

Walsall Homelessness Needs Review

2022



01.12.22



Walsall Council



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1. Introduction

Under section 2(1) of the homelessness act 2002 housing authorities are given the power to carry out a homelessness review for their district. The main purpose of this review is to evaluate the current levels of homelessness, related service provision and support in walsall to enable the development of a refreshed homelessness and rough sleeper strategy that is fit for the next five years. In law the homelessness and rough sleeper strategy must set out the authority's plans for the prevention of homelessness and for securing that sufficient accommodation and support are or will be available for people who become homeless or who are at risk of becoming homeless.

Section 2 of this review sets the wider context and provides a socio-economic overview of the borough covering population, economy, and the borough's evolving housing market. Using statistical data largely sourced from government returns section 3 provides an overview of homeless presentations to the council whilst section 4 reviews the activities for preventing homelessness. Section 5 reviews activities for securing accommodation. Section 6 focusses on the customer and stakeholder experience of homelessness services whilst section 7 provides an analysis of the key findings.

1.1 Statutory overview

Broadly speaking, a person is threatened with homelessness if they are likely to become homeless within 56 days. An applicant who has been served with valid a notice under section 21 of the housing act 1988 to end their assured shorthold tenancy is also threatened with homelessness, if the notice has expired or will expire within 56 days and is served in respect of the only accommodation that is available for them to occupy. An applicant is to be considered homeless if they do not have accommodation that they have a legal right to occupy, which is accessible and physically available to them (and their household) and which it would be reasonable for them to continue to live in (section 11 and 12 statutory code of guidance).

Housing authorities have a duty to carry out an assessment in all cases where an eligible applicant is homeless or threatened with homelessness. This will identify what has caused the homelessness or threat of homelessness, the housing needs of the applicant and any support they need in order to be able to secure and retain accommodation. Following this assessment, the housing authority must work with the person to develop a personalised housing plan (php) which will include actions (or 'reasonable steps') to be taken by the authority and the applicant to try and prevent or relieve homelessness.

The domestic abuse act 2021 and accompanying statutory code came into force on 01 October 2021. The act places duties on each relevant local authority in England to appoint a multi-agency domestic abuse local partnership board to perform certain specified functions including assessing and making arrangements for accommodation-based domestic abuse support in their area for all victims and their children to reside in relevant safe accommodation. The act also extends priority need for homeless assistance to persons who are homeless as a result of being a victim of domestic abuse (section a4.4 Of the statutory code).

In June the government published the 'fairer private rented sector' white paper and re-affirmed its commitment to legislate to end 'no-fault' evictions by repealing section 21 of the housing act 1988. The paper also seeks to move away from assured shorthold and fixed term tenancies to assured tenancies. If these reforms proceed it will clearly have consequential impacts to current homelessness legislation in particular parts of the 1996 Housing Act. Government will shortly be instigating a formal consultation with the aim of seeking clarity and understanding on the impacts these changes will have on the sector.

The UK Government has defined street homelessness as:

"People sleeping, about to bed down (sitting on/in or standing next to their bedding) or actually bedded down in the open air (such as on the streets, in tents, doorways, parks, bus shelters or encampments). People in buildings or other places not designed for habitation (such as stairwells, barns, sheds, car parks, cars, derelict boats, stations, or "bashes")"

1.2 Walsall Housing Strategy

Walsall's Housing Strategy, approved in 2020 is set to be reviewed in 2025. The strategy is underpinned by the vision that 'Communities are prospering and resilient with all housing needs met in safe and healthy places that build a strong sense of belonging and cohesion.' The Strategy is monitored quarterly by the Council's Money Home Job service and specific to homelessness it has four specific key performance indicators:

- Minimum 50% of successful prevention outcomes are through keeping people in the home by 2025
- Maximum 0.9 households in Temporary Accommodation per 1000 households
- Ensure no one needs to sleep rough in Walsall by 2024.
- 80 people rehoused and supported in Housing First by April 2021

1.3 Walsall's Homelessness Strategy

The current Homelessness Strategy was approved and took effect from 2018 and in line with legislation is due to be reviewed this year. The strategy has overseen a number of achievements since its inception and most notably these include:

- 101 Housing First tenancies – 2021 annual November Street Count found 4 rough sleepers.
- New Domestic Abuse safe accommodation commissioned – more mixed and dispersed provision jointly commissioned.
- New Homelessness Young Persons Temporary Accommodation – 76 units provided.
- Enhanced offer for those in supported lodgings that are better catered for complex cases.
- 116 Afghan households housed from a pledge of 120.
- 92 Ukraine households housed under Homes for Ukraine. To date 72 households are still housed through this scheme (with only 5 subsequently presenting to the authority following a breakdown of relationship with the host household)
- Revised Allocations Policy introduced to comply with 2018 Homelessness Act
- Restructure of Homelessness Service in response to legislation leading to a new debt service, dedicated housing and welfare officers and a specialist Young Persons Team
- Duty to Refer system in place with increasing numerical uptake.
- Successful pilot for dispersed temporary accommodation. Two long-term empty homes brought back into use. Ten 10 Covid Temporary Accommodation units piloted with Housing Associations
- Dedicated rough sleeper team developed and implemented.

2. Walsall Overview

2.1 Population, health and economy

Walsall is a metropolitan borough which was formed in 1974 and is one of seven authorities that makes up the West Midlands conurbation and one of four local authorities comprising the Black Country Region. Walsall contains six urban district centres: Walsall Town Centre, Aldridge, Bloxwich, Brownhills, Darlaston and Willenhall. The Borough covers 40 square miles and is bisected by the M6 motorway. Socio-economically, there is a noticeable geographic divide between the East and more deprived West. The 2019 Index of Multiple Deprivation now ranks Walsall as the 25th most deprived English local authority (out of 317), placing Walsall within the most deprived 10% of districts in the country (33rd in 2015, 30th in 2010 and 45th in 2007). Added to this, this measure rises to the 14th most deprived when exclusively focussing on deprivation affecting children.

Population: Walsall's population has increased by 6% between 2011 and 2021 from a former figure of 269,300 rising to 284,100 (Census 2021) encompassing 112,200 households. Nearby areas like Sandwell and Birmingham have seen their populations increase by around 11% and 7% and Walsall's growth is more in line with England's overall increase. As of 2021, Walsall is the eighth most densely populated of the West Midlands' 30 local authority areas, with around 20 people living on each football pitch-sized area of land¹.

Ethnicity: Walsall is a culturally diverse town where people of Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi background form the largest minority ethnic groups at around 19%². Persons from a White British background form 67% of the population³. One in seven residents have a non-UK country of birth (Census 2021) and Walsall now has a small Eastern European population. 37% of Children and young people (0-17) are from minority ethnic groups and 24% of Primary pupils have English as an additional language (School Census, January 2017)⁴.

Health: In absolute terms, the majority of health indicators around life expectancy and causes of death are described as **significantly worse than England** according to Public Health England 2019⁵. Life expectancy in the most deprived areas for both men and women is lower than the England average - 10.4 years lower for men and 8.8 years lower for women. Around 26% (15,070) of children live in low-income households. The rate for alcohol-related harm hospital admissions is 688 per 100,000 of population.

Economy: 61% of the population is of working age, broadly in line with the national figure. 76% are classed as economically active, slightly below both the regional and national averages. Of the households that have at least one person aged 16 to 64, 14% (12,000) are classed as workless and as revealed elsewhere in this document lack of labour market access is a consistent factor affecting homeless households in the borough⁶. 27% of the working age population have an NVQ Level 4 or above, this compares to a regional figure of 39% and a national figure of 44%.

In terms of income and employment scales, the average wage in Walsall (£548 p/w gross) is 6% below the regional average and 12% below the national. 8% of persons aged 18 to 24 claim out of work benefits – this compares to 6% regionally but is almost twice the national equivalent. According to Department for Work and Pensions figures (02/22), Walsall is ranked fourth out of all West Midland authorities in the percentage of working age people (6%) receiving unemployment related benefits⁷.

1 Office for National Statistics 2021

2 Census 2021

3 Census 2021, White British includes "White: English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish or British"

4 Walsall Insight, Trends and Intelligence

5 fingertipsreports.phe.org.uk/health-profiles/2019/Walsall

6 Nomis Official Labour Market Statistics 2022

7 *ibid*

2.2 Walsall's Housing Stock

Currently, Walsall has around 117,000 units of which 24% are Registered Provider owned and 76% privately owned¹. Of the 76% privately owned, it is estimated that around 13,400 are privately rented which accounts for around 15% of privately owned stock. Overall housing growth (5.4%) has just about kept up with household growth (6.3%) between 2011 and 2021 (Office National Statistics population projections) and household size has shifted from 2.49 to 2.51 (Black Country Strategic Housing Market Assessment 2021).

In 2019 the Council commissioned a Private Sector Stock Condition Survey and the following headline findings are noted:

- 12% of dwellings (around 11,000) have category 1 Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) hazards.
- The highest concentrations of all HHSRS hazards in the private sector are found in the Pleck, Palfrey and Darlaston South wards
- The highest concentrations of fuel poverty (Low Income/High Costs definition) are found in the Pleck, Palfrey and Darlaston South wards
- 3.8% (3,300) of private sector dwellings and 4.3% (779) of private rented dwellings in Walsall are estimated to have an EPC rating below Band E
- There is an estimated total of 2,030 houses in multiple occupation in Walsall, of which approximately 304 would come under the mandatory licensing scheme

2.3 Walsall's Housing Market

Walsall's housing market has changed significantly over the last decade and continues to evolve. The private rental market has expanded, housing 7% more households in 2019 than in 2014, with a like increase of 3% in the social rented sector². Walsall's most notable housing market characteristics are:

- Numerically, Walsall's affordable housing stock has remained static over the last decade. Owned exclusively by Registered Providers volumes of stock were 26,915 in 2011, 27,947 in 2016 and 27,813 in 2021 (accounting for around a quarter of the overall stock base)³. This static figure is likely accounted for by the low qualification for Right to Buy following stock transfer in 2003.
- At the end of March 2022 there were 13,728 applicants (excluding transfer applicants) on the Housing Register, up from 10,129 in March 2020 but lower than 14,327 in recorded in March 2021⁴. The number of homeless households on the register has declined over the three years from 424 in 2019/20 to 358 in 2021/22 (as at 01 April for each year).
- Similar to the national picture, social housing lettings across Walsall have been decreasing year on year, and whilst data for 2021/22 is yet to be released, there were 34% less properties relet in 2020/21 (1,660) than there were 3 years ago in 2017/18 (2,530)⁵.
- The overall average house price in Walsall in 2019 was 38% lower than the national figure, and 19% below the figure for the West Midlands (Black Country SHMA 2021). However, between April 2018 and 2022 average house prices continued to rise by 26%, with the average house price in April 2022 being recorded as £201,381. This percentage increase is not always mirrored within the typical entry market sector stock, with terraced houses matching the average rise (£163,303) but flats increased by a reduced 15% to average at £121,0766.

1 Live tables on dwelling stock (including vacants) - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

2 Black Country Housing Market Assessment 2021

3 Live tables on dwelling stock (including vacants) - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

4 Local Authority Housing Statistics (LAHS)

5 Table 1d: Social Housing Lettings 2017/8 to 2020/21, CORE Data

6 <http://landregistry.data.gov.uk/app/ukhpi/explore>

- Median rents in the private rented sector for all types of property have risen in recent times and suggest that households reliant on Local Housing Allowance (LHA) are increasingly being excluded from the Private Rental Market. In 2020 Local Housing Allowance Rates (LHA) were restored to the cheapest 30th percentile, however these rates have been refrozen since then meaning LHA has not kept pace with rental inflation. Figure 2.1 below outlines lower quartile weekly rents in 2021/22 by bedroom number against corresponding Black Country LHA rates¹ together with a snapshot of the number of properties listed by a local letting agent within the appropriate LHA rate w/c 05/09/22:

Figure 2.1: Lower Quartile rents 2021/22, Local Housing Allowance Rates and snapshot of property listings (by No.) w/c 05.09.22 within appropriate LHA rate:

Bedroom Number	Lower Quartile Rent	LHA	Property listing w/c 05.09.22*
One	104.00	91.82	3
Two	121.00	117.37	0
Three	155.00	136.93	0
Four	183.00	172.60	0

*Property listing sourced from local agent week commencing 05.09.22 based on a 3-mile radius from Walsall centre

- The affordability gap outlined above is reinforced within the 2021 Black Country Housing Market Assessment that records that 28% of households in Walsall requiring an entry level one-bedroom property are, on account of affordability excluded from either the local owner occupied or private rental sectors. This same figure rises to 29% for two bed properties, 35% for three bed properties and 44% for four or more entry level properties.
- Properties remaining empty for more than 6 months peaked in 2009 at 1456 units with 1012 being recorded in October 2021.

¹ Private rental market summary statistics in England - Office for National Statistics (ons.gov.uk)



3. Homelessness In Walsall

3.1 Overview

Though not ideal the statistical analysis of this review will focus on both 2019/20 data (the last year not impacted by COVID and reflective of previous years) and 2021/22. Officially lifted on 24 February, the Government response to the Covid pandemic triggered a series of restrictions for the housing sector, perhaps in the context of this study most notably the restrictions imposed on qualification for the service of Section 21 eviction notices. In Walsall in 2019/20, 163 households were accepted as being owed a homeless duty as a result of Private Rented Sector eviction, this same figure fell by 67% to 54 in 2020/21.

In 2019 the Levelling up, Housing and Communities and Department for Work and Pensions published research on the causes of homelessness and rough sleeping. Of note it concluded that structural factors were more likely to cause homelessness for families; with domestic abuse, relationship breakdown, financial issues, poverty, and lack of social housing being primary causes. Individual personal factors were often more associated with causes of single person homelessness; with relationship breakdown, mental health, and substance misuse being primary causes. Individual health-related factors were more prevalent causes of street homelessness and are detailed elsewhere under the 'Rough Sleeper' part of this paper.

Records show that in 2019/20 and 2021/22 the number of households who progressed to a homeless assessment were 1,106 and 824 respectively meaning that in direct comparison assessments fell by 25%¹. For both years, almost all (1,097 and 814) were subsequently assessed as owed a duty. At the same time a further 1,172 and 837 households were assessed as 'Advice Only/Early Closure' implying that roughly half of households who approach the authority in the context of homelessness go on to receive a duty.

Last year 425 of those assessed were owed the Prevention Duty, with 389 the Relief Duty. Nationally, Walsall applicants owed a duty are slightly more likely to be assessed as owed the Prevention Duty, comparing 52% locally to 48% nationally².

In Walsall, the core statutory homelessness service is delivered by the Council's Housing and Welfare Team. Following a successful bid for Rough Sleeper Initiative funding the team is also supported by a dedicated rough sleeper team that includes an outreach service. In addition, the borough also benefits from the newly formed Walsall Connected hubs, which serve as new entry points for people to be able to present as homeless. The Council also has 90 units of temporary accommodation, and this is supplemented by further services commissioned through our partners and includes:

- 76 units of dispersed temporary accommodation for young people provided by Walsall Housing Group
- A Domestic Abuse refuge (8 units) and a portfolio of 19 dispersed units provided by GreenSquareAccord (GSA). Housing support is also provided by GSA to the remaining rough sleepers that were housed under the Housing First Programme
- Black Country YMCA provide 15 supported lodgings, and a day stop and night stop service for young people

There are also a significant number of other voluntary sector and housing association partners in the borough providing services that help prevent and relieve homelessness.

¹ Total acceptances in 2020/21 were 827
² England excluding London

3.2 Causes of homelessness

Labour market activity appears to be heavily linked to homelessness in Walsall with over three quarters (620/824) of households owed a duty (2021/22) being economically inactive. Within this cohort 55% (339) were recorded as unemployed and a further 16% (101) recorded as 'Not working due to long-term illness/disability'.

Figure 3.1 below outlines the **causes of loss of last secure home** that led to the presentation, together with regional and national comparisons.

- Broadly speaking the main causes of homelessness as recorded by statistical returns are similar as a percentage share to both the regional and national equivalents.
- Assessments relating to domestic abuse have reduced slightly between 2019/20 and 2021/22 but are still above regional and national comparisons
- The recording of '**Other reasons / not known**' has reduced considerably and is now in line with regional and national comparisons and ensures more accurate data recording

Figure 3.1: Reason for Loss of Last Settled Home 2021/22 and 2019/20:

	2021/22	% share	2019/20	% share	% share W. Mids	% Share England
Family or friends no longer willing or able to accommodate	240	29	281	26	27	26
End of private rented tenancy - assured shorthold	164	20	163	15	20	25
Other reasons / not known	115	14	285	26	15	12
Domestic abuse	114	14	130	12	7	8
Non-violent relationship breakdown with partner	54	7	99	9	5	6
Required to leave accommodation provided by H. Office as asylum support	32	4	38	3	5	5
Other violence or harassment	28	3	15	1	4	4
End of social rented tenancy	27	3	43	4	3	3
Eviction from supported housing	18	2	20	2	2	4
Left institution with no accommodation available	15	2	11	1	1	1
End of private rented tenancy - not assured shorthold	7	1	12	1	11	8
TOTAL	814	100	1097	100	100	100

Note: % share of West Midlands and England (excluding London) sourced from last quarter of 2021/22.

3.3 Household profiles

Figure 3.2 looks at the **age profile** of the head of household accepted as owed a duty in both 2021/22 and 2019/20. It also outlines a regional and national comparison. The table clearly demonstrates that Walsall has an over representation of duty accepted towards persons aged 18 to 24 compared to both regional and national averages by 6 and 7 percentage points respectively¹. This issue is compounded further by 2021 Census data, in that whilst not strictly aligned with the homeless age bands, regionally (Metropolitan Area) Walsall is under-represented by persons aged 20 to 24 at 5.7% of its population compared to 7% of the former. This age group also declined in number by 7% between 2011 and 2021 in Walsall.

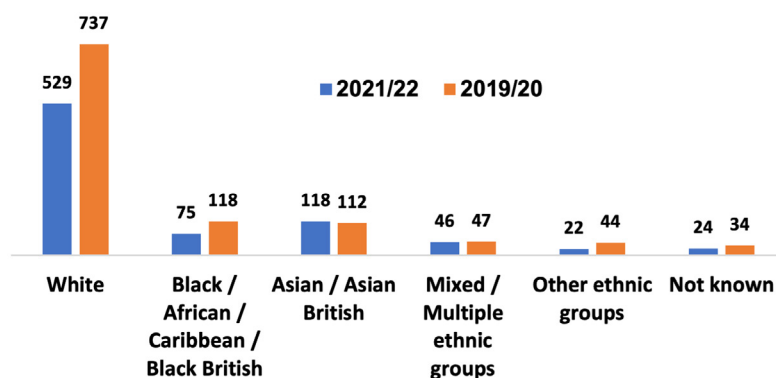
Figure 3.2: Persons owed a duty by age 2021/22 and 2019/20:

	2021/22	% share	2019/20	% share	% share W. Mids	% Share England
16-17	19	2	18	2	1	1
18-24	213	26	292	27	20	19
25-34	239	29	334	30	31	31
35-44	190	23	251	23	25	24
45-54	94	12	127	12	14	14
55-64	42	5	46	4	6	7
65-74	12	1	18	2	2	3
75+	4	0	10	1	1	1
Not known	1	0	1	0	0	0
Total	814		1097			

Note: % share of West Midlands and England (excluding London) sourced from last quarter of 2021/22.

Figures 3.3 and 3.4 overleaf focus on the **ethnicity of the main applicant** owed a duty during 2021/22 and 2019/20. Last year, White British households owed a duty made up 65% of presentations, Asian/Asian British 14%, Black African/Caribbean/Black British 9% and Mixed/Multiple Ethnic Groups 6%. This compares to like 2021 Census figures of 71%, 19%, 5% and 3% respectively implying a significant overrepresentation in Black African/Caribbean/Black British households and Mixed/Multiple Ethnic Groups. Comparing 2019/20 with 2021/22 there was a 4-point percentage increase in Asian/Asian British persons and a 2-point percentage decrease in Black African/Caribbean/Black British persons.

Figure 3.3: Ethnicity of main applicant owed a duty 2021/22 and 2019/20:



¹ Data for 2021/22 is not yet available but in 2020/21 nearly half of households in this age group were owed on account of 'Friends/relatives no longer willing to accommodate'.

Figure 3.4: Ethnicity as a percentage share of main applicant owed a duty 2021/22 and 2019/20:

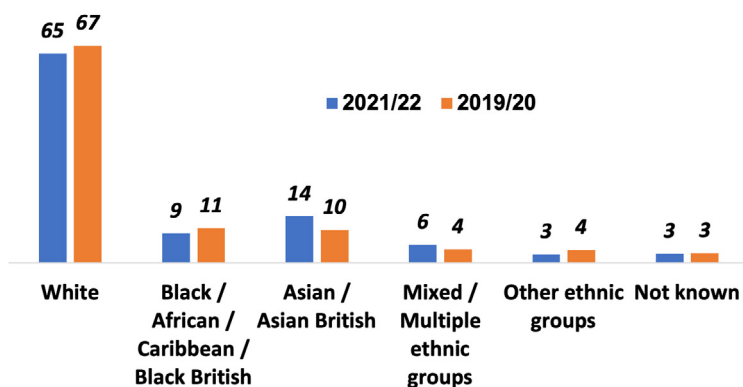


Figure 3.5 below focusses on the **household type to which a duty was owed** for 2021/22 and 2019/20 and using percentage shares offers a comparison with the region. Single person households make up around 55% of presentations in Walsall which is slightly above the regional share of 53% but such a margin is not significant. Women are more likely to experience homelessness than men, largely because of their very high prevalence of being the head of household as a single parent with dependent children (225 (female) and 16 households respectively 2021/22).

Figure 3.5: Household type where a duty owed 2021/22 and 2019/20:

	2021/22	% share	2019/20	% share	% share W. Mids
Single parent with dependent children - Male	16	2	26	2	3
Single parent with dependent children - Female	225	28	280	26	24
Single adult - Male	233	29	333	30	32
Single adult - Female	209	26	246	22	21
Single adult - Other / gender not known	1	0	0	0	0
Couple with dependent children	80	10	122	11	12
Couple / two adults without dependent children	25	3	67	6	5
Three or more adults with dependent children	14	2	14	1	2
Three or more adults without dependent children	10	1	7	1	1
Not known	1	0	2	0	0
Total	814		1097		

Figure 3.6 overleaf looks at the **support needs** of those households owed a duty covering both 2021/22 and 2019/20. In 2019/20, 40% (439) of households owed a duty were identified as having at least one support need with 601 individual support needs identified in total¹. In 2021/22 it was 53% (433) and in total 567 support needs were identified. Around 68% of the support needs identified last year were centred on the needs of mental health (123), support for young people (152) and persons at risk or experiencing domestic abuse (98). 13% of needs were related to disability, this compares to 15% nationally². The levels of repeat homelessness were low in number for both years (19), however only those who acquired a duty (roughly 50% of all presentations) are included in this calculation and exclude those who may have previously presented but were not assessed as owed a duty.

Figure 3.6: support needs of those households owed a duty covering both 2021/22 and 2019/20:

Support Need identified	2021/22	2019/20
History of mental health problems	123	100
At risk of / has experienced domestic abuse	98	71
Young person aged 18-25 years requiring support to manage independently	74	101
Physical ill health and disability	63	56
Care leaver aged 18-20 years	43	27
Drug dependency needs	22	31
Young person aged 16-17 years	20	35
History of repeat homelessness	19	19
Young parent requiring support to manage independently	15	38
Offending history	14	18
Care leaver aged 21+ years	12	12
History of rough sleeping	9	13
Learning disability	9	12
Access to education, employment or training	9	19
At risk of / has experienced abuse (non-domestic abuse)	9	9
At risk of / has experienced sexual abuse / exploitation	8	7
Alcohol dependency needs	7	14
Former asylum seeker	7	11
Old age	4	8
Served in HM Forces	2	0

1 Households can have multiple support needs, so the total number of support needs is not equal to the number of households with support needs

2 2022 Homelessness Monitor, CRISIS

4. Pre-Crisis Intervention - Prevention

4.1 Overview

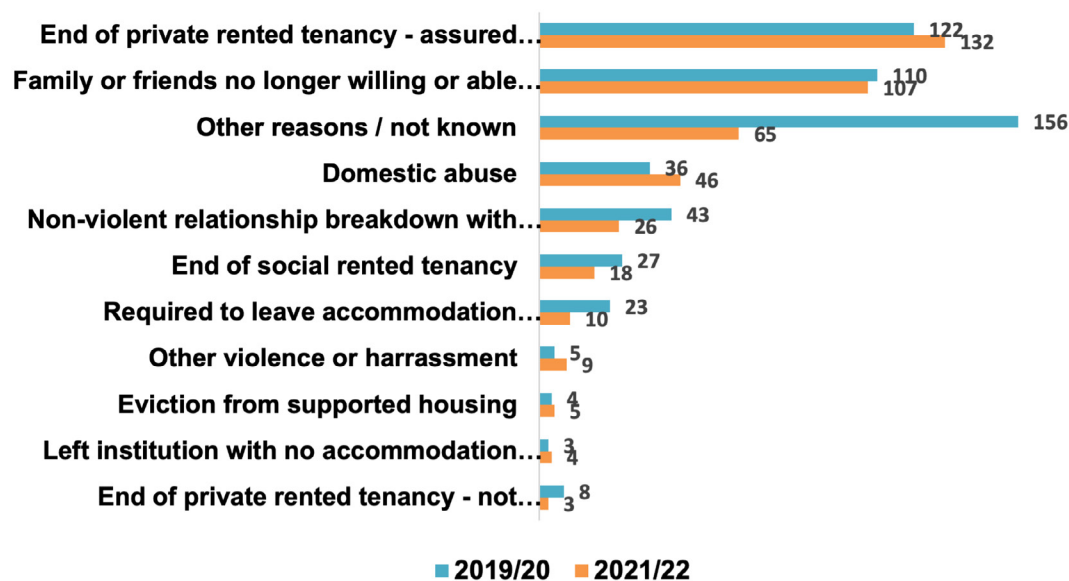
Housing authorities have a duty to take reasonable steps to help prevent any eligible person who is threatened with homelessness from becoming homeless. This means either helping them to stay in their current accommodation or helping them to find a new place to live before they actually become homeless. The prevention duty continues for 56 days unless it is either brought to an end by an event such as accommodation being secured or if the household becomes homeless. In practical terms Prevention has been divided into three elements – Early Prevention, Crisis Prevention and Reoccurrence prevention¹.

Early prevention often starts with relevant signposting and/or housing advice/information to prevent homelessness or a threat of homelessness. The Council's website has a dedicated homeless page and as required by legislation² the website gives specific homelessness information providing advice on prevention, securing accommodation, the rights of the individual and how to access help.

Crisis prevention can be divided into two broad practices. One is to help people threatened with homelessness to remain in their existing accommodation, and secondly where this is not possible or safe to do so, the other option is to help someone to obtain alternative accommodation – including the provision of temporary accommodation. Typical actions to help people remain in existing accommodation include resolving housing benefit problems, providing debt advice or offering mediation. Common actions to help people obtain alternative accommodation include securing an offer of social housing or securing private rented sector accommodation.

Nationally, Walsall applicants owed a duty are slightly more likely to be assessed as owed the Prevention Duty comparing 52% locally to 48% nationally³. Figure 4.1 looks at the **reason for loss of last settled home** for households owed a prevention duty comparing 2021/22 with 2019/20. The most notable change as a percentage share between the two years has been the reduction of the 'Other reasons/not known' classification⁴. This recording has reduced from a share of 29% to 15%. This latter figure is still above the regional (12%) and national (8%) equivalents, but its adjustment has likely made the 2019/20 data more accurate. In addition, it has likely had the impact of bringing the percentage shares of the other causes more into line with both regional and national equivalents, with local share distributions never straying beyond four percentage points of the wider West Midlands region.

Figure 4.1: Reason for loss of last settled home for households owed Prevention Duty 2021/22 and 2019/20:



1 Hal Pawson, Gina Netto, Colin Jones, Fiona Wager, Cathie Fancy, Delia Lomax (2007), Evaluating Homelessness Prevention, London, Department for Communities and Local Government

2 S.179(1) Housing Act 1996 as substituted by s. 2 Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.

3 England excluding London

4 6. Includes fire / flood / other emergency, left HM forces, mortgage repossession, property disrepair, other or not known

4.2 Prevention Duty outcomes

Last year a total of 406 households in Walsall had their Prevention Duty ended. Figure 4.2 overleaf provides an overview and comparison of the **reasons behind ending the Prevention Duty**. In 2021/22, 75% (304) of the 406 households where the duty ended secured accommodation, up by 11 points as a percentage share from 2019/20. Applicants in Walsall owed the Prevention Duty are more likely to have their duty ended by securing secure accommodation than their regional counterparts with the like figure sitting at 52%.

As stated elsewhere there are generally two options to securing accommodation in the discharge of a Prevention Duty and in Walsall there appears to be a heavy reliance on securing alternative accommodation as opposed to enabling the household to remain in their existing home, with 91% of the 304 households above moving to a new property and only 9% enabled to remain in their existing home. This latter figure compares to 27% regionally and 30% nationally (England, excluding London). This could imply that mediation is not at the forefront of service provision in this context.

Of note, there has also been a noticeable improvement with reduced occurrences of households having the duty ended through 'Contact Lost', down by ten percentage points. In addition, there was a three-percentage point reduction in households transitioning to becoming homeless during their Prevention Duty.

Figure 4.2: Reason behind ending the Prevention Duty 2021/22 and 2019/20:

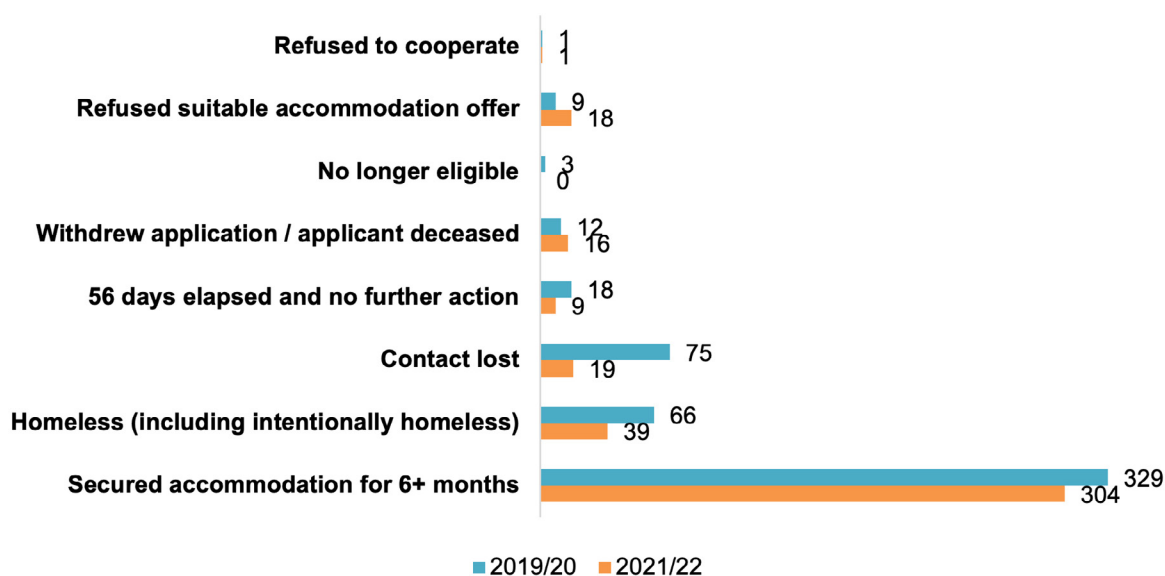


Figure 4.3 below outlines the tenure accessed to discharge a Prevention Duty for both those enabled to remain in their property and those securing alternative accommodation. Unfortunately, the data doesn't differentiate between those securing alternative accommodation and those enabled to remain in their existing home. However, given the low local share of households in the latter category, the table reveals a likely substantial increase in reliance on the social rented sector to secure alternative accommodation.

Figure 4.3: Source of accommodation used in discharging Prevention Duty 2021/22 and 2019/20:

	2021/22 No.	% Share	2019/20 No.	% Share
Social rented sector	239	79	185	56
Private rented sector	45	15	103	31
Staying with family	6	2	23	7
Staying with friends	3	1	2	1
Owner-occupier	1	0	1	0
Other	4	1	4	1
Not known	6	2	11	3

Figure 4.4 below identifies the **main activity that resulted in accommodation secured** for the 304 households securing accommodation last year with the local authority playing an increasing lead role in this activity. The table also records a reduction in the use of Discretionary Housing Payments (see also Section 4.5) securing accommodation together with a steep decline in persons being solely provided with advice and information. It also outlines a sharp decline in negotiation/mediation which may in part be linked to the low numbers enabled to remain in their own home.

Figure 4.4: Main activity that resulted in accommodation secured for households:

	2021/22	2019/20
Accommodation secured by local authority or organisation delivering housing options service	202	127
Helped to secure accommodation found by applicant, with financial payment	18	32
Helped to secure accommodation found by applicant, without financial payment	44	8
Negotiation / mediation / advocacy work to prevent eviction / repossession	9	14
Negotiation / mediation work to secure return to family or friend	5	46
Supported housing provided	3	22
Discretionary Housing Payment to reduce shortfall	2	11
Other financial payments (e.g. to reduce arrears)	4	9
Other	10	9
No activity – advice and information provided	7	51
TOTALS	304	329

Figure 4.5 overleaf outlines those who were owed a Prevention Duty (425) together with those households who secured accommodation under the Prevention Duty (304) in 2021/22 **by household type**. The table reveals that of those owed a Prevention Duty last year, households with children provide the largest cohort at 49% with single person households making up 45%. Whilst not exclusively from the exact same cohort, the table also reveals broadly speaking that all of the household types achieve the same proportionate successes in acquiring secure accommodation when the duty is relieved.

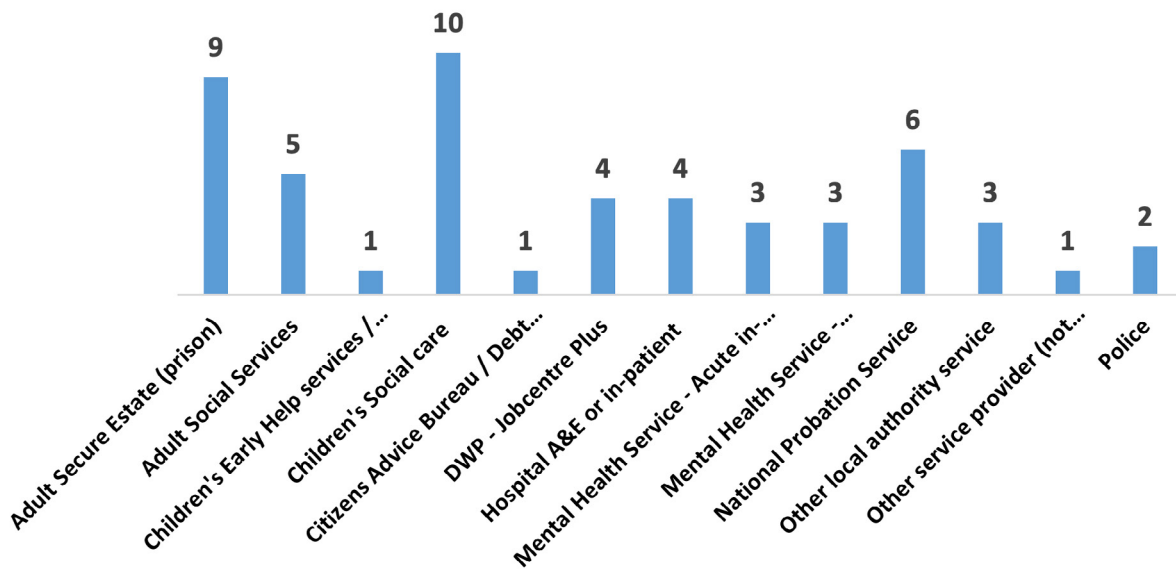
Figure 4.5: Household type of those owed Prevention Duty and those subsequently accessing secure accommodation at duty end 2021/22:

	HH Type OWED Duty 2021/22	% share	HH Type of those securing accommodation 2021/22	% share
Single parent with dependent children - Male	12	3	11	4
Single parent with dependent children - Female	129	30	98	32
Single parent with dependent children - Other / gender not known	0	0	0	0
Single adult - Male	79	19	63	21
Single adult - Female	110	26	67	22
Single adult - Other / gender not known	1	0	0	0
Couple / two adults with dependent children	60	14	41	13
Couple / two adults without dependent children	17	4	16	5
Three or more adults with dependent children	8	2	5	2
Three or more adults without dependent children	8	2	3	1
Not known	1	0	0	0

4.3 The Duty to Refer

The **Duty to Refer** came into force from October 2018. Specified public authorities are obliged to ask any person they believe might be homeless or threatened with homelessness if they wish to be referred to a local authority of their own choosing. Last year the authority received a total of 69 referrals, 52 (75%) of which were made via the Duty to Refer. The Council has a dedicated webpage for the Duty to Refer together with a referral form. **Figure 4.6** overleaf outlines the Duty to Refer referral sources for 2021/22. Of note, from consultation some service providers identified a lack of feedback from Duty to Refer referrals.

Figure 4.6 Duty to Refer referral sources for 2021/22.



4.4 Temporary Accommodation

Local housing authorities in England have a duty to secure accommodation for unintentionally homeless households in priority need under Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996. Households can either be placed in temporary accommodation pending the completion of inquiries into an application, or after an application is accepted until suitable secure accommodation becomes available.

Specific to temporary accommodation the Homelessness Code of Guidance stresses the need for local authorities to be alert to the risks that may be associated with placing families with children, and young people, in mixed hostel settings and it clearly states that where hostel accommodation is used to accommodate vulnerable young people or families with children it would be inappropriate to accommodate these groups alongside vulnerable adults (Para. 16.35).

Furthermore, in *Birmingham City Council v Ali, Moran v Manchester City Council* [2009], the court observed that ‘what is regarded as suitable for discharging the interim duty may be rather different from what is regarded as suitable for discharging the more open-ended duty in section 193(2).’ This confirms the Code of Guidance’s approach that, accommodation that would not be suitable in the long term may be suitable in the short term.

Case law (**Nzolameso v Westminster City Council (2015)**) also sets out the need for a local authority to have a formal temporary accommodation and procurement strategy in place. The Supreme Court Judgment included a set of requirements that local authorities need to consider when allocating temporary accommodation to homeless households which included that each local authority should have, and keep up to date, a policy for procuring and allocating temporary accommodation to homeless households.

The Council currently has 90 temporary accommodation units in four blocks and two dispersed units as detailed in **Figure 4.7** below (see also Section 3.1). Since 2020 the Council’s Housing Strategy has included a target that at any given time a maximum of 0.9 households per 1,000 will be accommodated in temporary accommodation and to date this has been achieved.

Figure 4.7: Outline of Council temporary accommodation in Walsall:

Temporary accommodation site	Description with client groups	No. of units
Dolphin House,	17 x 2 bed flats	
Goscote	1 crash pad for single person	19 units
	1x 1 bed adapted	
	9 x 1 bed flats	
206-213 Green Ln	1 x 3 bed flat	
	1 x 1 bed adapted	13 units
	2 flats converted to houses in multiple occupation with 5 bedrooms in each	
222 - 233 Green Ln	12 X 3 bed Maisonettes	12 units
Sandwell House,	28 x 2 Bed flats	
Sandwell Street	2 x 1 bed wheelchair accessible	32 units
	2 x 2 bed wheelchair accessible	
Rivers House	14 flats all 1 bed for ages 16 -24	14 units
136 Broadway,	3-bedroom house	1 unit
43 Wenlock Gardens,	3-bedroom house	1 unit

Over the last three financial years a total of 778 households were placed into temporary accommodation by the Council. In the same period a total of 1,012 temporary accommodation placements occurred. This difference is almost exclusively accounted for by households entering bed and breakfast temporary accommodation and then moving into other more appropriate temporary accommodation facilities shortly afterwards. In 2019/20 there were 382 placements, 306 in 2020/21 and 324 in 2021/22. Figure 4.8 overleaf outlines the total number of temporary accommodation placements by accommodation. In 2019/20 bed and breakfast accommodation accounted for 47% of placements compared to 37% by the close of last year.

Figure 4.8: Temporary accommodation placements by type 2019/20 to 2021/22:

	2019/20 to 2021/22	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Local Authority Stock	476	161	152	163
Bed and Breakfast	401	179	101	121
Supp Housing	111	38	35	38
RP stock	17	-	16	1
Refuges	5	4	-	1
Hostels	1	-	1	-
Private Rented Sector	1	-	1	-
TOTAL	1,012	382	306	324

Figure 4.9 looks at the median length of stay by each temporary accommodation type covering each of the financial years.

Figure 4.9: Temporary accommodation placements by type and length of stay 2019/20 to 2021/22:

	2019/20		2020/21		2021/22	
	No.	Ave. Length of stay (days)	No.	Ave. Length of stay (days)	No.	Ave. Length of stay (days)
Local Authority Stock	161	124	152	101	141	102
Bed and Breakfast	179	10	101	5	125	7
Supported Housing	38	18	35	20	36	31
Housing Association stock	-	-	16	159	1	118
Refuges	4	174*	1	137	1	11
Hostels	-	-	1	75	-	-
Private Rented Sector	-	-	1	98	-	-
TOTAL	382	-	307	-	304	-

*mean average

Figure 4.9 above excludes tenancies created within the time frame that have not yet ended and are almost exclusively centred on tenancies within the local authority's own stock. The median average length of stay in bed and breakfast placements has reduced by 3 days between 2019/20 and last year. Whilst this same figure is higher than the intervening year it is assumed this may be accounted for by the unprecedented conditions arising from the Covid pandemic.

From the 1,012 placements 823 (81%) were located within the Walsall boundary. Of the 189 that were not, 150 were bed and breakfast placements. A geographical breakdown of placements is outlined in Figure 4.10 below:

Figure 4.10: Out of borough placements by location/type 2019/20 to 2021/22:

Location	Number of Placements	Bed and Breakfast	Supported Housing
Wolverhampton	67	67	-
Birmingham	58	55	3
Dudley	26	8	18
Sandwell	15	3	12
South Staffs	11	11	-
Cannock Chase	7	6	1
TOTAL	184	150	34

Note: a further 5 placements were made outside of the above areas.

The authority has four concentrated facilities that provide TA in the borough namely; Sandwell House, Rivers House, Dolphin House, and Green Lane. Excluding households who are currently present at these facilities, Figure Three below outlines each of these facilities by the number of households using the block and length of stay.



Figure 4.11: Temporary accommodation facility by number of placements and length of stay 2019/20 to 2021/22:

	No. Units	No. completed placements	Length of Stay (days)		
			Shortest	Longest	Average (median)
Dolphin House	19	91	1	584	103
Green Lane	25	129	6	636	105
Rivers House	14	60	1	644	107
Sandwell House	32	172	1	628	113

Over the last three financial years a total of 778 households were involved in being placed into temporary accommodation by the Council. This involved 274 in 2019/20 and 252 in the latter two years. **Figure 4.12** overleaf outlines the main reason recorded for loss of settled home prior to entering temporary accommodation:

Figure 4.12: Main reason recorded for loss of settled home prior to entering temporary accommodation:

Main reason recorded for loss of last settled home	Number	Bed and Breakfast placement % share	
Family no longer willing to accommodate	187	72	39
Domestic abuse	93	53	57
Termination of private rented tenancy	80	51	64
Required to leave accommodation by Home Office	51	21	41
Non-violent relationship breakdown	47	31	66
Non racially motivated violence/harassment	41	24	59
Friends no longer willing to accommodate	38	11	29
Eviction from supported living	22	5	23
Termination of social rented tenancy	18	10	56
Property disrepair/emergency	11	8	73
Racially motivated violence	7	3	43
Left institution with no accommodation available	6	2	33
Property no longer suitable due to disability/health	3	1	33
Left prison with no accommodation available	2	1	50
Mortgage repossession	1	1	100
Other/not recorded	173	98	57

Figure 4.13 overleaf focusses on the households accessing temporary accommodation by age of head of household and number of children in the household. From the 778 households accepted into temporary accommodation, 45% (346) contained children, the majority containing one (142) or two children (89). Numerically, age profiles of 18-25, 26-35 and 36-45 are evenly spread with a fall off commencing at 46 plus. Unfortunately, economic activity is not recorded within the data, however 544 (70%) of the 779 households entering temporary accommodation were in receipt of benefits¹ with 433 in receipt of Universal Credit. Other recorded characteristics of the households accessing temporary accommodation include:

- 145 households had a dedicated social worker
- 97 households were recorded as having been homeless before of which 63 (65% of the cohort) had slept rough
- 95 households were recorded as having an outstanding debt
- 19 households had support from a dedicated probation officer

Figure 4.13: Households entering temporary accommodation 2019/20 to 2021/22 by age (head of household) and number of children

¹ Disability Benefits/Employment and Support Benefit/Income Support/JSA/State Pension/Tax Credits/Universal Credit

Age of head of household	No.	Number of children	No.
17	5	One	142
18-25	226	Two	89
26-35	216	Three	60
36-45	201	Four	33
46-55	94	Five	22
56 plus	36		

Specific to use of bed and breakfast accommodation, the following is noted:

- The number of households involved in bed and breakfast placements has reduced from 179 in 2019/20 to 121 in 2021/22. In addition, households placed in bed and breakfast are staying in the said accommodation for a shorter median length of time by 3 days. In 2021/22 54% (67) of placements stayed 7 days or less compared to 41% (74) in 2019/20.
- Over the three years 194 of the 400 households contained children. The numerical share involving children has declined from a 59% (104) share in 2019/20 to a 41% (49) like share in 2021/22.

Covering 2021/22, Figure 4.14 below looks at the previous location by three-digit postcode of those households who entered into temporary accommodation. From the 252 households, 156 (62%) originated from four central postcode areas of WS1, WS2, WS3 and WS10:

Figure 4.14: Three-digit address postcodes of households entering into temporary accommodation 2021/22:

WS2	62	Out of Bor.	17
WS3	36	WS9	13
WS1	35	Unknown	12
WS10	23	WV12	9
NFA	17	Other (all <9)	28

4.5 Discretionary Housing Payments

Involving 999 households, in 2021/22 the Council committed £998,000 to Discretionary Housing Payments. The year before it supported 1,266 households¹. Connectivity between the Housing Benefits Team and the Homelessness Team is strong, and a significant number of Discretionary Housing Payments are utilized to prevent homelessness. There is universal opinion that the Discretionary Housing Payment data recorded in Figure 4.4 is a significant underrepresentation of actual Discretionary Housing Payments utilized in the prevention of homelessness. The current Discretionary Housing Payment policy was published in 2016.

¹ Discretionary Housing Payments statistics - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

5. Securing Accommodation

5.1 Overview

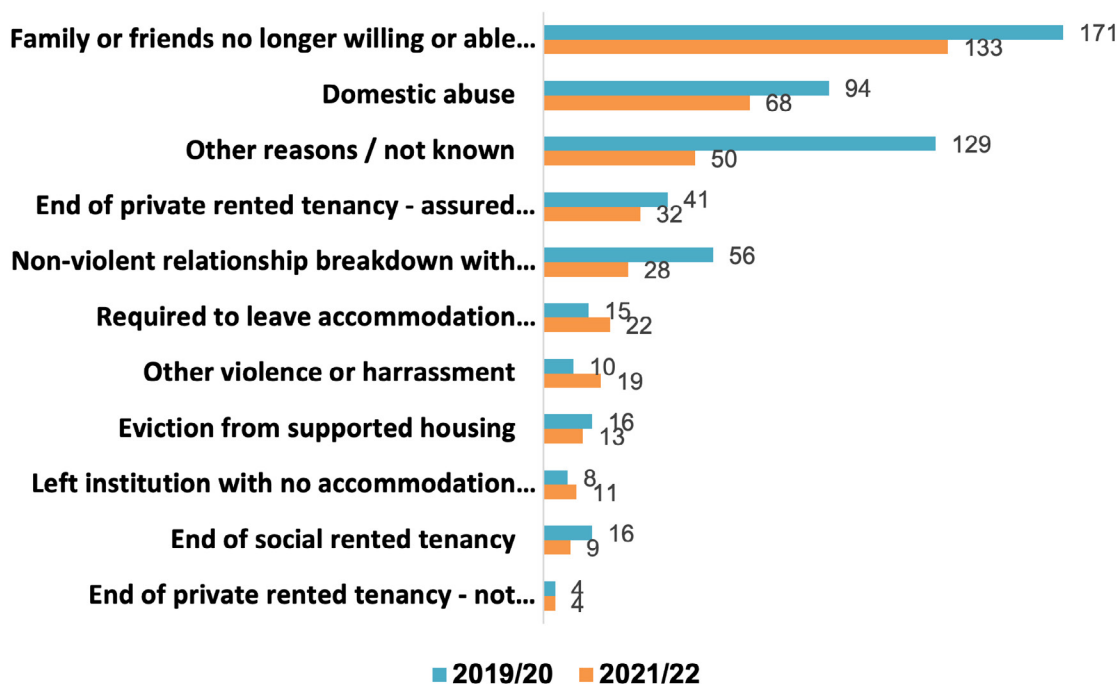
If an applicant is already homeless, or becomes homeless during the prevention stage, then support and interventions become focussed on helping the applicant to secure accommodation. Persons at this stage of homelessness qualify for the Relief Duty that lasts for 56 days unless ended in another way. If the housing authority has reason to believe a homeless applicant may be eligible for assistance and have a priority need, they must be provided with interim temporary accommodation at the Relief stage.

If a housing authority is unable to prevent an applicant from becoming homeless, or to help them to secure accommodation within the 'relief' stage, they are required to reach a decision as to whether the applicant has a priority need for accommodation

A housing authority will owe the 'main housing duty' to applicants where the Relief Duty ends and the authority is satisfied that the household is eligible, has a priority need for accommodation and are not homeless intentionally. Certain types of households qualify for Priority Need and these include families with children, pregnant women, victims of domestic abuse or those in an emergency situation such as a fire or flood. Other groups may be assessed as having priority need because they are vulnerable as a result of old age, mental ill health, physical disability, having been in prison or care or as a result of becoming homeless due to violence. Under the main housing duty, housing authorities must ensure that suitable accommodation is available for the applicant (and their household) until the duty is brought to an end, usually through the offer of a settled home.

Figure 5.1 overleaf looks at the **reason for loss of last settled home** for households assessed as owed a Relief Duty comparing 2021/22 with 2019/20. Comparing in percentage terms the 389 and 560 accepted duties owed in 2021/22 and 2019/20 respectively, none of the core reasons changed by more than three percentage points other than those recorded under 'Other reasons/not known' classification¹. This recording has reduced from a share of 23% to 13% and is now in line with the West Midlands regional equivalent figure of 14%.

Figure 5.1: Reason for loss of last settled home for households owed Relief Duty 2021/22 and 2019/20:



¹ 6. Includes fire / flood / other emergency, left HM forces, mortgage repossession, property disrepair, other or not known

5.2 Relief Duty outcomes

Last year a total of 430 households in Walsall had their Relief Duty ended. **Figure 5.2** overleaf provides an overview and comparison of the **reasons behind ending the Relief Duty**. In 2021/22, 60% (256) of the 430 households where the duty ended secured accommodation (up by 3 percentage points from 2019/20). Regionally, households in Walsall owed the Relief Duty are more likely to have their duty ended by securing secure accommodation by quite a margin with the equivalent figure sitting at 40%.

Similar to the national picture, social housing lettings across Walsall have been decreasing year on year. This in part is down to the proactive interventions from local social housing providers to reduce evictions and abandonments and clearly sustaining tenancies reduces homelessness. However, with a heavy reliance on the social housing sector to discharge homeless duty, the reduction in tenure turnover could have an impact on the Council's ability to maintain this strategy. Last year there was a notable shortfall in three and four bedroom property vacancies and to alleviate this the Council has recently entered into a down-sizing pilot with a local Registered Provider (Walsall Housing Group) to explore incentives to encourage and/or enable households who are under-occupying larger properties to downsize to more appropriate accommodation.

Figure 5.2: Reason behind ending the Relief Duty 2021/22 and 2019/20:

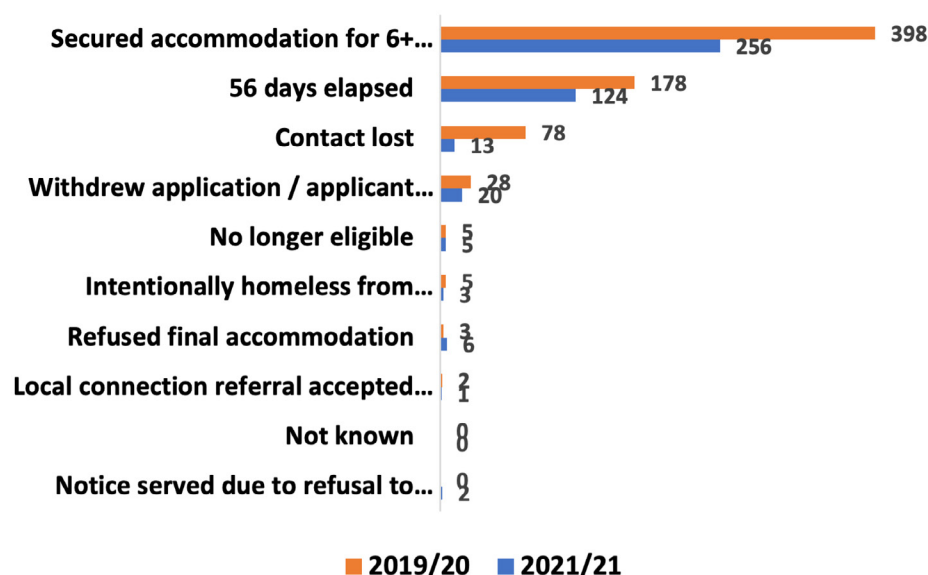


Figure 5.3 below focusses on the tenure of accommodation used in discharging Relief Duty. It points to a strong reliance on the social rented sector; however, it also shows a percentage increase in the use of the private rented sector.

Figure 5.3: Source of accommodation used in discharging Relief Duty 2021/22 and 2019/20:

	2021/22 No.	% Share	2019/20 No.	% Share
Social rented sector	134	52	234	59
Private rented sector	93	36	112	28
Staying with family	7	3	10	3
Staying with friends	3	1	6	2
Owner-occupier	0	0	0	0
Other	7	3	22	6
Not known	12	5	14	4

Figure 5.4 overleaf looks at the **main activity recorded that enabled the household to secure accommodation** resulting in the Relief Duty being relieved. The data indicates a shift by sixteen percentage points towards the local authority securing the accommodation with a reduction by six-percentage points in supported housing being provided. Over the two years under review accommodation found by the applicant remained static at around a 6% share.

Figure 5.4: Main activity that resulted in accommodation secured for households where Relief duty relieved:

	2021/22	2019/20
Accommodation secured by local authority or organisation delivering housing options service	169	198
Supported housing provided	34	77
Helped to secure accommodation found by applicant, with financial payment	21	29
Helped to secure accommodation found by applicant, without financial payment	16	29
Other activity through which accommodation secured	12	36
No activity	4	29
TOTALS	256	398

Figure 5.5 overleaf outlines those who were owed a Relief Duty (389) in 2020/21 together with those households who secured accommodation under the Relief Duty (256) in 2021/22 **by household type**. The table reveals that of those owed a Relief Duty last year, single person households provide the largest cohort at 65% with a further 33% containing dependent children.

Figure 5.5: Household type of those owed Relief Duty and those subsequently accessing secure accommodation at duty end 2021/22:

	HH Type OWED Duty 2021/22	% share	HH Type of those securing accommodation 2021/22	% share
Single parent with dependent children - Male	4	1	3	1
Single parent with dependent children - Female	96	25	31	12
Single parent with dependent children - Other / gender not known	0	0	0	0
Single adult - Male	154	40	125	49
Single adult - Female	99	25	76	30
Single adult - Other / gender not known	0	0	0	0
Couple / two adults with dependent children	20	5	11	4
Couple / two adults without dependent children	8	2	5	2
Three or more adults with dependent children	6	2	4	2
Three or more adults without dependent children	2	1	1	0
Not known	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	389		256	

Last year, following the end of their Relief Duty 108 households were assessed as being owed the **'Main Duty'**. Compared to 2019/20 this represents a 35% reduction when 165 households were assessed as such. Of the 108 households where the main duty was accepted, 60% of priority need was based on dependent children. In 2021/22, 114 households had their Main Duty ended, with 94 of these being ended with the acceptance of a Part 6 social housing offer.

5.3 Rough Sleepers

In December 2020, the MHCLG published a detailed research paper on the causes, impacts and outcomes of persons experiencing rough sleeping¹. Taken from a sample of 563 participants it looked at vulnerabilities and wellbeing, childhood, employment and welfare, health, substance misuse services, criminal justice system and housing. Of note:

- 96% respondents had one vulnerability or support need
- 83% reported having at least one physical health need
- 82% reported a mental health vulnerability (82%).
- Two thirds of respondents had been a recent victim of crime
- 60% of respondents had a support need related to drug or alcohol.
- Half of respondents had a support need related to drug misuse
- a quarter had a support need related to alcohol misuse (23%).
- Half of respondents had spent time in prison (53%) and a third of respondents had been a victim of domestic abuse (35%) at some point in their lives.
- Almost three quarters (72%) of respondents had experienced one or more of the following: spent time in care as a child, been permanently excluded from school, regularly truanted from school

In September of this year the Government published its **Ending Rough Sleeping for Good** strategy². The strategy offers a series of funding and support interventions that will underpin Walsall's revised homelessness strategy in the context of tackling rough sleeping. These include:

- The Rough Sleeping Initiative - £500 million will help provide emergency beds, off-the-street accommodation, and wrap-around support (the Council has successfully secured £1.8 million of this programme covering 2022 to 2025).
- Rough Sleeping Accommodation Programme - £433 million to provide up to 6,000 homes for rough sleepers including the provision of support from specialist staff
- Single Homelessness Accommodation Programme – a £200 million fund to deliver up to 2,400 homes by March 2025, including supported housing and Housing First accommodation, and accommodation for young people at risk of homelessness, including rough sleeping
- Streetlink – plans to revitalise this initiative to make it more user friendly

The Council's annual rough sleeper count undertaken in November 2022 identified eight people. This represents a numerical rise to previous years as identified in **Figure 5.6** which records the annual snapshot count conducted in November of each year:

Figure 5.6: Walsall Rough Sleeper Counts by year/number 2016 to 2022:

Year:	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Count:	26	20	11	6	4	4	8

1 Understanding the Multiple Vulnerabilities, Support Needs and Experiences of People who Sleep Rough in England
2 Department for Levelling Up Homes and Communities, September 2022

In November 2017 the Council set up the first West Midlands regional Housing First pilot – a scheme that places rough sleepers into long-term general needs accommodation with the necessary wrap around support to sustain the tenancy. In January 2019 the Walsall scheme became part of a wider regional pilot funded via the West Midlands Combined Authority. The latter scheme has now stopped accepting new rough sleepers.

As of September 2022, a total of 103 persons have either been housed or are currently housed since the West Midlands Combined Authority Housing First Scheme took effect - with 48 currently housed of which 32 are ex-offenders. A total of 26 people have 'graduated' from the scheme where there is mutual agreement that they no longer need support to maintain their tenancy. In part, the success of the programme has enabled the Council to meet its Housing Strategy Target of housing 80 persons under the scheme. Sadly, 13 people have died whilst part of the scheme. To date from those currently housed:

- 21 have been housed between 1 and 2 years
- 20 have been housed between 2 and 3 years
- 5 have been housed in excess of 3 years

Not surprisingly the health and support needs of the persons benefitting from the scheme are deep and complex. Of the 74 currently housed 84% have mental health needs and 89% have a substance misuse/alcohol dependency need. Nearly three quarters (54) of those currently housed are ex-offenders (at present a housing protocol for persons leaving prison is not in place).

Following the successful RSI bid and the cessation of Housing First pilot intake, the newly formed Rough Sleepers Initiative (RSI) Team are currently supporting a further 50 persons who are either rough sleeping or are at risk of rough sleeping. Still taking in referrals, the team currently operates to the Housing First ethos by providing an outreach service, and long-term general needs accommodation which will be further enhanced by a specific service level agreement currently being developed with local registered housing providers. This includes a 5-bed male House of Multiple Occupation, 2 dispersed flats through the Next Steps Accommodation Programme and a further 5 dispersed Rough Sleepers Accommodation Programme units. These units are specifically for rough sleepers or those at risk of, and are often targeted at those with a low to medium complexity (i.e. 'below' Housing First). Plans are also afoot to submit a bid to secure accommodation for ex-offenders via Accommodation For Ex-Offenders funding.

Walsall has also joined the West Midlands Combined Authority Change into Action model in 2020 (an approach to alternative giving to support rough sleepers) which brings together key partners in the borough. The model has been set up to receive donations from the public to be made available to people and organisations who can bid for funding to support people sleeping rough in Walsall.



6. The Customer Experience

6.1 The service user experience

This section draws on a number of focus groups and surveys that have been undertaken to gather quantitative data on people's opinions and experiences of homeless services in Walsall. Those who took part in the collection of this quantitative data incorporated the views of young people, newcomers as well as those who had experienced domestic abuse, rough sleeping and other causal factors leading to homelessness.

Ten people took part in a focus group whose primary cause of homelessness had been related to **domestic abuse**. The majority in the group expressed that they felt they were in a safe place and felt supported by their homeless officer. Most acknowledged that the offer of alternative accommodation had come through quickly and efficiently, but some felt limited and frustrated by their options to access dispersed accommodation particularly in the context of being able to keep the family unit together.

Most felt they could be better informed of their move-on options at an earlier stage to enable a better understanding of their options and limitations in terms of both the process and likely length of waiting time etc. They felt drop-in sessions from the Homelessness Officer could help with this. Of note, the presence of a universal wifi system at the facility used for the focus group session would be welcomed so that residents can participate more readily in everyday life, for example residents would be more empowered to look for properties online.

Some in the group complained about the length of time they had been resident at their current residential facility. Some had been there for 10 months or more and wanted to move on but complained about the availability of properties. However, the vast majority did not want a flat and aspired for and would rather wait for a house whilst recognising that the availability of houses was very limited.

This year the Council conducted a survey with **young people** who had engaged with young person's services and ranged from people who had accessed the Nightstop, supported lodging schemes, and the Walsall Housing Group MHJ scheme. Thirty-two people responded and in terms of the overall satisfaction with the service received, none reported that they were either dissatisfied or very dissatisfied. Drilling down further from those who took part in the survey:

- Over a third expressed a degree of frustration over the time it had taken to access the various facilities
- 67% were positive about the help they had received from their respective service. Correspondingly three quarters were positive about the help they had received from staff
- 60% were positive about being given the options to make their own choices within their respective scheme
- 56% felt there was sufficient flexibility within the service

Suggestions for service improvement included making information on-line, having one keyworker and having a support worker emergency number. From a focus group involving five young persons, those who took part felt well supported particularly with regard to acquiring future independent living skills, e.g. cooking and budgeting. Some in the group expressed a preference that on acquiring an independent tenancy they would benefit from floating support in the initial few transitional months. One issue raised was the disincentive to acquire employment that could lead to the individual being required to pay a high rent to live in their current housing scheme and elsewhere in this paper it is noted that many experiencing homelessness are affected by unemployment. Of note, none of those present were aware of their Personal Housing Plan.

During September three persons who had experienced **rough sleeping** were interviewed on a one-to-one basis to identify their experiences from initial engagement with services through to their current settled status. In this instance, all three had been supported by the now discontinued Housing First (HF) programme but of note much of the HF output has been continued under the remit of the Council's Rough Sleeper Team.

All three persons that were interviewed recorded a very positive experience from the rough Sleeper Services. From the interviews the main issues raised were:

- One ex-rough sleeper in particular had identified a significant need for blue light services (up to twice a day and largely ambulances) when rough sleeping and suffering from alcoholic/drug dependency. Since being housed their need for these services had ceased.
- Early engagement and referral: from the interviews the experience of initial engagement was not always positive. One candidate had had a bad experience of a hostel placement that was outside of Walsall (and away from local connections) whilst another had been offered a property that they felt was not up to a decent habitable standard.
- All were very satisfied with their current property, feeling safe and secure from which to build a stable life. All felt they had been offered a degree of choice on the property they were currently living in. One noted that they felt they would have felt even more secure about their home had they had the terms of the tenancy explained to them in more detail.
- All were very complimentary about the current support they were receiving and felt this was pivotal to their current stability, albeit one had experienced an unfortunate gap in support brought about by a planned staff absence. All were very complimentary about the long-term support they had received and continue to receive, and that support had enabled them to maintain their tenancy by alleviating isolation, providing help and support with mental health issues and ensuring household bills were paid on time.

In October a focus group was held made up of persons from the **new and emerging communities**. Exclusively from Ukrainian and Afghanistan backgrounds, those who had previous contact with the council were generally pleased with the service and support they had received although only 2 had had contact with the housing teams. Whilst overall people were appreciative of their current temporary accommodation, all those present expressed concerns about their housing options and those particularly from the Afghan communities felt they still had little idea in terms of how they would be able to secure long-term secure accommodation.

Private rents were discussed together with perhaps assistance with deposits, however they felt that the private rents were more expensive, and the tenancies offered less stability. The support from the Refugee and Migrant Centre was very appreciated. Those present and who were in temporary accommodation were complimentary on both the support they had received from the Temporary Accommodation Team together with responses when any repairs have been required.

In October of this year a further focus group was held at Dolphin House involving 6 residents who were currently resident in the said temporary accommodation facility. From the 6 attendees the shortest stay had been 3 months and the maximum length of stay was 13 months. The following key points were made at the session:

- The group universally felt they had all been well supported by staff at Dolphin, both in the context of housing and wider personal issues. In addition, all were satisfied with facilities at Dolphin House. They all 'got on' and were very supportive of one another
- There was no internet available at the facility and residents are not permitted to have a router. It was felt the lack of internet prevents residents from performing many of life's tasks and activities (particularly related to inclusion) with working from home and the wider impacts on schooling being cited.
- On the whole the point of first contact with the council had been positive, supportive and effective, though at times it had proved difficult 'getting hold of people' later on in the process. None of the group were familiar with their Personal Housing Plans.
- Universally the group felt the choice of properties from which to move on to is too limited but fully acknowledged and understood the supply of vacant properties was very limited. The group felt they would benefit from greater support to enable them to bid for properties.
- In acknowledgement of the short supply of properties, the group were supportive of the need to explore wider housing options. When asked the majority of those present would favourably consider:
 - A Private Rented Sector tenancy if guaranteed for twelve months or more and still enabled to bid on properties without a reduced priority
 - The offer of a three or four-bedroom flat in the social rented sector
- The group felt, even if there was no change, they would benefit from being given more regular updates on:
 - Their likelihood of securing a property within the short to medium/long term even when nothing has changed
 - The state of the local housing market

6.2 The stakeholder experience

Locally Walsall enjoys a strong partnership built up between the Council and local social housing providers. By way of example, Chairs of the Homeless Steering Group have been from the Walsall Housing Group (WHG) and Green Square Accord. In addition, the largest provider (WHG) has a Corporate Plan which contains actions that directly contribute to homeless prevention in Walsall, for example the commitment to not evict anyone into homelessness which has been extremely successful in driving down the number of evictions from 96 in 2017/8 to just 3 so far in 2022/23.

At the Walsall Homelessness Forum held in July of last year a series of workshops were held to obtain the views from the wide spectrum of stakeholders present. The following key points were noted:

- Specific to the objectives, feedback included suggestions to:
 - 1) introduce separate objectives tailored toward Young People and Rough Sleepers
 - 2) enhance Objective 1 in terms of setting out how we will react to varying levels of homelessness as they change over time
 - 3) Question over retaining Objective 5
- There was strong support to introduce more 'up-stream' prevention (e.g. school education) and to introduce more 'lived experience' into service development and provision
- A general concern of the impact of the 'cost of living crisis'
- A recognition of the need to increase the provision of affordable housing in particular:
 - larger 'family stock' and bungalows (the latter to free up existing larger family stock)
 - review age restricted stock with a view to making more stock available for younger people, particularly young single persons
- The need to develop a better understanding of roles of partnership organisations
- Those with No Recourse to Public Funds were seen as a major concern in the context of homelessness with a need to understand roles and responsibilities e.g. with Children's Services and Public Health etc
- The need to develop a more person-centred approach – 'help me to help myself' and to maintain/ensure a single point of contact.
- More provision of long-term support with regular tenancy visits (floating support) aligned with risk assessments where required with a direct referral mechanism when it is apparent that a tenancy is at risk – introduction of Tenancy Sustainment Officers?
- A recognition of the need to develop more access to the Private Rented Sector – support service for landlords/incentive schemes/support for Private Rented Sector Tenants
- Tackle empty homes that could be linked to purchasing long term empty homes with a view to relieving homelessness
- Explore the option to make training/employment a condition of tenancy
- Ensuring service users/support agencies are sure of what's on offer
- Consider introducing a social lettings agency
- Some concerns raised over the implementation and effectiveness of Personal Housing Plans
- People need to know much more upstream what's realistic in terms of housing offer and what they're entitled to so that expectations can be realistic

Over a two-week period in September over 200 **private sector landlords** (or their representative Agents) were contacted as part of a separate piece of research where there had been a homeless presentation linked to a Private Rented Sector property. The analysis showed:

- Landlords expressed concerns around the planned changes in legislation (Renters Reform Bill) with proposals to:
 - remove section 21 'no fault' evictions
 - make it illegal for landlords and agents to refuse to rent properties to people who receive benefits
 - give local authorities more power to enforce and protect renters' rights
- Landlords were also impacted by changes in tax brackets and what they could now claim as part of their self-assessment which includes maintenance of properties only.
- The feedback from landlords overall demonstrated a negative perception of the council's homelessness roles, responsibilities and interactions with the homeless service. Landlords in the main felt the tenant were seen as the council's priority.
- Many landlords stated their interaction under this activity was the first interaction they had with the council and pointed to a general distrust and unwillingness to work with the Homelessness Service
- Some landlords stated they would be re-letting property but would be reluctant to work with the Council citing delays in rental payments and the perception that tenants sourced via the Council posed a greater risk when compared to the wider private market.

Much of the feedback above from Private Rented Sector Landlords is clearly a cause for concern and demonstrates the task ahead to build a greater confidence and working relationships with the local private rented sector. In part to deliver this, the Council has already appointed a Private Sector Officer whose remit will be to foster better relations and to develop positive incentives for the local market to engage with the Council.



7. Key Findings

7.1 Overview

The central purpose of this review has been to evaluate the current levels of homelessness, service provision and support in Walsall to enable the formulation of a refreshed Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy for the next five years. In law the strategy must set out the authority's plans for the prevention of homelessness and for securing that sufficient accommodation and support are or will be available for people who become homeless or who are at risk of becoming homeless. To enable this the following observations are made.

Between April 2019 and March 2022, the Council assessed and accepted a statutory duty to assist 2,738 households. In the latter two years 827 and 824 were supported by way of an accepted duty which for each year accounted for around half of those who approached the local authority where homelessness or threat of are the causal factor behind their approach. The vast majority found not to be owed a duty received advice.

The main causes of homelessness in Walsall recorded by statistical returns (i.e. those owed a duty) are broadly similar as a percentage share to both the regional and national picture, with **'Family or friends no longer willing or able to accommodate'** and the **ending of a private rented tenancy** combining to take half the share at 29% and 20% respectively. Assessments relating to domestic abuse have reduced slightly between 2019/20 and 2021/22 but are still above regional and national comparisons.

Applicants aged 18 to 34 years represent nearly 60% of households owed a duty. In line with national trends the most common age group (of lead applicants) in households owed a duty are aged 25 to 34, however Walsall has an over representation of persons aged 18 to 24 sitting at 26% compared to a regional and national average of 20% and 19%. This statistic would lend to consideration being given to adopting a specific objective in the revised strategy centred on the needs of younger people. 40% of households owed a duty contain dependent children.

Last year, White British households made up 65% of presentations, Asian/Asian British 14%, Black African/Caribbean/Black British 9% and Mixed/Multiple Ethnic Groups 6%. This compares to like 2021 Census figures of 71%, 19%, 5% and 3% respectively implying a significant overrepresentation in Black African/Caribbean/Black British households and Mixed/Multiple Ethnic Groups. Comparing 2019/20 with 2021/22 there was a 4-point percentage increase in Asian/Asian British persons and a 2-point percentage decrease in Black African/Caribbean/Black British persons.

Single person households make up around 55% of presentations in Walsall that are subsequently assessed as owed a duty, which is slightly above the regional share of 53% but such a margin is not significant. Women are more likely to experience homelessness than men, largely because of their very high prevalence of being the head of household as a single parent with dependent children (225 and 16 households respectively 2021/22).

The number of households identified with support needs has increased over the last three years rising to 53% in the last financial year. Around two-thirds of the support needs identified last year were centred on the needs of mental health, support for young people and persons at risk or experiencing domestic abuse. Levels of repeat homelessness were recorded on 19 occasions last year although this only accounts for persons who were previously owed a duty.

Looking ahead

The current Homelessness Strategy took effect from 2018 and over its 5-year span and based on the findings of this review has overseen a number of positive interventions and achievements, most notably a reduction in usage of temporary accommodation, a reduction in levels of rough sleeping, an uplift in positive Prevention and Relief outcomes together with responsive service restructures, most notably the introduction of the new and dedicated Rough Sleeper Team. In addition, the Council has recently appointed a Private Sector Housing Officer whose remit in part will be to remedy the issues with the private rented sector noted elsewhere.

However, considering the above successes it seems plausible that future levels of homelessness and subsequent pressures on services are likely to increase. This prediction is based in part on the socio-economic profile of the borough outlined in Section 2.1 set against a backdrop of significant and growing housing market pressures outlined in Section 2.3, together with the wider projected pressures brought about by the 'cost of living crisis'.

The above projection is also underpinned by **The Homelessness Monitor: England 2022 (Crisis)**¹. Supported by its own projections analysis the paper predicts a likely increase in homelessness from 2022. Furthermore, and specific to Walsall, research published in 2017 identified households affected by childhood poverty as a specific group more exposed and vulnerable to homelessness². Section 2.1 outlines that Walsall is particularly vulnerable from this perspective with the borough being one of 20 local authorities with the highest proportions of children aged under 16 in Relative Low-Income families, effecting a third of its under 16 population (31.8%)³.



1 the-homelessness-monitor-england-2022_report.pdf (crisis.org.uk)

2 Professor Glen Bramley and Professor Suzanne Fitzpatrick (July 2017), 'Homelessness in the UK: who is most at risk', Housing Studies Journal, pp1-21

3 Children in low income families: local area statistics: FYE 2015 to FYE 2020 - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

7.2 Activities centred on prevention

Early prevention often starts with relevant signposting and/or housing advice/information to prevent homelessness or a threat of homelessness. The Council's website has a dedicated homeless page and as required by legislation¹ the website gives specific homelessness information providing advice on prevention, securing accommodation, the rights of the individual and how to access help.

In Walsall more than half of all households seeking homeless prevention assistance have a responsibility for dependent children, whereas households seeking homelessness relief assistance are much more likely to be a single adult, accounting 65% of presentations and the majority being male. Homelessness prevention cases typically arise as the result of either the termination of a private rented sector tenancy (31%) or family and friends no longer willing or able to accommodate them (25%). In contrast, homelessness relief cases predominately arise due to family or friends no longer being willing or able to accommodate (34%) or Domestic Abuse (17%).

In 2021/22, 75% (304) of the 406 households where the Prevention Duty ended secured accommodation, up by 11 points as a percentage share from 2019/20. Applicants in Walsall owed the Prevention Duty are more likely to have their duty ended by securing accommodation compared to their regional counterparts with the like figure sitting at 52%. As stated elsewhere there are generally two options to securing accommodation in the discharge of a Prevention Duty and in Walsall there appears to be a heavy reliance on securing alternative accommodation as opposed to enabling the household to remain in their existing home, with 91% of the 304 households above moving to a new property and only 9% enabled to remain in their existing home. This latter figure compares to 27% regionally and 30% nationally (England, excluding London). The 2020 target setting a minimum 50% of successful prevention outcomes through keeping people in their original home by 2025 is therefore welcomed. Comparing 2019/20 with 202/21, it appears that households securing accommodation with mediation declined and in any event as a preventative measure has a low profile in the borough. Mediation can often be a key component is preventing homelessness particularly when it is specialised toward young people.

Affecting both Prevention and Relief outcomes, both affordability and access to secure affordable accommodation remain a concern in the borough and will continue to impact on homelessness. Whilst the social housing stock base has remained static, the number of relets continue to decline year on year curtailing options for access. At the same time Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates have not kept up with rents in the private rental market meaning that two, three and four bedroom units in particular are nearly always out of reach affordability wise for households reliant on LHA payments.

Added to the above recent local research with private landlords has pointed to a general sector distrust and unwillingness to work with the Council and this has clearly demonstrated the need to build greater confidence and working relationships within the local private rented sector both in the context of homeless prevention and enhancing housing options. In particular from a prevention angle, a greater understanding of the local causal factors behind the ending assured shorthold tenancies and the introduction of interventions to alleviate this would be beneficial.

Observed both in the consultation and through further analysis, there appears to be added scope for improving and developing joint working with other public bodies. This could include progressing with protocols and shared working arrangements, in particular with persons leaving prisons or youth detention centres, persons leaving hospital and care leavers.

1 S.179(1) Housing Act 1996 as substituted by s. 2 Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.

7.3 Activities centred on securing accommodation

Given the current local housing market pressures outlined in the previous section and centred largely around affordability and supply, securing accommodation is likely to remain a challenge moving forward. In part to address the central issue of supply and making the best use of existing stock it would be beneficial to review both the Councils Nominations Agreement and Housing Allocations Policy as well as undertaking a review of any potential impact of age designated stock in the local social housing sector given the age profile of households who present as homeless locally.

Whilst the Council does interact with the local private rented sector there are issues of concern as noted elsewhere. Exploring incentives that could be offered to private sector landlords to encourage them to house households supported by the Council's housing service would be beneficial and the recently appointed Private Rented Sector Officer will have the remit to explore these incentives as well as building more positive relationships with the local sector. Building on this, perhaps the introduction of a social letting's agency could also be explored. Properties almost exclusively in the private sector and remaining empty for more than 6 months peaked in 2009 at 1456 units with 1012 being recorded in October 2021. Opportunities may still exist to bring these homes back into use with appropriate incentives and linked to relieving homelessness.

The Council currently has 92 temporary accommodation units in four blocks and two dispersed units. Over the last three financial years a total of 778 households were placed into temporary accommodation by the Council involving a total of 1,012 temporary accommodation placements. The difference between households and placements is almost exclusively accounted for by households entering bed and breakfast temporary accommodation in the first instance and then moving into other more settled and appropriate temporary accommodation. In 2019/20 there were 382 placements, 306 in 2020/21 and 324 in 2021/22. Of note the Council lacks a policy for procuring and allocating temporary accommodation to homeless households.

Countering the national trend bed and breakfast usage has declined over the course of the current strategy. In 2019/20 bed and breakfast accommodation accounted for 47% of temporary accommodation placements compared to 37% by the close of last year. In addition, households placed in bed and breakfast are staying in the said accommodation for a shorter median length of time (by 3 days). In 2021/22 54% (67) of placements stayed 7 days or less compared to 41% (74) in 2019/20. The numerical share involving children has also declined from a 59% (104) share in 2019/20 to a 41% (49) like share in 2021/22. Achieving the most positive outcomes for people entering temporary accommodation in Walsall should be a key priority and it is noted that a full options appraisal (including a dispersed model) will be completed by the close of 2023 to establish the best model going forward. Since 2020 it has also been a target of the authority that at any given time to have a maximum of 0.9 households per 1,000 households in Temporary Accommodation and to date this has been achieved

Comparing 2016 and 2017 when rough sleeper numbers peaked in Walsall, the Council has made significant and demonstrable impacts on tackling rough sleeping in the borough, although the latest 2022 annual rough sleeper count of 8 offers a degree of caution against counts of 4 for both 2020 and 2021. Following the cessation of new acceptances to the Housing First programme the Council successfully secured £1.8m Rough Sleeper Initiative (RSI) funding and created a dedicated Rough Sleeper Team (RST). The RST currently support 50 persons who are either rough sleeping or are at risk of rough sleeping. Enabled by the RSI funding, the RST currently operate to the Housing First ethos by providing outreach services and long-term general needs accommodation for rough sleepers which should be further enhanced by a specific service level agreement currently being developed with local Registered Providers. The Council also intends to promote the Change into Action project further by expanding it to local businesses and further utilizing the spending options attached to this funding.

Plans are now in place to submit a bid to secure accommodation for ex-offenders via Accommodation for Ex-Offenders funding and more broadly speaking will continue to utilize the funding opportunities emanating from the Government's **Ending rough sleeping for good** strategy. Given the recent release of the strategy together with wider government directives on Homelessness Strategies' outline structure consideration should be given to adopting a specific objective centred on ending rough sleeping.

To date 92 Ukraine households have been housed under the **Homes for Ukraine** scheme. At the time of finalizing this assessment 72 households were still housed through this scheme with only 5 subsequently presenting to the authority following a breakdown of relationship with the host household. However, as the outcome of the war in the Ukraine remains uncertain the authority maybe called to assist increasing numbers of households currently housed under this scheme.

The West Midlands Region like all regions of the UK forms part of the Government's dispersal and resettlement scheme. The vast majority of households supported under this programme do not have access to public funds and therefore in law do not qualify for assistance from the Council other than in certain circumstances where the household includes a dependent child or a vulnerable adult and in these circumstances a referral may be made to Social Care. Currently the number of people entering the UK dispersal and resettlement scheme is increasing and looking ahead it seems likely that the borough will receive an increasing number of presentations from former Asylum Seekers who have been given leave to remain and entitled to access public funds. These households will be assisted initially by the Housing and Welfare Team and there is a clear likelihood that increasing pressures will be placed on services via this situation. Many of these households will have specific support needs and the role and engagement of the local voluntary sector will be key.



7.4 Service user and stakeholder perspectives

This review was able to draw on a number of focus groups, surveys and stakeholder events to gather quantitative data on people's opinions and experiences of homeless services in Walsall. It was very clear from the majority who took part in the focus groups largely connected to temporary accommodation that there was a great deal of positivity around access to the service and the help and support subsequently received. The majority felt frustrated by their ability to move on to more settled secure accommodation which was largely reflective of the supply of suitable properties. Most who took part were not aware of their Personal Housing Plans. Of note there was a consistent request that all temporary accommodation facilities should have independent wifi to enable access to information and to enable better homeworking for school children.

Those who had experienced rough sleeping were also complimentary about the support they had received to enable them to maintain their tenancy. One had received a bad experience in their initial temporary accommodation placement, but all were now benefitting substantially from having a secure home of their own. The overall findings from these interviews fully justify the authority's forward-looking approach to supporting rough sleepers by continuing as far as possible with the Housing First (HF) ethos now that pilot is no longer accepting new intakes.

Like many service users', staff and wider stakeholder views and opinions were on the whole largely uniform. Looking ahead many held concerns about the impact of the current economic climate and 'cost of living crisis' and its impact on homelessness. Some were clear on the need to develop a better understanding of the roles and interactions of partnership organisations and there was also strong support to introduce more 'up-stream' prevention (e.g. school education) and to introduce more 'lived experience' into service development and provision. The support of those with No Recourse to Public Funds in need of support were also seen as a key concern again with a need to understand roles and responsibilities e.g. with Children's Services and Public Health etc

Most also acknowledged the affordability strains combined with the need to increase the provision of affordable housing, in particular larger 'family stock' and bungalows (the latter to free up existing larger family stock) and supported the suggestion of a review of age designations applied to existing stock. In addition, a need to engage more with the private rented sector was also cited in the context of increasing supply and options with a support service for landlords/incentive schemes/support for Private Rented Sector Tenants being considered. Feedback received from private landlords is discussed elsewhere.

In line with observations made at the customer focus groups, concerns were raised over the implementation and effectiveness of Personal Housing Plans together with customers being better informed more upstream to understand what is realistic in terms of housing offer and entitled so that expectations become realistic. Some also expressed a need for more provision of long-term tenancy support and regular tenancy visits (floating support) aligned with risk assessments where required with a direct referral mechanism when it is apparent that a tenancy is at risk.

From a strategic perspective, it is clear that locally Walsall enjoys a strong partnership built up between the Council and local social housing providers. This includes by providing Chairpersons for the Homeless Steering Group, whilst the largest provider has a Corporate Plan which contains actions that directly contribute to homeless prevention in Walsall.



