>• Electrical safety standards</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Park Home Fee Policy</li> <li>• Housing Standards Enforcement Policy and Statement of Principles for Determining Financial Penalties</li> </ul> |



| Legislation | Duties and powers                                                                               | Statutory documents |
|-------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|
|             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Accommodation needs of gypsies and travellers</li> </ul> |                     |

Beyond these statutory and regulatory housing functions, local authorities have a broader role in regard to the overall strategic approach to housing for their area, which involves:

- Housing enabling, policy, research and strategy
- Regeneration and neighborhood renewal programs
- Housing related support commissioning

## Key findings from the review of homelessness and rough sleeping in Warrington

In order to inform this strategy, the council carried out a review of homelessness data, conducted a Homelessness Summit in September 2023 and 2024 (Appendix A) alongside a wider council survey to consult the public published on the Council's website (Appendix B).

The findings from this review have informed this strategy and our four commitments listed below.

### Our vision

It is a legal requirement for Housing Authorities to publish a strategy every five years as a minimum, having completed a review into current and future homelessness.

The Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2025–2030 has been produced in partnership with all stakeholders and partners, who all committed to ending homelessness in Warrington.

The strategy aims to make:

- Homelessness a rare occurrence: increasing prevention and earlier intervention across all services
- To ensure homelessness is as brief as possible: improving temporary and supported accommodation so it becomes a positive experience
- Increasing access to settled homes and the right support at the right time to prevent repeat homelessness
- To ensure that people have the right support needed to improve their lives and opportunities



## A home for everyone

In Warrington we believe that everyone has the right to a home of their own and to support as and when they need it.

The council and its partners are committed to making this happen by preventing homelessness, in all its forms, and providing safe and secure places for people to live if they become homeless.

The council's Homelessness and Housing Advice Service forms the central hub for housing help to prevent and relieve homelessness across Warrington together with our many partners.



# Tackling rough sleeping

People who sleep rough experience some of the most severe health inequalities and report much poorer health than the general population. Many have co-occurring mental ill health and substance misuse needs, physical health needs, and have experienced significant trauma in their lives.

The Positive Steps commitment, a service provided by the Council's Homelessness and Housing Advice Service and funded as a Public Health initiative, provides meaningful activities including health and wellbeing, promoting education, work experience, volunteering opportunities for those who have experience rough sleeping or who are at risk of it.

## The causes of homelessness and rough sleeping

The causes of rough sleeping are typically described as either structural or individual factors. These can be interrelated and reinforced by one another.

### Structural factors include:

- poverty
- inequality
- housing supply and affordability
- unemployment or insecure employment
- access to social security

### Individual factors include:

- poor physical health
- mental health problems
- experience of violence, abuse and neglect
- drug and alcohol problems
- relationship breakdown
- experience of care or prison
- bereavement
- refugees



# Our pledges

## **Pledge 1 - Increasing access to settled homes for people at risk of homelessness and providing more suitable, affordable homes for all, through integrated housing delivery**

The key to tackling homelessness will be to make best use of existing housing stock whilst also enabling the supply of new homes to meet housing needs.

To do so successfully will require Warrington Borough Council to reimagine its strategic approach to housing, ensuring all of its housing-related strategies are integrated and complimentary of other key Council strategies and to ensure all of its housing-related services work collaboratively and cohesively in their approach to delivering the best outcomes for our communities on all housing-related matters.

The Senior Housing Lead (along with a dedicated cabinet member for housing), should have oversight of:

- Social housing allocation
- Homelessness
- Private rented sector standards
- Empty homes
- Housing strategy/policy/enabling
- Supported housing
- Regeneration and neighborhood renewal

This will bring about a number of benefits, including:

1. Being more effective in strategically planning work to balance the housing market and create sustainable communities.
2. Improving the housing vision and strategic decision-making
3. Deliver better housing outcomes for the local community

## **Pledge 2 - Improving the prevention of homelessness**

Supporting people at risk of becoming homeless and/or ensuring people at risk of homelessness can stay in their existing home or make a planned move to alternative accommodation.

The prevention of homelessness is best achieved using a holistic approach to protecting the occupant, to addressing the hazards, to improving the environment and to tackling ASB.

Improving the prevention of homelessness will need to include the following in the production of future plans and require partnership working across services to achieve.



1. Emergency accommodation for people who have nowhere to stay.
2. Negotiation and advocacy for people being asked to leave their accommodation or threatened with eviction, to help them continue occupying their existing home.
3. A supply of affordable housing for any person who is homeless or threatened with homelessness.
4. Specific measures for young people leaving care who are at risk of homelessness.
5. Specific measures for people who are victims of domestic abuse, can no longer afford their housing costs, are living in poor housing conditions, and whose home is overcrowded, to ensure they have reasonable accommodation to occupy.
6. Support for people due to leave prison, discharge from armed forces, and other institutional discharge, to avoid them having nowhere to stay and help them retain any accommodation secured.
7. Support for people with financial issues, loss of job/unemployment, poverty and welfare benefits, to help them remain in their existing accommodation or to obtain alternative accommodation.
8. Tackling health inequalities and the wider determinants of health.
9. Support for people with physical health, mental health, and substance misuse to help remain in their accommodation.
10. Counselling to help people recover from violence, harassment, abuse, bereavement, relationship breakdown, arguments with parents, or domestic abuse, to help them successfully occupy or continue occupying their accommodation.

## **Pledge 3 - Ending rough sleeping**

Providing a range of advice, accommodation, and support services to people sleeping rough so they can move away from the streets and access and sustain long term, settled accommodation.

A successful temporary night hub project put into place in 2023 will be developed to become a permanent safe place to stay for those facing street homelessness. A full package of wrap around support and engagement will be developed to keep people from sleeping rough, provide personal support to address issues of health, wellbeing, improve lifestyles and assist with move-on accommodation.

## **Pledge 4 - Improving lives**

Many homeless households are confined to living for long periods in temporary housing or B&B type accommodation. This brings with it a range of issues including the uncertainty of a life living in limbo, strains on mental and physical health and problems for children by affecting their educational achievements and normal development.

There is a wide range of support available for singles, couples and families experiencing various forms of homelessness. This includes, but is not limited to support via:

- Housing Related Support in commissioned accommodation for single people and couples
- Floating Support in dispersed temporary accommodation
- Resettlement support in private rented sector/registered social landlord tenancies



- Emergency accommodation and support for rough sleepers
- Engagement opportunities to build confidence, resilience, recognising personal skills and qualities and how they could be used in the workplace.

We will build on these services to provide the best possible accommodation and support to our homeless households by:

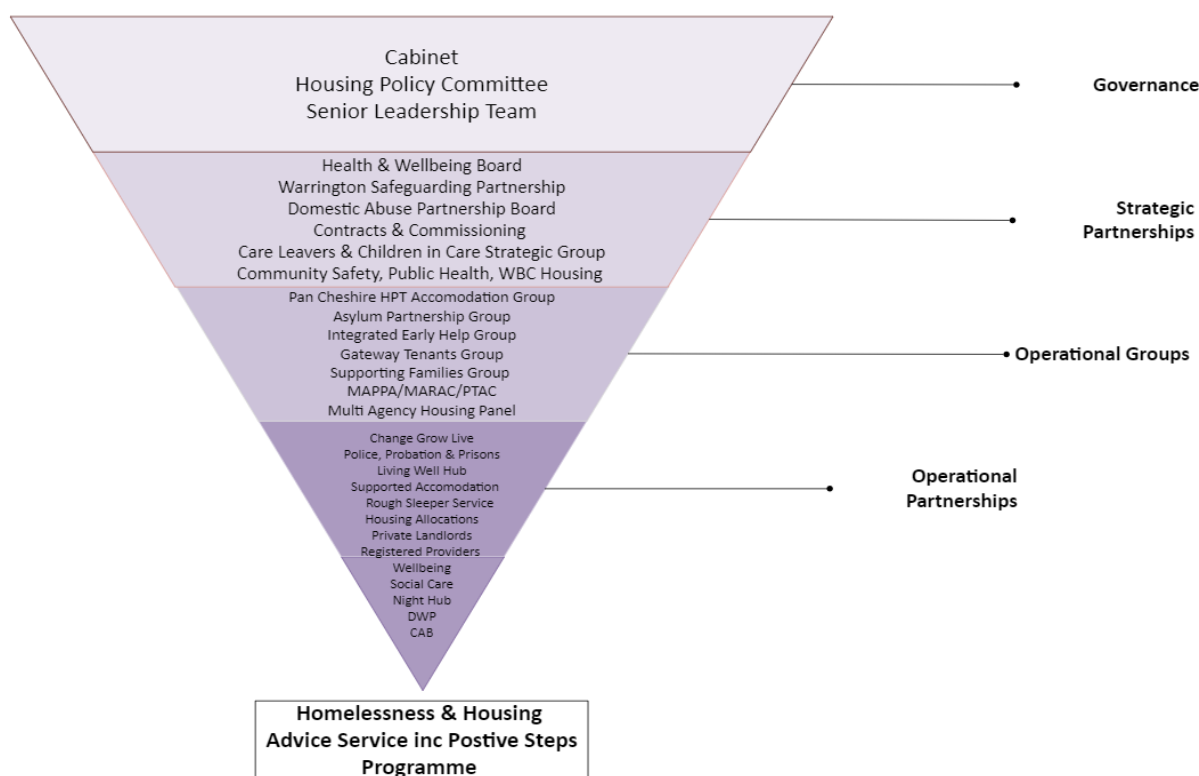
- Setting minimum standards for temporary accommodation
- Improving and enhancing Personal Housing Plans
- Quality assurance across commissioned supported housing and support services
- To build on current homelessness engagement activities to address inequalities and access to employment, transport, health services and a healthy and sustainable environment.

## **Governance**

The council is committed to ending homelessness at the highest level and this is reflected in the governance and oversight of homelessness in Warrington.

- Senior Leadership Team has weekly oversight of homelessness in Warrington informed by reports provided by the Homelessness Service.
- The council's new Housing Policy Committee will oversee policy, strategy development and receive progress reports in relation to all housing matters for the borough.
- A lead Cabinet Member has specific responsibility for poverty, inequality and protection which includes homelessness. Monthly briefings ensure the lead member is fully sighted and updated on homeless matters.

The diagram below illustrates how the council's homelessness service provides the foundation for targeted prevention activities.



## Access to homelessness and housing services

The council's Homelessness and Housing Advice Service is based in the Gateway Community Hub in the centre of Warrington, alongside many of our partners.

The service is open every weekday 9am to 5pm and outside of this by our Out of Hours Telephone Service.

The service has an open door. We offer a Drop-In Service as well as a planned appointments service.

We prefer to meet face to face to ensure we can get to know our customers and their needs. We also offer telephone and email as methods of communication. We have a diverse community and so access to language services make sure everyone can be heard and understood, to ensure our services are culturally competent and inclusive.

In addition to our town centre service, we operate pop-up housing advice surgeries in other places, like community centres, to increase access to the help we can provide to prevent homelessness. We aim to expand on this work in the future to increase awareness of our services to all minority groups.

## The duty to refer

The 'duty to refer' is the statutory responsibility of public authorities to notify us as the local housing authority of anyone they believe to be homeless or at risk of becoming homeless within 56 days.

This works well in Warrington, and we have arrangements with social care, police, probation, prisons and hospitals.

## **Our partners**

We work with a range of services across the Council and across Warrington to prevent and relieve homelessness. The Gateway Centre is a base for many of the support services we work with including citizens Advice Bureau, Vulnerable Tenants Support Services, Rough Sleeper Service enabling a joined-up approach.

Regular partnership working is key with other council services, commissioned services and the voluntary sector.

## **National Context**

### **Homelessness in England during the five years between 2018 – 2023**

- The number of homelessness assessments relatively stable between 70,000 and 80,000 during this period.
- Use of temporary accommodation for all household types increased by 26%
- Households using bed and breakfast type accommodation increased by 107%
- Families in B&B type accommodation for more than 6 weeks increased by 83%
- For rough sleeping the numbers were decreasing until 2022 when there was a rise of 26%. (Based on single night autumn counts by local authorities in England).

### **Several factors have contributed to homelessness in recent years**

2018 - Homelessness Reduction Act implementation

2020 - Coronavirus Pandemic, Local Housing Allowance rates frozen

2021 - Domestic Abuse Act

2022 - Ukraine conflict led to increased homeless applications

2023 - Renters Reform Act, Asylum seekers obtaining leave to remain, Supported Housing (Regulatory Oversight) Act, Social Housing (Regulation) Act



## Reducing social housing

Social rented housing is provided by a social landlord, in Warrington this is through registered social landlords, with a rent set at around 50% of market rents.

Insufficient social housebuilding plus too many homes being sold or demolished means there's been a net loss of social housing nearly every year since 1981. Between 2022-2023, there was a net loss of 11,700 social rent homes. (Shelter 2024).

The rise of platforms like Airbnb and Booking.com has facilitated a surge in short-term holiday lets, driven by both the potential for profit and a less favourable tax regime for traditional buy-to-let landlords.

## Changes affecting the private rented sector

| Year               | Number of landlord purchases | Number of landlord sales | Net gain/loss |
|--------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------|---------------|
| 2010               | 119,230                      | 38,190                   | 81,040        |
| 2011               | 124,160                      | 57,770                   | 66,390        |
| 2012               | 133,050                      | 73,120                   | 59,930        |
| 2013               | 154,140                      | 105,920                  | 48,220        |
| 2014               | 178,170                      | 149,810                  | 28,330        |
| 2015               | 189,410                      | 177,020                  | 12,390        |
| 2016               | 159,850                      | 195,530                  | -35,680       |
| 2017               | 138,060                      | 185,360                  | -47,300       |
| 2018               | 131,370                      | 180,980                  | -49,610       |
| 2019               | 123,750                      | 160,380                  | -36,630       |
| 2020               | 110,910                      | 132,190                  | -21,270       |
| 2021               | 172,060                      | 201,640                  | -29,580       |
| 2022               | 145,880                      | 192,650                  | -46,770       |
| 2023<br>(estimate) | 112,510                      | 143,060                  | -30,550       |

Source: ONS and Hamptons

- Private landlords have been leaving the market since 2016 leading to a reduction in supply of rental housing available.
- Mortgage interest rate rises has made the Buy to Let sector a less attractive investment and has forced landlords to increase rents.
- Plans to 'scrap' the 'No Fault Section 21 Evictions' outlined in the Renters Reform Bill has led to private landlords considering their position.

## Welfare reform

This legislation (Welfare Reform Act 2012) has impacted on the increasing number of people who have become homeless nationally via the following:

- Universal Credit – A benefit made direct to the applicant, which covers some or part of any housing costs. Local Housing Allowance rates have been frozen at 2011 levels and have made the rental sector unaffordable to people who rely fully or in part on benefits.
- The under-35 shared-room rate – this is a very low level of rent forcing single people into Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMO's) which is not always readily available.
- Underoccupancy charge – which reduces the maximum amount of rent people could be covered by Universal Credit or housing benefit if they have a spare bedroom.
- The introduction of the benefit cap – which limits the overall amount that people can claim if they're unemployed by reducing their Universal Credit housing element.

More recently, the cost-of-living crisis has resulted in more contributing factors, increasing the risk of homelessness.

## Warrington context

### Overview of housing in the borough

The borough of Warrington has a resident population of 210,900 (NS, 2021 Census) comprising 90,540 households. Nearly one in five are aged over 65, and this proportion is anticipated to grow to over a quarter of the population during the course of the Local Plan period. Conversely, the 35-49 age group is reducing. The median age of the borough's population is now 42, up from 40 in 2011. Approximately 8% of the population are registered with a serious disability.

The majority of residents either own their own home or have a mortgage (70%). Approximately 15% live in social rented accommodation and 1.3% live in HMOs or other shared rented accommodation. In line with national trends, the private rented sector is increasing in importance in the Borough, with 15.2% of residents now in this sector (up from 11.2% in 2011).

The majority of the Borough's housing stock has an EPC rating of below C. Just over 1% have no central heating, and less than one in a thousand are powered by renewable energy such as heat pumps. There are regular meetings with registered providers to understand their remediation works to address and refurbishment programmes to enhance social housing living standards.

There are approximately 14,000 social homes in the Borough. The number of social rented homes has declined, principally as a result of Right to Buy and the focus on the delivery of low-cost home ownership properties (rather than rented) in national planning policy. Move on from social housing is also impacted by the wider economics, residents are staying in social housing for longer, meaning that the Borough's stock of affordable housing is not being recycled as regularly as it was in the past.

For instance, the number of households on the waiting list provided with social housing has fallen from 1,058 in 2021/22, to 876 in 2022/23 and 522 in 2023/24. This lack of available accommodation has contributed to the continuing growth in the number of households registered on the Council's Under One Roof waiting list (which currently stands at over 7,600), and the duration for applicants to find accommodation is significantly extended.



Waiting times for an offer of social housing, [note this is based on part year data provided by Under One Roof] is increasing year on year.

- For Band 1 Priority approximately 12 – 18 months
- For Band 2 Priority approximately 3.5 years

Homeless households are awarded Band 1 Priority, the length of time waiting for an offer of social housing is adding to pressures on the homeless system resulting in an increased length of time in temporary housing stock, and hotels, and increased cost to the Council of providing hotel accommodation.

The reduction in the recycling rates of social housing and the current levels of unmet demand is the principal driver for the assessed level of new affordable housing need in the Local Plan. The need from residents on the waiting list outstrips need arising through forecast population growth by a factor of five to one.

## Affordability

In the national context, Warrington is 'mid-table' for affordability. In terms of home ownership, Warrington South and North are ranked 368 and 429 respectively out of 572 constituencies. In terms of rental affordability, Warrington was ranked 218 out of 311 local authority areas. The average house in the Borough now costs 6.9 times the average household income (compared with 8.1 nationally). Affordability has, however, decreased markedly over the past twenty years: whilst earnings have, on average, doubled, house prices have increased by over 4.5 times.

The average price of entry for a one-bed home is £135,000, which requires an annual income of over £32,000. Entry level to rent a one-bed apartment is around £525 pcm requiring an annual income of nearly £25,000. The average household income in the Borough is £36,000. For women, the average salary is £33,000, and for young people under 21 it is £23,000. It is estimated that 43% of newly forming households cannot reasonably afford to purchase or rent across the Borough: for young people and single women the figure is far higher.

Even more troubling, however, is the average cost of new properties in the Borough. Warrington is now the third most expensive area in the Northwest to purchase a new home, with the average asking price being £427,000. This reflects the dominant house type being delivered in the Borough's principal new housing areas, which concentrate on the supply of executive homes serving the affluent commuter market, rather than more modest local needs. Nevertheless, even the cost of new starter homes in the Borough has increased by nearly 40% over the past five years.

One of the key challenges facing the Borough will be to ensure the delivery of more affordable open market homes that meet growing local needs, particularly from young people and newly-forming households, in the face of a commercial market that views Warrington as being a key commuter location.

## Homelessness in Warrington

The council has a statutory duty to homeless households. As barriers to accessing private rented sector housing continue to worsen, the council relies heavily on social housing to fulfil its housing duties to homeless households as the only affordable option.



The average waiting time for a social housing property, even with the priority given to homeless households is 12-18 months. This means that homelessness applications remain open to the service for accommodation and support during this time.

Intensive housing management for people in temporary accommodation and support for those households living in hotels is now an integral part of the homelessness officer's role.

Caseloads for homelessness officers are high and will continue to increase until we have in place more suitable long-term housing available.

In the years to March 2023 the council experienced a slow reduction in homelessness applications. This trend has now changed direction as we are continuing to experience a rise in homelessness presentations since April 2024.

- 21/22 - 2998 applications
- 22/23 - 2601 applications
- 23/24 - 2571 applications

However, the average number of new homelessness applications has increased by 26% this year after a period of stability.

- April – July 2023 - 52 applications per week
- April – July 2024 - 68 applications per week

The five main causes of homelessness in Warrington is typical of the main causes nationally.

1. Friends and family no longer willing to accommodate.
2. End of a private rented sector tenancy
3. Fleeing domestic abuse
4. Non-violent relationship breakdown
5. Eviction from supported housing

## Young people leaving care

Children's Services and Housing Services teams have in place a Joint Protocol for Care Leavers, in response to recommendations made in mid-2021, following a Peer Review of the, Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government.

A joint housing protocol helps children's services and housing authorities deliver the local accommodation offered to care leavers and prevent homelessness. It sets out commitments as corporate parents, and how these will be delivered in practice.

However, despite planning and support provided preparing young people in care for independent living, young people sometimes make mistakes, and care leavers (lacking both skills and support networks) are more likely than most to encounter difficulties with their accommodation. Families provide a safety net for other young people, so the corporate family (through the services they provide or purchase) must offer something equivalent for care leavers.



Currently, in Warrington, we have a standard offer under the housing allocations policy to award Band 1 additional, whenever a former care leaver is in urgent need of housing until they reach the age of 25 years.

However, we need to engage more widely with housing providers to accommodate former care leavers, to help them settle into independent living as part of a planned process, to prevent them falling into difficulties and potentially becoming homeless.

## Support needs of applicants

The support needs of homelessness applicants (where a statutory duty is accepted) mirrors the national picture.

The top five support needs for Warrington and for England are:

1. Physical ill health or disability
2. History of Mental Health
3. At risk of / experienced domestic abuse
4. Offending History
5. History of Repeat Homelessness

Often the perception of homelessness is the rough sleeper in a shop doorway. This is very far from the reality of homelessness. We assist clients from all backgrounds and circumstances. Rough sleepers account for a very small 1-2% of our client base. The client groups are diverse and below are examples of actual cases that have been assisted during 2024.

### Case study A

A nurse working at Warrington and Halton Hospital Foundation Trust had lived in affordable private rented housing for 12 years. She had 2 school aged children and worked full time.

She had been an exemplary tenant according to her landlord.

Nevertheless, the landlord decided he no longer wanted to be a landlord and was putting the property up for sale. He issued a S21 No fault eviction notice. The expensive private rented sector had become unaffordable to her during the time she had been in her tenancy and we were unable to secure any alternative private rented housing for her. The uncertainty of her situation was causing her and her children some distress as they worried about their future.

We were able to provide temporary housing (a 2-bed furnished flat) whilst she waits for an offer of social housing through Under One Roof.

### Case study B

A man presented to us following his return from a south African country. He originally came to UK several years previously, settling in Warrington in social housing. He had five children at the time he decided to leave the UK and went back to his country of origin.

His social housing property was taken back by the housing association after being abandoned.

After staying in the African country for 3 years, the family returned to UK with two additional children

The family of 2 adults and 7 children were placed in across three rooms of a hotel outside the borough because there were no local hotels who were able to accommodate such a large family. The impact on the service was considerable as we had no advance notice of this and staff needed to move very quickly to arrange immediate accommodation. We later managed to provide temporary housing, after modifying an existing property to accommodate this family whilst they wait for a large house in social housing.

This will take longer than the estimated 12-18 months because they require such a large property, of which there are few in social housing in Warrington.

### **Case study C**

A single pregnant woman presented to us as homeless following are relationship breakdown. We placed her in a local hotel who are agreeable to accepting homeless guests. A few weeks later, the young woman gave birth to a son. This was a very difficult situation for her and we arranged support services for her and her baby at the hotel.

She remained in the hotel until she was offered a social housing flat through Under One Roof. By this time her baby had had his first birthday, whilst still living at the hotel. The hotel management organised a first birthday party for him. She moved out a couple of weeks later.



# Emerging pressures on homelessness and housing

## Refugees

Warrington currently has 2 contingency hotels and a 149 bed spaces across a collection of HMOs, managed on behalf of the Home Office by a private contractor. Asylum seekers in the hotels and HMOs are awaiting a decision on their asylum application. If the application is successful and they are given Leave to Remain in the UK, they are served what is known as a notice to quit, generally within a very short timeframe. As part of this process, they are advised that they need to present as homeless to the local authority where they have been living in asylum accommodation.

The numbers of households presenting as homeless after leaving Asylum Seeker Accommodation are as follows:

| Year                    | Applications |
|-------------------------|--------------|
| 2024/25 (April to July) | 98 so far    |
| 2023/24                 | 61           |
| 2022/23                 | 9            |
| 2021/22                 | 7            |

## Family re-union scheme for refugees

This scheme allows asylum seekers with Leave to Remain to apply to have their families, left behind in their country of origin, to join them in the UK. Numbers amongst Warrington Refugees are currently low, but this is likely to increase as it has in other areas of the UK.

In many cases, these families are larger in size which then places increased pressure on homeless costs whilst there is a need for larger properties which are very scarce and not high numbers generally in social housing.

## Early release scheme from prisons

HM Government has recently announced the early prison release scheme for those that have spent a percentage of their standard determinant sentence (SDS). At the point of developing this strategy there is an anticipated 22 releases between September 2024 and December 2024. Where there is a housing need identified, all will have to have a statutory homeless assessment, where there is a priority need identified, the Council has a duty to find accommodation. This can be difficult depending on any attached license conditions and may ultimately have an effect on homelessness services. Partnership working with HM Prison and Probation services is ongoing.

## Rough sleeping in Warrington

The following table shows the results of the snapshot autumn counts made by local authorities for Warrington and our neighbouring councils.

| <b>Borough</b>            | <b>2021</b> | <b>2022</b> | <b>2023</b> |
|---------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Warrington                | 10          | 12          | 21          |
| Cheshire East             | 4           | 11          | 12          |
| Cheshire West and Chester | 8           | 10          | 22          |
| St Helens                 | 1           | 3           | 6           |
| Halton                    | 0           | 3           | 4           |

Following the results in Autumn 2023 the council put in place a temporary 'Off the Street' Night Hub, using additional winter funding from the government. This has proved successful to reducing rough sleeping in Warrington and has now been extended with the intention to make this a permanent accommodation and support hub.

Reported rough sleepers following implementation of Off the Street accommodation has significantly reduced.

This service is managed by a local charity, Room at the Inn. All referrals are made through the Homelessness and Housing Advice Service following a homelessness application and risk assessment. This service is supported fully by our partners, including the police, who have seen that stringent management reduces the levels of anti-social behaviour often seen with this client group in the past.

Our Homelessness Officer and in-house Positive Steps Programme is key to helping people to move out of rough sleeping into settled housing and lifestyle changes, whilst they use this facility, to take advantages of opportunities for education, training and day time activities.

| <b>Month</b>  | <b>No of rough sleepers</b> |
|---------------|-----------------------------|
| October 2023  | 19                          |
| November 2023 | 6                           |
| December 2023 | 10                          |
| January 2024  | 5                           |
| February 2024 | 3                           |
| March 2024    | 2                           |
| April 2024    | 3                           |
| May 2024      | 1                           |
| June 2024     | 2                           |
| July 2024     | 1                           |

See Appendix D for supporting data.

# Action plan and governance

A draft action plan accompanies this strategy setting out the actions needed, the resources available and the people responsible for the actions.

This action plan is available in Appendix E.

The governance of the strategy and the action plan will be carried out by the Council's Housing Policy Committee.

## Next steps

Timetable to adopt this strategy.

23 August 2024 - Issue documents for consultation

4 Sept 2024 - Discuss and ratify the strategy at the homelessness summit

24 Sept 2024 - Present to the councils Senior Leadership Team

January 2025 - Strategy approved by the councils Executive Board

April 2025 – Finals strategy to be published

