

STOCKPORT MBC

**Homelessness Prevention and
Rough Sleeping Strategy
2021-2024**

1. Introduction

- 1.1 All councils have a legal obligation to produce a strategy that co-ordinates work to prevent homelessness and tackle rough sleeping. This is the fourth strategy to be produced in Stockport since this requirement was introduced in 2002 and is based upon a review of homelessness within the Borough conducted during 2020 and extensive engagement with stakeholders. The Strategy covers the period from 2021-2024, aligning it with the duration of the Council's wider housing strategy.
- 1.2 While responsibility for the Strategy rests with Stockport Council, it also aims to bring together all partner agencies in the statutory and third sectors to ensure services are developed and delivered in a cohesive way. There is a focus within this iteration of the Strategy on the role of the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) and health partners in meeting the needs of people experiencing homelessness, as well as the contribution made by the third sector.
- 1.3 The strategy initially looks at the national, sub-regional and local context within which it is set and provides an overview of homelessness within the Borough. It outlines the key findings from the review of homelessness during 2020, including from engagement and consultation with stakeholders. Five key themes are then identified that form the basis of an action plan to further develop and improve services:
 - Improving access to affordable accommodation
 - The prevention and relief of homelessness
 - Improving the health of people who are homeless
 - Addressing multiple and complex needs
 - Tackling rough sleeping
- 1.4 The Action Plan outlines the key activities that will drive change, with lead agencies identified to deliver on each element.

2. National Context

- 2.1 At the start of the strategy period the national agenda is dominated by the Covid pandemic, with disruption of economic and social life unprecedented in recent times. The short-term homelessness impacts have centred around minimising rough sleeping and ensuring the safety of people in temporary accommodation, however longer-term challenges are likely to follow.
- 2.2 In addition to the projected impact upon unemployment and related inability to cover rent or mortgage payments, there is also a 'backlog' of possession actions due to restrictions during 2020/21. This makes engagement with the private rented sector such a core aspect of this strategy.
- 2.3 Existing priorities such as the Government's Rough Sleeping Strategy also remain, added to by the likely enactment of the Domestic Abuse Bill in 2021. The 2020 public sector spending round also outlined homelessness as a main departmental priority for the Ministry of Housing, Community and Local Government (MHCLG) both reinforcing a commitment to address the issue and highlighting potential funding opportunities in the years ahead.
- 2.4 The impact of the Covid pandemic on the national finances, and consequences for wider public spending are however a concern, with homelessness impacted significantly by reductions in health, community safety and welfare services.

3. Sub-regional Context

- 3.1 Homelessness has been a strong focus of the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) and formed a central element of Andy Burnham, the Greater Manchester (GM) Mayor's election manifesto. A GM wide homelessness strategy is being developed during 2021, which aims to build on strong collaborative work during the Covid crisis on accommodating several hundred rough sleepers in emergency accommodation across the city region and implementing cross borough initiatives such as the Housing First Scheme and Ethical Lettings Agency.
- 3.2 As well as offering opportunities to more effectively apply for funding and deliver projects, this GM perspective facilitates working across wider sectors such as health and social care, seeking to overcome traditional barriers to joint working. The action plan linked to this strategy outlines the aim of close working across the sub-region, maximising outcomes for the Borough and its residents.

4. Local Context

4.1 *Housing situation*

- 4.1.1 The primary underlying reason for homelessness within Stockport is the lack of affordable accommodation. While often accompanied by other social and economic issues, ranging from domestic abuse to mental illness and unemployment, it is the sheer discrepancy between demand and supply of accommodation that is the main issue.
- 4.1.2 Within the Borough there are at least 11,000 households in some form of housing need, of whom 63% cannot afford to rent or buy properties at market rates. Demand for social housing far exceeds supply, with 6,500 households on the housing register and up to 450 applications for each available council or housing association tenancy. With the numbers of households projected to rise year on year, the shortfall of affordable homes in Stockport is expected to increase by approximately 500 units per year over the course of this strategy.
- 4.1.3 Expanding the availability of affordable housing is therefore an underpinning element of this strategy, and aligns closely with the Council's 2021-2024 Housing Strategy.

4.2 *Strategic*

- 4.2.1 It is essential that this strategy is in alignment with other local plans and drivers for change, and has been developed with particular regard to:
- *The Stockport Council Plan 2020-21 – Outlining the ambitions for the Council and a relevant focus on early intervention by adult and children's services to prevent crisis developing*
 - *The Housing Strategy 2021-2024 – Key document outlining the Council's approach towards development and influencing the housing market*
 - *The Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2017-2021 – Focussing on how services collectively support people to maximise their wellbeing*
 - *The Domestic Abuse Strategy 2017-2020 – Outlining a multi-agency approach to prevention of abuse in all its forms, ensuring the skills exist to respond when it occurs and holding offenders to account.*
 - *The Safer Stockport Strategy 2018-2021 – Covering all aspects of community safety, but with a strong focus on safeguarding the most vulnerable, addressing domestic abuse and substance abuse related issues.*

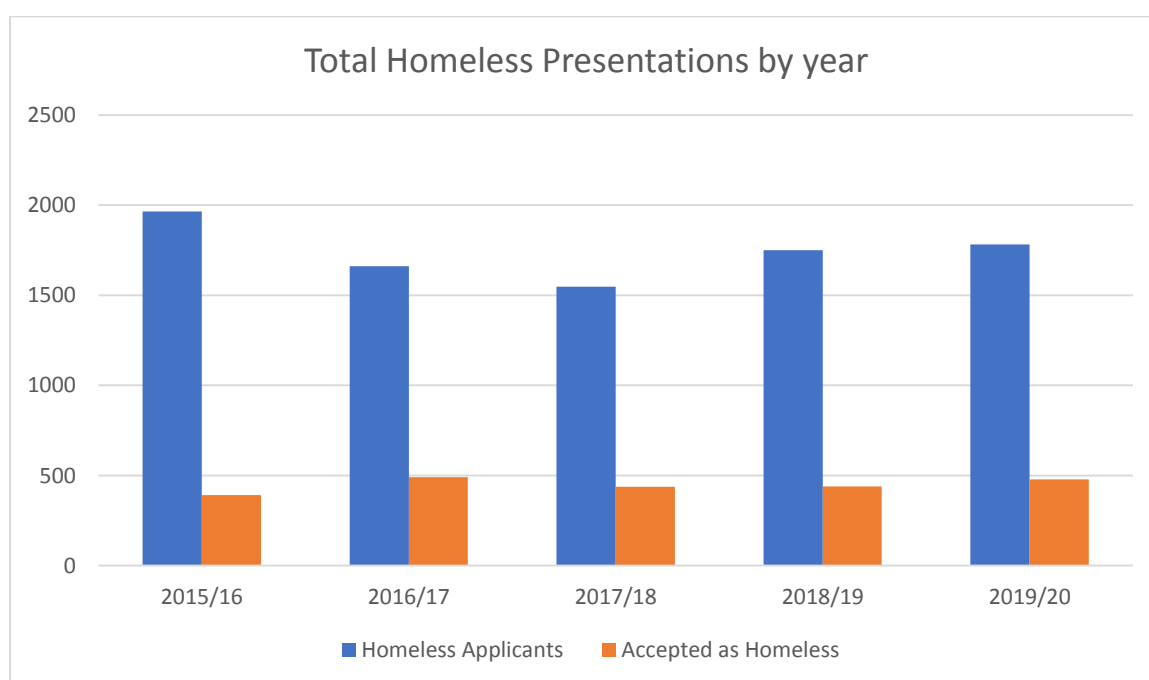
- *Corporate Parenting Strategy 2020-2023 – Outlining the approach to ensure that children looked after by the local authority and leaving care get the best outcomes in life, often with accommodation as a core factor.*
- *New ASC Operating Model – Changing the way services are delivered with a preventative focus and promoting independence*

4.2.2 A common theme of most of these areas of work is the need to work in a person-centred way to support people to maximise their potential and wellbeing, with effective multi-agency working as an essential driver of change. Exploring new ways of working and avoiding silo working is also a recurring thread, which are again key principles within this strategy.

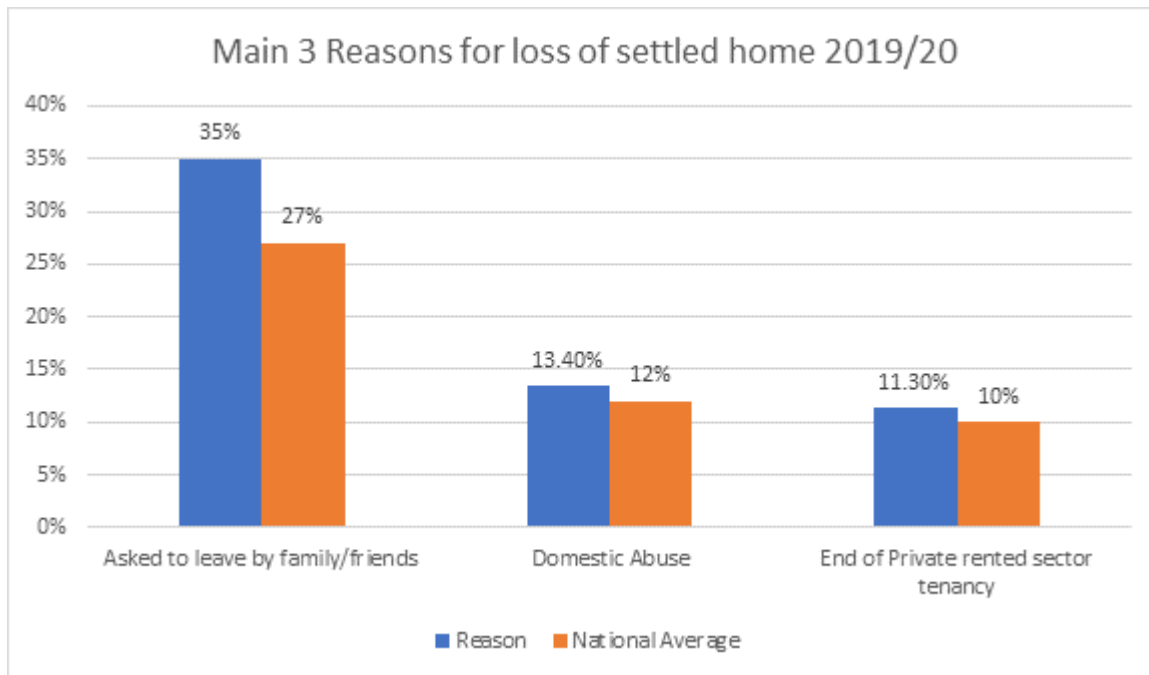
5. Overview of homelessness in Stockport

5.1 Stockport Homes Group (SHG) deliver the core homelessness service on behalf of the local authority, meeting its duties to provide advice and assistance to people in housing need within the Borough and providing temporary accommodation where required.

5.2 SHGs Housing Options Team saw 1782 households during 2019/20 who were at risk of losing accommodation. Of these, 476 were eventually found to be homeless, a similar figure to recent years with a five-year average of 448 households.



5.3 Of those becoming homeless, the main reason for loss of accommodation was being asked to leave by family and friends which made up 168 (35%) of 476 households, with domestic abuse the next highest with 64 (13.4%) and the end of private sector tenancies 54 (11.3%). These are broadly in line with national figures on the causes of homelessness, which were 27% from being asked to leave by friends and family, domestic abuse 12% and end of assured shorthold tenancies with 10%.



- 5.4 The vast majority of those becoming homeless were single people, with 264 (55%) males and 90 (19%) females. Of the 84 (18%) with children, 79(17%) were single parents and 22 (5%) couples.
- 5.5 After the introduction of the 2017 Homelessness Reduction Act in April 2018, the duties upon local authorities were extended towards assisting all those faced losing accommodation within 56 days. During 2019/20 a homeless prevention duty was accepted towards 528 households, of whom 334 (63%) were helped to find alternative accommodation before losing their home and 91 (17%) went on to become homeless.
- 5.6 Of those cases where a homelessness prevention duty was accepted, this was due to a notice being served on a private rented tenancy in 192 (33%) of instances, and as a result of being asked to leave by family and friends in 201 (34%) of cases with the remainder split equally between numerous factors from leaving prison to non-violent relationships breakdowns.
- 5.7 The number of rough sleepers was recorded as being six during a night-time count/estimate in November 2020, a 50% reduction from the 12 recorded at the same time in 2019. This was due to a range of factors such as the introduction of a dedicated outreach team funded through the Rough Sleepers Initiative (RSI) and the GM Housing First Programme.

6. Homelessness Review Main Findings

- 6.1 The review of homelessness conducted during 2020 consisted of:
- *Completing a desktop assessment of existing services*
 - *An analysis of homelessness statistics*
 - *Engagement with temporary accommodation residents*
 - *A workshop with stakeholders with a health focus*
 - *Interviews with key partner agencies in the statutory and third sector*
 - *A review of strategic priorities on a local, sub-regional and national basis*

6.2 Co-ordinated by the Council, SHG and the CCG, the key themes identified through the Review were:

- *Accessing affordable accommodation – Underpinning homelessness in various guises is the lack of suitable accommodation that people can afford to access and live in*
- *Preventing homelessness – with affordable accommodation hard to acquire, and the process of becoming homeless a stressful and disruptive process, avoiding it in the first place is a key objective*
- *Improving the health of people who are homeless – there is an extremely strong correlation between homelessness and poor health, with its knock-on effects for individuals and health services*
- *Addressing multiple and complex needs – often linked to or exacerbated by homelessness, this emerged as a key consideration from a health, community safety, social care and housing perspective*
- *Tackling rough sleeping – while a thread running through the other key themes, and constituting a relatively small number of people, ending the most visible and harmful manifestation of homelessness is a strategic and humanitarian priority*

6.3 In addition, some approaches and values were arrived at to help guide the related action plan:

- *Joint working between agencies – the complexity of the challenges these themes pose means that their resolution depends heavily upon collaborative approaches.*
- *New ways of working– relying on expecting people to fit neatly into services or joint working to succeed without challenging existing norms is unlikely to work.*
- *Person centred approaches – success depends upon engagement with people and recognising their individuality, not just delivering a service ‘to them’.*
- *Prevention and early intervention are key – not just in terms of homelessness, but avoiding health issues, family dynamics and relationships deteriorating .*
- *Staff training – few stakeholders feel their staff have all the skills and knowledge needed to achieve the best outcomes.*
- *Homelessness is not just about finding someone a property – while a central element, a holistic approach is needed.*
- *Homelessness is often not a one-off event – people often need ongoing support well into having found accommodation.*

6.4 Specific actions were then agreed with partner agencies, resulting in the plan attached at Appendix A.

7. Governance and implementation

7.1 Different lead agencies have been assigned for each action to ensure ownership and delivery of the Plan. To ensure effective oversight, provide challenge and help overcome any barriers, a homelessness forum will meet twice a year to review progress. This will consist of senior managers from the Council, SHG and CCG, and a full midpoint review of progress and an updated action plan will be published.