

**Watford Borough Council
Homelessness Review 2020**

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Introduction

Local authorities are empowered by Section 1(1) of the Homelessness Act 2002 to carry out a homelessness review in their districts and on the basis of the results of the review, formulate and publish a homelessness strategy. This document is Watford Borough Council's review of homelessness in Watford carried out in 2019. A wide-ranging review has been undertaken of the homelessness situation in the borough over the last 5 years from 2013/14 to 2018/19. It takes into account new duties for all local housing authorities under the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 and considers the likely challenges and opportunities for tackling homelessness going forward over the coming 5 years to 2025-26.

This Homelessness Review and the Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy arising from it is part of a suite of documents headed by the council's Housing Strategy.

National, regional and local context

National context

National policy

There has been significant national housing and welfare reform since 2010. This section reviews some of the key changes. Recent national level research points to how changes in government housing and welfare reform appear to have led to a rise in homelessness across the country.

Making every contact count

The Ministerial Working Group on Homelessness, a multi-government departmental approach to tackling homelessness published its findings, "Making every contact count" in 2012. The document posed 10 local challenges to local authorities as follows:

1. Adopt a corporate commitment to prevent homelessness which has buy in across all local authority services
2. Actively work in partnership with voluntary sector and other local partners to address support, education, employment and training needs
3. Offer a Housing Options prevention service, including written advice, to all clients
4. Adopt a No Second Night Out model or an effective local alternative
5. Have housing pathways agreed or in development with each key partner and client group that includes appropriate accommodation and support
6. Develop a suitable private rented sector offer for all client groups, including advice and support to both clients and landlords
7. Actively engage in preventing mortgage repossessions including through the Mortgage Rescue Scheme

8. Have a homelessness strategy which sets out a proactive approach to preventing homelessness and is reviewed annually so that it is responsive to emerging needs
9. Not place any young person aged 16 or 17 in Bed and Breakfast accommodation
10. Not place any families in Bed and Breakfast accommodation unless in an emergency and then for no longer than 6 weeks

These challenges became the Gold Standard Challenge to local authorities overseen by the National Practitioner Support Service whose key activities were to assist local authorities to improve their service delivery in the intervention in and prevention of homelessness in their areas. They did this by setting a national standard. The process of measuring local authorities against the national standard included a diagnostic peer review (DPR) and if deemed at an adequate standard, local authorities then demonstrated how they met the national standard for each of the ten challenges. “By achieving the 10 Local Challenges, local authorities are able to demonstrate that they have in place a comprehensive prevention focused service for all customers”¹. Local authorities achieving all 10 challenges are awarded Gold Standard. Watford has been through the Gold Standard DPR process and has so far achieved the Bronze Standard. In the light of the HRA17, NPSS has introduced the Self-Assessment (Homelessness Reduction Act) Portal (SAHRA), a self-assessment tool based on the revised challenges, to assist in local authorities to ensure they are compliant with HRA17 and the Homelessness Code of Guidance. LAs showing they have reached the relevant standard for each challenge will receive NPSS certification. WBC will pursue certification in the relevant standards in due course.

Housing White Paper – Fixing our Broken Housing Market

Published in February 2017, the Government’s Housing White Paper set out a number of measures for addressing in the short term, the impact of the shortage of housing and homelessness. On assisting with the shortage of homes it committed to:

- Continuing to support home ownership through Help to Buy and Starter Homes
- Continuing investment to build more affordable homes through the Affordable Homes Programme
- Making renting fair for tenants
- Continuing to crack down on empty homes and support areas most affected by second homes
- Helping the most vulnerable through “developing a sustainable and workable approach to funding supported housing in the future”²

On homelessness, the government committed to: “do more to prevent homelessness by supporting households at risk before they reach crisis point as well as reducing rough sleeping.”³ The government subsequently enacted the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 (see below) and published a Rough Sleeping Strategy (also see below). In addition, it increased the Rough Sleeping Fund from which Watford Borough Council (WBC) was successful in gaining resources. This enabled a multi-agency, multi-disciplinary Intervention Team to be set up to provide a wraparound service to local rough sleepers. This team began work in April 2017 and continued until March 2019 when the good practice established was transferred to a revised Navigator Team, also funded by MHCLG through its Rapid Rehousing Pathway. This team began its work in April 2019 for one year with the addition of

¹ NPSS website: <https://npsservice.org.uk/gold-standard/> (accessed September 2019)

² DCLG (2017), “Fixing our broken housing market”, Pg 57

³ Ibid, Pg 57

being able to spend up to £500 per person to facilitate rough sleepers' journey away from the streets. The funding also emphasised access to employment through volunteering, training and job application assistance for rough sleepers ready to move forward in this way. In January 2020, a further £413,000 in Rough Sleepers Initiative funding was secured which has enabled the Intervention/Navigator Team to continue working for a further year, together with a Street Outreach Service which began operating from July 2019, and resources for a Rough Sleepers Co-ordinator post, a Housing First post, private rented sector access funding and personal budgets.

Homelessness legislation

The biggest change in a generation in the way homelessness is tackled has been in the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 (HRA17) which came into force on 3 April 2018. Previously, all homelessness applications were dealt with in one step where the council determined whether it had a duty to house, usually when the household was already homeless. There was an emphasis on examining whether the household had done something which would lead to a decision of intentional homelessness and therefore no duty to house by the council. The HRA17 fundamentally changed this approach introducing two new duties, the prevention and relief duties, which has meant all homelessness applications involve two or three stages depending on whether a household is threatened with or actually homeless. Longer timeframes were also introduced with the prevention and relief duties lasting at least 56 days each. In summary, homelessness applications are now dealt with in the following way:

- If not yet threatened with homelessness, the prevention duty applies: the council works in partnership with the household to either help them stay where they are now or find an alternative home within 56 days
- If prevention actions fail, or the customer is already homeless when they approach the council for help, the relief duty applies. The council must provide temporary accommodation for priority households (see Glossary for definition) and another 56 days follows working in partnership with the household to find an alternative home
- If that 56 days passes and an alternative home has not been found, the council then makes a decision on whether it has a main duty to house. It is only at this point that the council examines whether the household did or did not do something that caused them to become homeless. If the household became homeless through no fault of their own, the council will owe a duty to house them and will continue the search for a suitable home. Where a household is found to be not homeless or did/not do something which made them intentionally homeless, the council will require them to find their own accommodation and vacate any emergency or temporary accommodation provided

Every applicant must have a personal housing plan setting out actions for both the applicant and the council in preventing or relieving their homelessness. The plan also sets out the support and housing needs of the household.

Later on in this review, data on the number of homeless households assisted by WBC is examined both under Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996 and since April 2018 under the HRA17.

Other duties introduced by HRA17 included the Duty to Refer which from 1 October 2018 required public authorities to refer to local housing authorities for assistance people they think are or may be homeless. To date (September 2019) WBC has 178 referrals under the Duty to Refer from the following agencies:

- JobCentrePlus

- Prisons
- Probation Services
- Health Services, eg, hospitals, mental health units, GP services
- Other local authorities

WBC has also received referrals from non-public bodies such as third sector agencies, housing associations and women’s centres.

The most referrals (56%) come via JobCentrePlus.

The HRA17 was accompanied by a completely updated [Homelessness Code of Guidance for local authorities](#).

The role and expectations of Homelessness and Housing Options teams by partners under HRA17 is generally not well understood, including local authority homelessness duties. A lot has often been expected of the Housing Team but cannot be delivered - for example, pressure to provide temporary accommodation when it is not legally appropriate to do so - which sometimes makes partnership working on resolving individual cases difficult to manage. A lot of work was done by the Housing Team during 2018-19 to inform a wide range of partners about its duties under HRA17 through meetings and updating the council’s Housing web pages. A further communications campaign is needed at regular intervals to remind existing stakeholders and inform new ones.

Rough Sleeping Strategy 2018

The government’s [Rough Sleeping Strategy](#), published in August 2018, set out its commitment to halve rough sleeping by 2022 and end it by 2027, expecting a wide range of stakeholders to work in partnership to achieve this. In December 2019, the new government announced its commitment to end rough sleeping by the end of the Parliament in 2024, a full three years earlier than previously committed⁴. £100m over 2 years was made available to support this commitment in 2018, placing this in the context of other funding to build more affordable homes. The most recent announcement to end rough sleeping earlier included a commitment to continue Flexible Homelessness Support Grant and Homelessness Reduction Grant for 2020/21 to a total of £263m.

The Rough Sleeping Strategy sets out the government’s vision: “Prevent, Intervene and Recover”.

- Prevent covers funding for pilots aimed at ex-offenders and care leavers, reviewing legislation to stop discrimination against rough sleepers, getting a better understanding of rough sleeping and particularly the needs of LGBT individuals and victims of modern slavery, looking at affordability within the private rented sector
- Intervene sets out funding and measures to assist rough sleepers off the streets
- Recovery looks at funding and pathways into settled housing for rough sleepers

WBC has been successful in securing funding under the Intervention aspect of the Strategy, discussed later on in this review.

⁴ MHCLG (23/12/2019) Prime Minister pledges new action to eliminate homelessness and rough sleeping, Press release Accessed: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/prime-minister-pledges-new-action-to-eliminate-homelessness-and-rough-sleeping>. 11/1/2020

Health and homelessness

Public Health England, in a September 2019 blog, Health Matters⁵, summarised the issues facing rough sleepers in England:

- the scale rough sleeping had increased by 165% since 2010,
- 84% of rough sleepers were men, 14% were women
- 80% were aged over 25 years
- The average age of death of rough sleepers was 44 years for men and 42 for women compared to 76 years for men and 81 years for women in the general population
- Half of all deaths were due to three factors:
 - 40% were due to accidents, including drug poisoning
 - 13% were due to suicide
 - 9% were due to liver disease
- In terms of health issues:
 - 50% had mental health needs with depression and anxiety and panic disorder being twice as high as in the general population
 - 41% had substance-misuse issues
 - 42% had alcohol misuse issues
- Many suffered with two or more of the above health issues as well as being homeless
- The poorer health outcomes for homeless people related to:
 - Exposure to poor living conditions
 - Difficulty maintaining personal hygiene
 - Poor diet
 - High levels of stress
 - Drug and alcohol dependence

Austerity

Welfare Reform

A wide range of changes to the welfare benefits system began through the implementation of the Pensions Act 2011 and the Welfare Reform Act 2012. These have included:

- **Changing the state pension age for everyone.** In November 2018, it was 65 for both men and women. From then onwards state pension age increases gradually until age 67 if someone is retiring in 2028.

⁵ <https://publichealthmatters.blog.gov.uk/2019/09/30/health-matters-rough-sleeping/>

- Introducing a cap on the total amount of benefits that working age households could receive, commonly known as the “**benefit cap**”. In September 2013, the benefit cap was set at £500 per week (£26,000 pa) for a family and £350 per week (£18,200 pa) for a single person with no children. The cap operated by cutting financial assistance with rents. In November 2016, the cap was lowered and a differential approach taken with the benefit cap for families in London lowered to £23,000 per year and to £15,410 for single people. Outside London the benefit cap was reduced to £20,000 per year and £13,400 pa for single people. The caps have not been updated since then.
- Council Tax Support was replaced with **Council Tax Benefit** and its administration given to local authorities. All local authorities were required to devise and consult on their own Council Tax Benefit scheme whilst at the same dealing with a 10% reduction in funding. Pensioners were not affected by this measure.
- Introduction of the **Spare Room Subsidy**, known as the “bedroom tax” in April 2013. Affecting working age households living in the social rented sector, this measure reduced Housing Benefit entitlement for social rented sector tenants by 14% for one spare bedroom and 25% for two or more spare bedrooms. There is a lack of housing for tenants affected by the benefit cap to move to. The measure has increased rent arrears for social rented landlords and put pressure on local authority Discretionary Housing Payments budgets to assist tenants in this situation.
- Replacing the Disability Living Allowance (DLA) with the **Personal Independence Payment (PIP)** for disabled people of working age. PIP criteria are far stricter than DLA and many claimants lost their DLA income. PIP was expected to save the DWP £3bn annually from 2018-19⁶.
- Income-related **Employment Support Allowance**, paid to people with a health condition or illness that prevented them from working was replaced with a “limited capability for work element as part of Universal Credit. The Department for Work and Pensions’ (DWP) own data showed that 49% “of ESA claimants’ primary condition related to mental health”⁷. Mental ill health is a key cause of homelessness.
- **Universal Credit (UC)**, an online only application, amalgamating six means-tested benefits⁸ into a single means tested payment for working-age families, paid 5 weeks after application (but often more), paid monthly in arrears, as well as being combined with the benefit cap, has caused significant financial distress to thousands of families. It is linked to a significant increase in use of food banks and places vulnerable people at particular disadvantage. The two child policy introduced for all new UC claims after February 2019 places households with three or more children at particular financial risk and hardship. A number of exemptions apply including where a child was born before 6 April 2017, or the DWP accepts a third child was conceived as a result of rape or arose as part of a twin or triplet birth. In its examination of the implementation of Universal Credit, the National Audit Office concluded the DWP “does not have a realistic alternative but to continue (implementation) ... It would be both complex and expensive to revert to legacy benefits at this stage”⁹ (our brackets). Full Universal Credit service for new UC claimants or those whose circumstances changed (eg, they moved home) came to Watford in December 2017 and January 2018. The remaining claimants of legacy benefits will be moved to Universal Credit in a “managed migration”

⁶ Equality and Human Rights Commission, “The impact of welfare reform and welfare-to-work programmes: an evidence review” March 2018, Pg 65

⁷ Ibid, Pg 73.

⁸ The legacy benefits are: income support, income-based jobseekers allowance, income-related employment and support allowance, housing benefit, child tax credit and working tax credit

⁹ National Audit Office, “Rolling out Universal Credit”, June 2018, Pg 7

process set to last till 2024. There is ample evidence that the structure of Universal Credit causes significant debt for most households who have to rely on it. A key outcome of this is that housing associations and private landlords alike see UC claimants as a risk and will not take them on as tenants. This has resulted in the housing options being considerably limited for households dependent on UC.

- **Local Housing Allowance (LHA)** has been reduced severely. It was initially designed to cover the bottom 50% of market rents but in 2011 this was then reduced to 30%. In 2013, LHA rates stopped being kept in line with market rents and have been frozen for 4 years since 2016. The result for Watford is less than a handful of homes per week being advertised at LHA levels. The government announced that the freeze on LHA will stop and levels increased by CPI from April 2020. Whilst this is welcomed, in practice it will make little difference as rates will only be increased by CPI¹⁰, an average of £10 per month per household. The section later on in this review on Affordable Housing Supply will explore the impact of LHA rates further.

Cuts in welfare benefits have also included Child Benefit, tapers to Universal Credits as a result of income earned, additional changes to tax credits, and freezing benefits from 2016/17 for 4 years. Research on the impact of welfare reform looked at losses to “places and people” in each local authority area in England, Wales and Scotland¹¹. The research calculated that the cumulative loss from welfare reform since 2010 is “£27bn a year – equivalent to £690 a year for every adult of working age”.¹² For Watford, the total anticipated loss by 2020/21 from welfare reform is estimated to be £37m per year or £580 per working age adult per year. This is a considerable impact on the local economy as well as to individual households.

Cuts to Local authority expenditure

Since 2010 local authorities have faced a 40% cut in central government funding. Although this has been offset to a certain degree by raising funds through council tax revenue, business rates or commercial investments, most local authorities have reduced staffing and services in response. WBC has responded to the challenge through its Watford 2020 programme the vision for which is “Watford in 2020 will be a customer-focused, digitally-enabled, commercially-minded council”. The council has undertaken a far-reaching programme of culture and service delivery change supported by a completely updated IT infrastructure.

The council has received some New Burdens funding for implementing the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, but as for all local authorities this was significantly less than was needed. The council also receives Homelessness Grant, Flexible Homelessness Support Grant and Discretionary Housing Payment funding. Without doubt, these are welcome pots of funding to help local authorities tackle and prevent homelessness but they are not enough, not permanent and cannot be relied upon. This makes it difficult to put long-term, sustainable initiatives in place.

Lastly, the government has launched a series of funding initiatives in recent years aimed at tackling rough sleeping. Its approach, however, has been to ask local authorities to bid for funding, often with short deadlines, to be constantly innovative and to show how the activities funded would be sustained into the future. Watford has been successful in gaining £1,129,698.00 in MHCLG funding

¹⁰ Consumer Price Index

¹¹ Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research, “The uneven impact of welfare reform – the financial losses to places and people”, 2016

¹²Ibid, Pg 3.

covering the period 2017/18 to 2020/21 to fund activities around combatting rough sleeping. However, a period of consolidation is now required rather than successive bidding rounds and an acceptance that when funding ends, it is quite likely any initiative that was funded will end too whether the problem of rough sleeping has been solved or not.

Cuts to TA expenditure

Until 1 April 2017 the Department for Work and Pensions had paid local authorities a management fee for each unit of temporary accommodation in use at a rate equivalent to 90% of the relevant Local Housing Allowance plus £60. This was known as the TA subsidy or management fee. This arrangement was replaced by a fixed Flexible Homelessness Support Grant (FSG) provided by MHCLG, initially for two years but has been extended by a further year so far. The purpose of FSG was to give freedom for local authorities to fund a range of homelessness prevention activities.

The table below shows the outcome of this change in subsidy. The additional £60 per unit that had been paid is removed and the underpayment of benefit in comparison with the LHA rate.

Property size	Current LHA rate per week	TA subsidy pre 1/4/17 pw	TA subsidy (through FSG) after 1/4/17 pw	Loss of income pw
1 bed	£165	£195.00	£135.00	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £60 loss per unit pw compared with the pre-04/17 subsidy rate • £30 loss per unit pw compared with the current local LHA rate
2 bed	£208.69	£236.54	£176.54	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £60 loss per unit pw compared with the pre-04/17 subsidy rate • £31.46 loss per unit pw compared with the local LHA rate
3 bed	£262.26	£278.08	£218.08	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £60 per unit pw compared with subsidy rate • £44.18 loss per unit pw compared with the local LHA rate

The Council reduced rents in self-contained temporary accommodation units it owned which in turn reduced income coming in to help fund the homelessness service. Despite negotiation, neither private landlords nor registered providers (housing associations), from whom temporary accommodation units had been procured, reduced their rents. This meant these rents had to be topped up by FSG, meant to fund homelessness prevention activities.

In addition to reducing the amount available for homelessness prevention activities, the reduction in TA subsidy has made the procurement and funding of new or replacement self-contained temporary accommodation much harder.

Rising homelessness

National data shows that homelessness has been increasing since 2010; as noted above, there has been an increase in rough sleeping of 165% since 2010. The number of homeless households in temporary accommodation has also been steadily increasing each year since 2011 standing at 83,700 as at December 2018. London households make up two thirds (68%) of all households in England in temporary accommodation¹³. The use of bed and breakfast (B&B) accommodation for households with children for more than six weeks is unlawful and is never acceptable for young single people aged 16 or 17. However, the use of B&B is becoming increasingly common with approximately 20 16/17 year olds in B&B at December 2018 and 2,420 households with children or expected children of which 810 had been accommodated in B&B for more than six weeks.

Homes for Cathy – the role of Housing Associations in preventing and relieving homelessness

“Homes for Cathy” comprises a group of housing associations set up in the 1960/70s to mark the 50th anniversary of the drama documentary “Cathy Come Home” aired on BBC TV in November 1966. The aims for Homes for Cathy included:

- Highlighting the history of housing associations and their original aims and culture.
- Raising awareness about continuing homelessness
- Promoting the need for more housing at a price people can afford¹⁴

Housing associations involved signed up to a number of commitments, known as the Cathy Commitments, which are:

1. To contribute to the development and execution of local authority homelessness strategies.
2. To operate flexible allocations and eligibility policies which allow individual applicants’ unique sets of circumstances and housing histories to be considered.
3. To offer constructive solutions to applicants who aren’t deemed eligible for an offer of a home.
4. To not make homeless any tenant seeking to prevent their homelessness (as defined in the Crisis plan).
5. To commit to meeting the needs of vulnerable tenant groups.
6. To work in partnership to provide a range of affordable housing options which meet the needs of all homeless people in their local communities.
7. To ensure that properties offered to homeless people are ready to move into.
8. To contribute to ending migrant homelessness in the areas housing associations operate.
9. To lobby, challenge and inspire others to support ending homelessness

Housing associations with homes in Watford who have signed up to the Cathy Commitments are:

- Catalyst HA
- Hightown HA
- Origin Housing

¹³ Wilson W. & Barton C., (2019), “Briefing Paper: Households in temporary accommodation (England), House of Commons Library, Pg 9

¹⁴ Bogle, D., (xxxx), Homes for Cathy, Hightown Housing Association

- Watford Community Housing

Regional Context

WBC operates in a two tier local authority setting with some key services run by Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) which are relevant to WBC in delivering its homelessness services.

Strategies and documents relevant to the relationship between Watford and HCC in delivering homelessness services include:

- Health and Well-being Strategy
- Joint Strategic Needs Assessment
- Joint Housing Protocol
- Housing-related Support

In its 2016-2021 **Health and Well-being Strategy**¹⁵, one area of action HCC includes is to “Seek to tackle homelessness and housing issues and their underlying causes”. This is included under “Living and Working Well”, one of its four high level priorities which also includes Starting Well, Developing Well and Ageing Well. Living and Working Well has two key objectives:

- Good mental health and well-being for working age adults (where homelessness and housing issues is set) and
- Healthy lifestyles for working age adults.

The Strategy also lists “housing and the living environment” as one of six social determinants influencing individuals health and well-being.

Intrinsically linked to the Health and Wellbeing Strategy is HCC’s **Joint Needs Strategic Assessment** (JSNA) which looks at the health and social care needs of Hertfordshire’s population and helps public bodies decide what type of local services to commission¹⁶. As set out above, housing and the living environment is a key issue for health and wellbeing. The JSNA paper on “Housing Quality and Health”¹⁷ sets out the cost of poor housing to the NHS but also states that information is patchy with four of the 10 district authorities using the Building Research Establishment’s Housing Health Cost Calculator to measure housing quality, of which one is Watford. Data, mostly from Watford, shows the five most prevalent health and housing safety issues in the private housing sector are excess cold, fire, damp and mould, electrical hazards and falling on stairs. Any of these issues can lead to the homelessness of a household if not tackled. Tackling cold homes occupied by people vulnerable to ill health and improving reach into the private rented sector is stated as a priority for the JSNA¹⁸. A recent update of the JSNA covering housing-relating support funding, finds that “Local HRS¹⁹

¹⁵ Hertfordshire County Council, “Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2016-2020”, June 2016, Pg 4

¹⁶ HCC, “What is the JSNA”, <https://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/microsites/jsna/what-is-the-joint-strategic-needs-assessment.aspx> (accessed September 2019)

¹⁷ HCC, JSNA: Housing Quality & Health, May 2017, <https://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/microsites/jsna/jsna-documents/housing-quality-health-jsna-final-draft-july2017.pdf> (accessed September 2019)

¹⁸ Ibid, Pg 12

¹⁹ HRS: housing related support

services are currently fragmented across the county and the need for a more consistent approach to this provision with clear pathways is widely recognised by stakeholders.”²⁰

WBC works with HCC’s Adults and Children’s Services through a **joint housing protocol** covering arrangements for dealing with:

- Homeless 16 and 17 year olds
- Care Leavers
- Homeless households found intentionally homeless or with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF)

The joint protocol is currently being reviewed and revised with launch of the new edition likely in 2020.

Operating from 1 October 2019, HCC has set up a Families First Homeless Prevention Team which is a Children’s Services Team aimed at helping families who are threatened with or are actually homeless. The aims of the team are:

- “A reduction in the number of intentionally homeless families requiring support from Children’s Services by identifying and supporting families at the earliest opportunity
- A reduction in Children’s Services spend per intentionally homeless family by developing plans to ensure families become self-sustaining and are not dependant on the local authority.”²¹

The team will work with families with children aged 0-18 (or up to 25 years if the child has a special educational need or disability) where a Hertfordshire district or borough council has made or is about to make an intentionally homeless decision and so are at risk of becoming homeless. It will use the Families First model which recognises additional support needs that may contribute to the risk of homelessness such as help with reducing alcohol/drug use, mental and physical health problems, parenting, domestic abuse, school-related issues. The support will also include offering employment and training support, help with addressing money and debt problems, benefits advice, help with liaising with housing providers including through the personal housing plan process.

HCC uses **housing related support** (HRS) funding to commission local voluntary sector partners in the county in delivering support services to rough sleepers and single homeless people with complex needs. There are currently three voluntary agencies in Watford in receipt of HRS funding. After cutting HRS to these agencies by 15% in January 2017, HCC have recently embarked on a comprehensive review of HRS funding with a view to consulting on a draft HRS strategy for use of this funding and agreeing a final version in late 2019. See also JSNA above.

Local Context

Local context – introduction

²⁰ Hertfordshire Public Health (2019), “JSNA Briefing – Housing-related Support – Adults with a Complexity of Needs”, Pg 4

²¹ Herts County Council “New Families First Homeless Prevention Team”, <https://www.hertfordshirefamiliesfirst.org.uk/september-2019/current-news/new-families-first-homeless-prevention-team> (accessed October 2019)

Watford is located in Hertfordshire, 17 miles north west of central London and is adjacent to the Greater London Area. The borough has an area of 2,142 hectares (8.3 square miles) and is the only non-metropolitan borough wholly within the M25. The borough is the largest urban area in South West Hertfordshire and has the highest population density. It also has a strong concentration of services and facilities with considerable employment, retail and leisure opportunities. Formerly a market town, the settlement has grown significantly over time with its core being Watford town centre.

Watford is strongly influenced by London, which provides good access to services and facilities and opportunities for employment. However, coinciding with these benefits are increased growth pressures on the borough that have not been encountered to such an extent in the past. These pressures are the fundamental challenges facing the borough in the years ahead. The Local Plan, in conjunction with other corporate strategies will seek to guide this new development to meet the needs of the community and achieve sustainable development.

Originally a market town known for traditional industries including printing and brewing, Watford has evolved to become an important regional centre for retail, leisure and business. The town centre provides a diverse array of services and facilities that serve the wider South West Hertfordshire and supports a significant amount of employment. The wider town centre area contains a mix of chain retailers and private operators, creating a varied mix of retail and restaurant provision to meet local demand. This is complemented with a healthy number of new businesses across the borough. There is also a strong in-out commuting relationship with London. Watford has good access to strategic transport routes, rail and road. WBC has ambitions to increase use of buses and cycling within the borough.

Population

The current population of Watford is 96,700 (mid-2017 estimate) and is estimated to grow by 16% by 2026. From a gender perspective, there are estimated to be fractionally more females than male residents, although this difference is not significant.

The population density for Watford is circa 4,500 people per square kilometre. This makes it one of the most densely populated district areas in England and Wales. However, in comparison with some metropolitan boroughs, particularly those in and around the outskirts of London, the density is relatively low.

Ward Level Populations

Watford Ward	2016
Callowland	8,075
Central	9,201
Holywell	8,542
Leggatts	7,864
Meriden	7,944
Nascot	8,779
Oxhey	6,734
Park	8,731
Stanborough	7,488
Tudor	6,894
Vicarage	8,777
Woodside	7,646

**This is ONS experimental data (Ward Level Mid-Year Populations Estimates (experimental), Mid-2019)*

Households

The average household size in Watford is 2.45. This is average for the region is 2.43.

Number of Households

The ONS data, says that there were 36,681 households in Watford at the time of the Census; and as of 31 January 2019 the figure was 39,052.

Household Size

- The 2014 projections estimate that between 2014 and 2039:
- Watford's average household size will decrease from 2.45 to 2.33
- Hertfordshire's average household size will decrease from 2.42 to 2.29
- England's average household size will decrease from 2.35 to 2.21

Household Composition

From the 2014 projections, one person households see the biggest increase in household growth in Watford, representing 44% of the total household growth. Households with dependent children see the next biggest rise, with 35% of household growth. Couples with other adults make up 9% and other (multi-person adult) households make up 7% and finally, couple households (without children or other adults) make up the remaining 6% of all estimated growth.

Ethnicity

Watford has a very diverse population, more so than the rest of Hertfordshire. For Watford, the Census 2011 shows the following breakdown in terms of ethnicity:

- White British (61.9%)
- White Other (7.7%)
- Pakistani (6.7%)
- Indian (5.5%)
- Other Asian (4.4%)

Religion / Belief

The religious breakdown in the Census 2011 of the main religions in Watford are:

- Christian (54.1%)
- Muslim (9.8%)
- Hindu (4.8%)
- No religion stated (21.4%)

Disability / Health

Around 85% of the population of Watford state that they have 'good health' and just under 14% record a disability. We do not have details as to what these disabilities are but they will include a wide range of physical and mental health disabilities or impairment.

The 2018 NHS Health Profile's summary conclusion is that the health of people in Watford is 'varied' compared with the England average. About 12% (2,300) of children live in low income families – this

is an improvement on 2016 (14% / 2,700). Life expectancy for both men and women is similar to the England average, although life expectancy is 6.6 years lower for men and 3.4 years lower for women in the most deprived areas of Watford than in the least deprived areas.

The profile also shows that physically active adults (19 years +) is 68% for Watford compared to the England average of 66%. There has been a decrease from the 2017 profile in the percentage of adults classified as overweight / having excess weight from 60% to 55%, which is better than the England average of 61%. The percentage of obese children in Year 6 (aged 10-11) at 21% is significantly worse than in the 2017 Health Profile; the England average is 20%. This is an area that the borough will need to track over the next year.

Watford MOSAIC Profile

Our MOSAIC²² profiling of the borough enhances our understanding of our population and provides valuable context for our decision making as well as underpinning our communications and engagement.

MOSAIC GROUP	Group/Type Name	MOSAIC DESCRIPTION	Number of households in Watford	Watford Percentage	UK Percentage
1 J40	Career Builders	Singles and couples in their 20s and 30s progressing in their field of work from commutable properties	4508	11.69%	1.59%
2 J44	Flexible Workforce	Young renters ready to move to follow worthwhile incomes from service sector jobs	3123	8.10%	1.26%
3 D14	Cafés and Catchments	Affluent families with growing children living in upmarket housing in city environs	2837	7.35%	1.31%
4 I36	Cultural Comfort	Thriving families with good incomes in multi-cultural urban communities	2794	7.24%	1.37%
5 H35	Primary Ambitions	Forward-thinking younger families who sought affordable homes in good suburbs which they may now be out-growing	2391	6.20%	1.96%

*Watford MOISAIC Profile (2016)

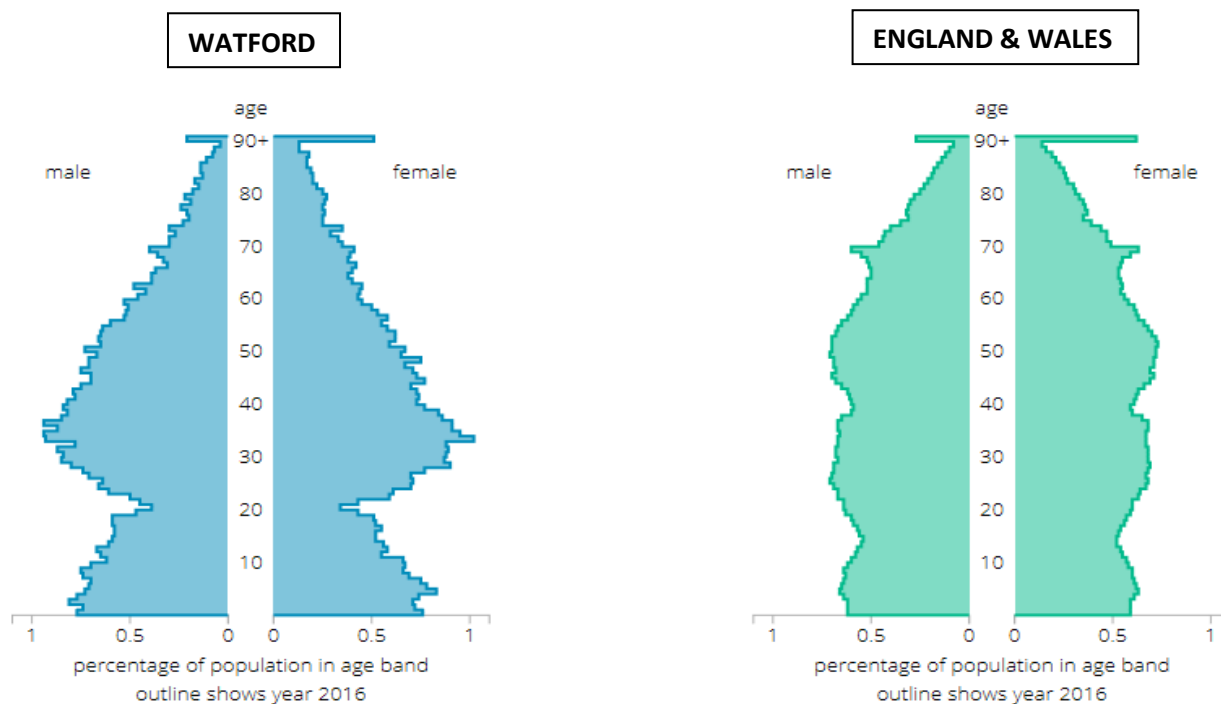
Age

The largest populations by age band in Watford are:

- 25-44 (31,700)
- 45-59 (18,100)

The numbers in each successive age-band fall progressively until there are estimated to be 6,000 who are 75+. We know that around 74,000 residents are of voting age in Watford and that the borough has a younger profile than the rest of England and Wales.

²² MOSIAC is a consumer classification system using census and other data about local populations which is delivered by Experian Information Solutions.



Deprivation

The Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) 2019 published in October shows that Watford ranks 195 out of 317 local authorities in England. Although not completely comparable, Watford ranked 192 in the IMD 2015. On this measure, Watford has become slightly less deprived in the last four years. Watford has no LSOAs²³ which are in the top 10% of most deprived. The most deprived LSOAs in Watford are situated in Hollywell (two LSOAs) and Meriden (one LSOA) where levels of deprivation have remained the same in comparison with 2015, being within the top 30% most deprived.

Housing tenure in Watford over time

Changes in dwelling stock by tenure in Watford since the last census in 2011 are shown in the table²⁴ below:

Year	Local Authority (incl. owned by other LAs)	Registered Providers of Social Housing	Other public sector	Private sector	Total
2018	30	6500	50	33330 ²⁵	39910 ²⁶
2017	30	6400	50	33120	39600
2016	30	6420	50	32750	39250
2015	30	6470	50	32450	39010
2014	30	6490	50	32190	38760

²³ Local Super Output Areas are geographic areas containing an average population of 1500 people or 650 households and do not align with ward boundaries. Ward boundaries tend to change and vary greatly in size whereas LSOAs tend to be consistent in size over time

²⁴ Source: MHCLG, Table 100 Dwelling stock: Number of Dwellings by Tenure and district: England – 2011-2018;

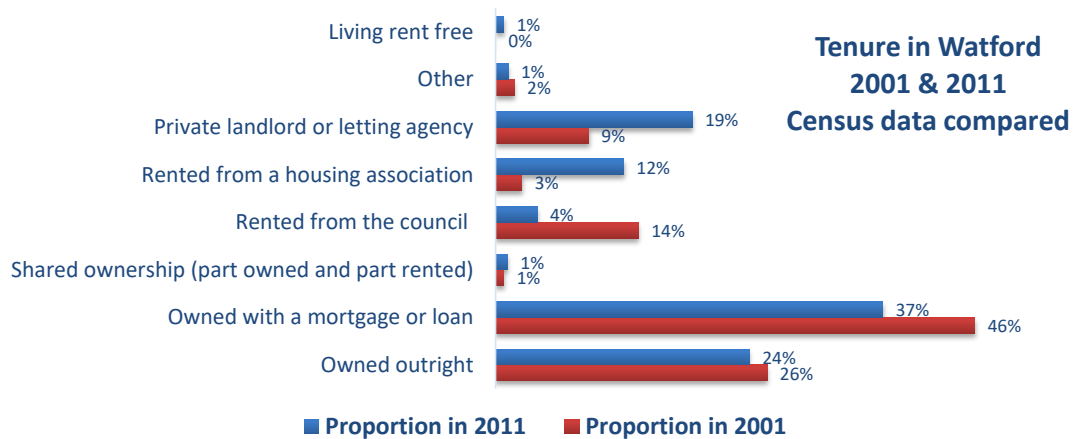
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/814669/LT_100.xls (accessed October 2019)

²⁵ 2018 data is estimated

²⁶ 2018 data is estimated

Year	Local Authority (incl. owned by other LAs)	Registered Providers of Social Housing	Other public sector	Private sector	Total
2013	20	6460	50	31820	38360
2012	20	6320	50	31430	37820
2011	59	6164	54	31130	37400

Private sector data here includes both private rented and owner occupied homes. Proportionately over the period 2011 to 2018, the number of homes owned by social housing providers has remained the same at around 16%/17% of all homes in the borough, whilst the number of private sector homes has increased slightly from 83% of all homes in 2011 to 84% of all homes in 2018. More detail about the private sector is needed. Only census data breaks tenure down into more detail. The chart below compares proportions of housing tenure in the census data for 2001 and 2011:



As can be seen, the main differences between the 2001 and 2011 census data are that there is a:

- 10% increase in the number of private rented homes (private landlord or letting agency);
- 11% reduction in owner-occupation (ie, homes owned with a mortgage or loan reduced by 9% and a 2% decrease in the number of homes owned outright);
- 10% reduction in the number of homes owned by the council and an increase of 9% in housing association homes; the council passed on ownership of its housing stock to Watford Community Housing in 2007. However, some 4% of householders in 2011 continued to think they were council tenants.

The private rented sector is estimated to have increased by a further 9% by 2017 making the private rented sector 28% of all homes in Watford²⁷. Given the patterns in the census data, it is likely that over the years since the 2011 census, the rise in the private rented sector will have been matched by a similar reduction in the owner-occupied sector.

Affordability of housing in Watford will be examined later on in this review.

²⁷ WBC, (2018), Private Sector Renewal Policy, Pg 4

Draft Local Plan Vision

The vision for Watford contained in WBC's draft Local Plan states that "In 2036 Watford will continue to be a welcoming and vibrant place, where people enjoy a high quality of life in a place that is attractive for everyone to visit and partake in recreational activities. Sustainable development will have been delivered through quality development schemes that have considered how different parts of the borough work together to affect the whole area including the economic, environmental and social aspects of everyday life. The town will have been adaptable during a period of change, supporting innovative approaches to development that benefit the town and the South West Hertfordshire area. Residents will be able to live in the types of housing they need and will have access to education and employment opportunities. The environment will have been protected for the benefit of future generations and semi-natural areas of green infrastructure will have been enhanced for the benefit of ecology and wildlife."²⁸

Housing Strategy

WBC's Housing Strategy is being revised and will be consulted on in 2020. In preparation for this, Members have agreed a vision for housing in the borough: "Watford is a town where people can access a choice of affordable and good quality homes in neighbourhoods that are thriving, attractive and inclusive places to live and enable residents to build sustainable, safe and healthy communities. The Strategy will cover the key themes of:

- Growth in housing supply
- Best use of existing homes
- Preventing homelessness
- Building sustainable neighbourhoods and communities
- Quality of homes
- Choice and affordability
- Meeting specific housing needs

Tenancy Strategy

WBC is currently revising its Tenancy Strategy which sets out set out the Council's requirements and expectations of registered providers operating within the Watford district with regards to the types of tenancies granted and provisions within them to households taking up their tenancies. WBC does not have a housing stock of its own and relies heavily on partner housing associations to assist applicants on its Housing Register by supplying vacant homes at social and affordable rents. The council will be consulting on its revised Tenancy Strategy during 2020.

Nominations Policy

As the council does not have its own stock, it depends on being able to nominate Housing Register applicants to vacant homes offered to it by housing associations. It therefore has a Nominations Policy rather than an Allocations Policy which explains how the council will accept, prioritise and nominate Housing Register applicants. The current Nominations Policy has been in force since August 2015. All Nominations (Allocations) policies need review from time to time to ensure they continue to be fit for purpose. Although the council ensured the current Nominations Policy complied with changes needed arising from the Homelessness Reduction Act (ie, extending reasonable preference to homeless applicants to which it owed a Prevention or Relief Duty), further changes were needed. Consequently the council has recently consulted on a number of proposed changes which are:

²⁸ Watford Borough Council (2019), "First Draft Watford Local Plan 2020-2036", Pg 17

- Reducing the number of bands from five to three
- Reducing the number of offers for non-homeless applicants per year from three to two
- Amend the bedroom entitlement so that it aligns with the housing benefit/local housing allowance bedroom entitlement
- Introduce quotas to share the limited supply of housing amongst different groups of Housing Register applicants which are reviewed annually
- Change the residence requirement from being required to live in Watford for the last five out of 6 years to 5 out of 7 years

Consultation closed at the end of September 2019. Initial consultation analysis shows most respondents were in favour of the proposals. The revised Nominations Policy is planned to come into force in 2021.

Temporary Accommodation Placement Policy

This document sets out Watford Council's policy for the placement of households in temporary accommodation, both inside and outside the Borough. It covers both interim placements made under Section 188 Housing Act 1996 ("HA96"), while homelessness enquiries are undertaken, and longer term temporary accommodation placements for households accepted as homeless under Section 193 HA96. It requires updating as a result of the HRA17 coming into force in April 2018.

Private Rented Sector Discharge Policy

The Localism Act 2011 amended the 1996 Housing Act providing new powers for local authorities to use suitable private rented offers of housing to discharge (bring to an end) the main homelessness duty without requiring the applicant's consent. It applied to all new homeless applications from 9 November 2012. Regulations, subsequent case law and the statutory homelessness code of guidance²⁹ require local authorities to consider a number of factors in assessing the suitability of prospective private rented sector offers of accommodation.

The policy sets out that all homeless applicants can be considered for a suitable private rented offer whether they meet the residence connection (see above) set out in the Nominations Policy or not. Landlords are required to offer an assured shorthold tenancy of at least 12 months. In addition the issue of suitability includes the following factors:

- If an offer is outside Watford, the distance from the town and ease of transport connection
- Any significant disruption to employment, caring responsibilities or education for the household
- Accessibility to medical facilities and other support essential to the well-being of the household
- Accessibility to local services, amenities and transport
- The property is in reasonable condition
- Electrical equipment safety regulations are met
- Fire safety and carbon monoxide poisoning precautions are met
- Current gas safety certificates are in place
- A valid energy performance certificate is in place
- A HMO licence is in place where required
- An adequate Assured Shorthold tenancy agreement is in place

²⁹ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/homelessness-code-of-guidance-for-local-authorities/chapter-17-suitability-of-accommodation>

- The private rented home being considered has an adequate number of bedrooms for the households needs

Homeless applicants have the right to have the suitability of the private rented sector offer reviewed.

Information on the number of homeless household housed in the private rented sector is set out in the section later on in this document: [Affordable Housing Supply for homeless households and households in general](#).

Private Sector Renewal Policy

The council's Private Sector Renewal Policy has an important role in maintaining standards of private sector housing in the borough, and is a key resource for households facing or actually homeless. There has been a significant growth in the private rented sector in Watford from 9% of the total stock in 2001 to 28% in 2017.³⁰ Compared to the owner occupied sector in Watford, the results of a Building Research Establishment stock modelling exercise reveal higher levels of disrepair, fuel poverty (low income, high cost of fuel) and low income in the private rented sector than in the owner occupied sector, whilst Category 1 hazards are proportionately similar³¹, see the table below outlining these findings:

Indicator		Private sector stock				Social stock	
		Owner occupied		Private rented			
		No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
No. of dwellings		21,747	-	11,040	-	6,370	-
HHSRS category 1 hazards	All hazards	3,306	15%	1,749	16%	484	8%
	Excess cold	423	2%	337	3%	64	1%
	Fall hazards	2,588	12%	1,267	11%	271	4%
Disrepair		592	3%	527	5%	96	2%
Fuel poverty (10%)		1,535	7%	937	8%	326	5%
Fuel poverty (Low Income High Costs)		1,058	5%	1,151	10%	270	4%
Low income households		1,633	8%	1,490	13%	3,826	60%

Watford has an estimated 1,600 houses in multiple occupation (HMOs), higher than the national average but not unexpected given the town's close proximity to London and the high cost of housing locally. The proportion of households on low income and in fuel poverty are considerably higher in HMOs than in the rest of the private rented sector³².

In line with HCC's JSNA findings, WBC's Private Sector Renewal Policy emphasises the link between poor housing and poor health. As a result, the aim of the policy is "to improve and maintain private sector housing standards in Watford, to promote health, wellbeing and sustainability in which available resources are targeted at those most in need." The policy goes on to say that the basis for prioritising available resources is "to remove or reduce housing related defects that are detrimental to an occupant's health, in terms of physical and mental wellbeing." The policy's key priorities for available financial assistance are to:

1. Improve the health and wellbeing of the borough's residents through housing improvement with a focus on those most in need (vulnerable households)³³

³⁰ WBC, (2018), Private Sector Renewal Policy, Pg 4

³¹ Ibid, Pg 12

³² Ibid, Pg 4

³³ defined as those reliant on welfare benefits and on incomes below £15,860 pa

2. Improve the energy efficiency of the borough's housing
3. Enforcement of housing standards in the rented sector
4. Provision of Disabled Facilities Grants (and a supported service to delivery them)

In addition, the council will seek to:

- Encourage homeowners and landlords to maintain and invest in their own property, thus protecting their asset (and its value) in the longer term.
- Target and recycle limited public funds at the most vulnerable households living in the worst housing conditions by providing a framework of support based on enforcement and interest free loans.
- Utilise partnership working to lever in further funds for improvement works to increase project capabilities and improve service delivery. For example Energy Company Obligation (ECO) monies, health monies and/or other grant funding.
- Continue to collect and use evidence, data and intelligence about the borough to target funding and enforcement, including information to inform the equalities agenda and the equalities impact assessment for this policy.
- Addressing small works at an early stage to prevent deterioration of properties in the future and to improve home safety and health.
- Proactively approaching priority households to publicise the service and inviting applications for assistance and to assess the need for enforcement, for example, the Street Improvement Project.
- Proactively targeting properties, areas and owners where accommodation presents the highest risk to health and safety of occupants and the most negative impact on local communities. For example area or ward action, rented properties, HMOs, etc.
- Focus resources on tackling issues of corporate importance and move to a targeted approach based on annual plans contained within the Environmental Health & Licensing Service Plan and Housing Service policies.
- Although some place must be given to a reactive service, we aim for 70% of resources to be allocated as a result of proactive prioritisation, planned visits and programs.

Economic Development Strategy

In promoting economic development and regeneration in Watford, the council's Economic Development Strategy 2015-2020 has the following priorities:

- Priority 1 – the sustainable growth of Watford and its economy
- Priority 2 – transport and connectivity
- Priority 3 – inward investment and business retention
- Priority 4 – innovation and enterprise
- Priority 5 – employability and skills

Led by town centre businesses in Watford, the Business Improvement District (BID) was set up in 1 April 2016 and will run until 31 March 2021. Through an annual BID levy, also paid by Watford Borough Council, the aim is to improve the business environment within the town centre. Over

3,500 businesses operating in the town provide an important source of local employment; employment is obviously a key way of getting out of homelessness, accessing suitable affordable homes and escaping the impact of welfare reform, such as the benefit cap.

Partnership working on homelessness in Watford

There are a range of strategic and operational partnerships working in Watford around the theme of homeless and rough sleeping including the following:

Watford Strategic Homelessness Forum

In operation since 2016, this well-attended forum meets seven times a year on a 6-8 weekly basis. Its purpose is “To reduce homelessness and improve services and provision for people and households at risk of or actually homeless within the Watford Borough Council area” and its aims and responsibilities are:

- To reduce rough sleeping in the Watford area
- To reduce the numbers of households in temporary accommodation
- To develop effective pathways to settled accommodation for homeless households
- To ensure greater joined up working between Watford Borough Council and all homelessness agencies in the borough

The role of the forum is to work in partnership to

- Take a strategic and holistic overview of homelessness in the area
- Agree, prioritise and achieve practical outcomes for reducing homelessness in the area and improve standards of homelessness service and provision

Membership of the forum is wide-ranging and includes key voluntary agencies delivering services to single homeless people (New Hope, One YMCA, GROW, hertsyounghomeless), health agencies, such as Hertfordshire Partnership University Foundation Trust, CGL Spectrum (substance misuse agency) and Meadowell Clinic (a GP surgery aimed at the single homeless and other vulnerable people) Watford Citizens Advice, several housing associations including Watford Community Housing, Catalyst (formerly Aldwyck), Origin and Hightown, WBC (including Housing Services, Community Safety and Revenues and Benefits). The Forum is also attended by the elected Mayor and the Portfolio Holder for Housing.

A peer review of Watford’s homelessness services found that the Homelessness Forum was “positive with good buy-in from partners” and the “Homeless Forum takes (the) lead on rough sleeping and is an example of good joint working with partners, including community safety, police, HB, mental health, YMCA”³⁴.

Meetings have discussed a wide range of topics over the last two years including:

- Presentations from member agencies on their work and services for with homeless households in Watford
- Presentations from external agencies on topics of interest to the Forum, such as from Fulfilling Lives in Islington & Camden and Homelessness Link on Housing First.

³⁴ NPSS Diagnostic Peer Review Feedback, December 2017

- Consideration of government funding opportunities and consultation on government policy changes
- Regular reflection on council housing and homelessness statistics
- Consideration of future ways of working such as setting up a Single Homeless Pathway or local policy changes such as the council's Nominations Policy
- Regular report backs and input from Hertfordshire County council on key funding issues such as Housing-related support funding
- Setting up sub groups on particular issues, for example, drafting a best practice guidelines document for working with rough sleepers in the town ([published](#) in May 2019) and a Housing First group examining whether such a scheme can be set up in Watford

Rough Sleeper Initiative and Rapid Rehousing Pathway Co-ordination

The council successfully applied to two streams of MHCLG funding during 2018/19: Rough Sleeper Initiative (RSI) and Rapid Rehousing Pathway (RRP). This funding lasting for one year has enabled a proactive Street Outreach Service to be put in place from July 2019 and the continuation of the existing Intervention (Navigator) Team from April 2019. In January 2020, a further £413,000 in Rough Sleepers Initiative funding was secured which has enabled these two vital services to continue their work for a further year. More details about the activities and make-up of these teams are set out in the section below on Homelessness Services in Watford.

The two services adopted the successful multi-agency, multi-disciplinary model established by the original Rough Sleeper Grant-funded Intervention Team with the agencies involved, New Hope, CGL Spectrum, hertsyounghomeless and Watford Citizens Advice agreeing a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) and a Data Sharing Agreement. The MoU set out the responsibilities of each agency on staffing, pricing and payment, governance and other policies (eg, use of IT, data protection, confidentiality), ownership of equipment, and so on. Each agency recruited and appointed the workers needed to staff up the Street Outreach Service whilst all but one of the workers from the Intervention Team continued as the Intervention/Navigator Team. WBC commissioned New Hope to lead on distributing funding to partner organisations and the overall management of both teams.

Regular monthly operational meetings take place to discuss data collection and analysis whilst bi-monthly partner meetings look at strategic and service planning issues arising out of the data collection.

It is hoped an additional partner, Hertfordshire Partnership University Foundation Trust (HPFT), will join once the recruitment to a mental health practitioner post is completed.

Watford's Winter Shelter

Another highly successful initiative in Watford involving a range of stakeholders working in partnership is Watford's winter night shelter (WWNS). WWNS ran as a pilot from 1 December 2018, initially to 31 January 2019 and then extended to 31 March 2019. New Hope took the lead in setting up the shelter working with two local churches (St Mary's and Wellspring) and OneYMCA providing space for the shelter, funding came from WBC and MHCLG and support from over 60 volunteers from the local communities who helped staff the shelter every night it ran. A review of the shelter in May 2019 agreed it had been a highly successful humanitarian project which had undoubtedly saved lives. Some 105 individuals benefited from the shelter, with 33 (31.5%) moving into various forms of settled or supported accommodation instead of returning to rough sleeping.

A further Winter Night Shelter, again co-ordinated by New Hope and with space provided by OneYMCA, has run again from 1 December 2019 and will run to 31 March 2020 offering up to 19 bed spaces per night. All except 5 of last year's volunteers have agreed to volunteer in the shelter again this year. The Street Outreach Service will play a key role in actively engaging with WWNS users and together with the Intervention/Navigator Team will hopefully increase the proportion of users who are successfully moved off the streets during 2019/20.

Town Centre Task Group

A key concern for Watford businesses and other local stakeholders has been the increase in rough sleeping, illicit drug activity and associated anti-social behaviour (ASB) in the town which reached concerning levels in the summer of 2018. There has been particular concern about the impact on businesses and perception of the town. A year-long Town Centre Task Group, led by the elected Mayor, began work in Autumn 2018. Key stakeholders include the voluntary sector working with rough sleepers, the police, representatives from the council's housing, community safety and communications departments, the health sector, Watford BID (see above) and the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Property. The Task Group has put an Action Plan in place that is working towards:

1. No street begging in the town centre
2. No visible drug dealing/taking in the town centre
3. Reducing rough sleeping in the town centre
4. Tackling persistent ASB (such as street drinking) by identified individuals in the town centre
5. Increasing the engagement of those who are rough sleeping with appropriate services, focusing particularly on the entrenched, hard to engage rough sleepers
6. Identifying a hard core of offenders causing the most harm and proactively target them to make the town centre an uncomfortable place to be
7. Influencing and work with the courts to gain support to secure Criminal Behaviour Orders 's to effectively deal with the impact the ASB has on the town centre
8. Improving perception of the town centre and encourage behaviour change that supports positive solutions
9. Identifying any displacement that arises from the Action Plan and proactively target these locations
10. Encouraging businesses/individuals to report ASB and rough sleeping to 101 (Police) and the Streetlink App respectively
11. Ensuring service provision is targeted to prevent attracting homeless people to Watford
12. Ensuring there are agreed structures and processes are in place to respond and deal with any future ASB in the town centre as soon as it arises to achieve a sustainable approach for the future

Measures of success for the Task Group are:

- An increase of 50% of those rough sleepers positively engaging with relevant agencies
- An increase in the positive perception of the town centre from baseline in early 2018 to completion of Action Plan (baseline autumn 2019)

- A reduction in the number of complaints received by the Mayor’s office for anti-social, criminal and intimidating behaviour in the town centre compared to the summer of 2018 (baseline of 22 during June-sept)

Key outcomes for the Task Group so far include much improved partnership work across the agencies involved and a more co-ordinated approach to the issues the group was set up to tackle.

WBC and Watford Community Housing Liaison

The council and the borough’s largest housing association, Watford Community Housing (WCH), work in partnership at various levels, strategically and operationally on the development and acquisition of new homes in the borough, making best use of existing homes through policies such as rightsizing and liaising on lettings. WCH is the largest supplier to the council of homes for letting to applicants on the Housing Register. The ownership of the council’s housing stock passed to WCH in 2007.

Homelessness Services in Watford

Under the HRA17, the council has a statutory duty to provide housing options and advice services and to prevent and relieve the homelessness of those who approach it for assistance. Initial access to the council’s homelessness services is through its online [Housing Advice Form](#). For those who need help with completing the online form assistance is available either from the Housing Team or Customer Services Centre in person or over the phone.

For all households threatened with homelessness within 56 days, or actually homeless, an eligibility test must be applied before a homeless application can be taken which involves finding out whether the household meets certain immigration and UK residence conditions. If a household does not meet eligibility conditions, the council can only provide general advice and information.

Where eligibility conditions are met, the council will then carry out an assessment of the household’s situation and put together a personal housing plan (PHP) with the household which sets out:

- Their current housing situation
- What their support needs are to ensure these are taken into account when their housing situation is being resolved
- What their housing aspirations are

The PHP is a partnership document between the council and the household, identifying tasks the household will do (eg, apply to the Housing Register, apply for benefits, deal with debts, look for another home) and tasks the council will do to resolve their housing situation, which could either be:

- Preventing their homelessness by taking action to enable them to stay where they are (eg, negotiate with a landlord, a grant to pay off rent arrears) or move to another settled home.
- Relieving their homelessness, if actually homeless, by providing settled accommodation, or if that is not possible providing emergency accommodation if the household is in priority need

Provision of emergency accommodation for households in priority needs includes the following types of households:

- Families with children under 16 (or under 19 if still dependent on their parent(s))
- Pregnant
- Care leavers aged 18-20
- 16-17 year olds
- Homeless due to fire, flood or other disaster
- Households that are “vulnerable”

The criteria for vulnerability have been modified by case law over time and include the following:

- Old age
- Physical or learning disabilities
- Mental health problems
- Fleeing domestic abuse or violence
- Time spent in care, prison or the armed forces

These issues are assessed within the context of whether the council thinks someone can cope with being homeless, for example: how any disability or illness affects daily life, what support is available from friends, family or other services and whether being homeless makes the person being assessed more vulnerable than an ordinary person made homeless.

All homeless applicants have the right of review a decision of the council at several stages of their homelessness application including whether they should have been given emergency accommodation or not.

An additional source of referrals to the council is through the “[Duty to Refer](#)” which requires all public bodies to refer to the council anyone they are dealing with whom they think are homeless now or will be. Public bodies include prisons, the probation service, Job Centre Plus, hospitals, Adult and Children’s Care services.

The council delivers its housing and homelessness services through three teams:

- A Housing Solutions Team, which deals with most homelessness cases at the start of their application, checking eligibility, providing initial advice and undertaking initial prevention activity including putting in place a PHP. Where initial prevention activity is not successful or the household is already homeless, cases are passed on to:
- The Caseworker Team which deals with more complex homelessness prevention cases and relief activity for those actually homeless by organising emergency accommodation if applicable, and revisiting the PHP and agreeing further action points with the household. This team also makes key legal decisions about ending of the prevention duty, the start and end of the Relief Duty (eg, because suitable settled accommodation has been found and accepted by the household) and the Main Duty decision, that is whether the council accepts a duty to house (because the household became homeless through no fault of their own) or decides the households had made themselves homeless intentionally (eg, they did not pay rent when they had the financial resources to do so).
- The Property Team organises the supply of emergency and temporary accommodation for homeless households as well as sourcing good quality, affordable homes from private

landlords locally or further afield, and some direct lets from housing associations which can be used to end the council's Relief or Main Duties.

There are a wide range of services available in Watford to help prevent homelessness for those facing it or relief where a household is actually homeless. Services available include both face to face and accommodation-based with details about them set out and kept up to date on the Council's website [here](#) for those wishing to self-help. Advice on what to do and where to get help is given for different situations including:

- [Being evicted from a private rented tenancy or having problems with a landlord](#)
- [Being told to leave home by parents, relatives or friends](#)
- [Young people aged 16 and 17 with a housing problem](#)
- [Being evicted by a housing association landlord](#)
- [Being in danger of or actually rough sleeping](#)
- [Facing or actually homelessness because of problems with drugs and alcohol](#)
- [Losing a home because of abuse or threats of violence including domestic abuse](#)
- [Being a veteran or current serving member of the armed or reserve forces facing homelessness or actually homeless](#)
- [Leaving care](#)

The council's housing and homelessness web pages are still in development with the council planning to provide information for people with an offending history and victims of modern slavery.

The council cannot resolve homelessness on its own and in some respects does not have the skills or resources to do so. For example:

- The support and accommodation needs of rough sleepers is better delivered by several well-established voluntary agencies within Watford, including New Hope, GROW (Group for the Rootless of Watford) and OneYMCA.
- The needs of 16-24 year olds who are not care leavers are well assisted through the services of hertsyounghomeless
- The needs of priority households who are ineligible (eg, because they have No Recourse to Public Funds³⁵) or for whom the council has made an intentionally homeless decision are assisted by Hertfordshire County Council through its Families First Homeless Prevention Team

A breakdown of all homeless prevention services provided by the voluntary sector in Watford is set out in [Appendix 3](#), Services in Watford for homeless households (including rough sleepers)

Homelessness in Watford

³⁵ See [Appendix 1](#), Glossary

The council's duties in relation to homelessness

The beginning of April 2018 saw the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 (HRA17) which required major changes in the way local authorities were required to respond to households threatened with or actually homeless.

Prior to the HRA17, local authorities had responded to homeless applications it received through its duties set out in Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996. Homeless applications had been dealt with in one step in which councils determined whether they had a duty to house, usually when the household was already homeless, with the main investigative focus being on whether the household had done something which made them intentionally homeless. Priority need households³⁶ were often placed in temporary accommodation whilst the investigation into whether the council had a duty to house took place. Single people over the age of 18, were usually given advice but little support with finding another home, unless they had a priority need.

The HRA17 changed the response required significantly, introducing two prior steps to assisting any household threatened with or actually homeless:

- If not yet homeless but this looks likely within the next 56 days, the first step is **prevention** in which a personal housing plan (PHP) is agreed with the household. The PHP sets out a household's reason for their potential homelessness, what their housing needs are and what support needs they have to be able to meet their housing needs. The document also sets out how the council and the household will work together on various courses of action designed to enable the household to either remain where they are or find an alternative home within the next 56 days.
- If prevention fails or the household is already homeless when they seek assistance from the local authority, the second step, **relief**, starts. This might include providing temporary accommodation if a priority household is involved.
 - Where a household has been through the prevention stage and then becomes homeless, a further 56 days starts for the local authority to work with household to find an alternative home under the relief duty.
 - If the household is already homeless, a period of 56 days starts in which the council and the household will work together on a personal housing plan to enable the household to move on to settled housing.
- If relief fails, the third step, the **main duty**, is taken. This where the local authority issues a decision which says either the household was intentionally homeless and so the local authority does not have a duty to house them or they are not intentionally homeless and so there is a duty to house the applicant on the part of the local authority.

Homelessness applicants have the right of review of a wide range of decisions taken by the local authority.

Profile of homelessness in Watford

³⁶ See Glossary for definition of priority need household

The data in this section covers periods prior to the introduction of the HRA17. For the period 2013/14 to 2017/18, data submitted for P1E³⁷ returns is used. For 2018/19, HRA data published in the MHCLG Homelessness Live Tables³⁸ is provided in this Review.

The level of data local authorities (LAs) are required to collect and submit about each household they assist is far more than ever provided under the previous homeless legislation. All local authorities, including WBC, have found difficulties complying with MHCLG data requirements. The MHCLG data is labelled as experimental data, so is incomplete and may not be accurate. As House of Commons Library publication explains

“Local authorities have been warning officials that [H-CLIC]³⁹ is ineffective since it went live in April. The new homelessness figures for April to June 2018 are the first aggregated reports based on this new system. Entire local authorities have failed to return data for this period. For many others their returns are incomplete or contain errors because they haven’t yet got to grips with the new system. The new statistics are likely to under-represent how many people were homeless in this period.”

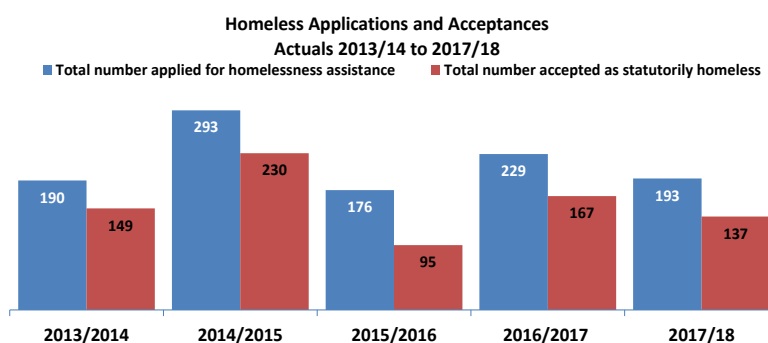
MHCLG report that 322 out of 326 local authorities provided a response, of which some were partial responses. In some parts of the release, it has made estimates to scale up the available data to a national total.⁴⁰

WBC has supplied data to MHCLG in all four quarters of 2018/19 and for three quarters in 2019/20.

Lastly, it is somewhat difficult to compare 2018/19 data with previous years’ homelessness data except in the broadest terms, for example, approaches and assessments.

Homelessness applications and acceptances

The chart below shows homeless applications and acceptances during the period 2013-14 to 2017-18, under the Housing Act 1996, Part 7 (HA96, Pt7). Apart from 2015/16, the council accepted a duty to house for between 71%-78% of homeless applicants.



In terms of assessments during 2018/19, the following chart shows that the number of household approaches were similar to 2016/17. Assessment of a duty under HRA17, however, is very different from HA96 Pt7 and is not comparable. This is because one or more of the following duties may have been assessed in each case:

³⁷ See Glossary for explanation of P1E

³⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-homelessness>

³⁹ See Glossary for explanation of H-CLIC

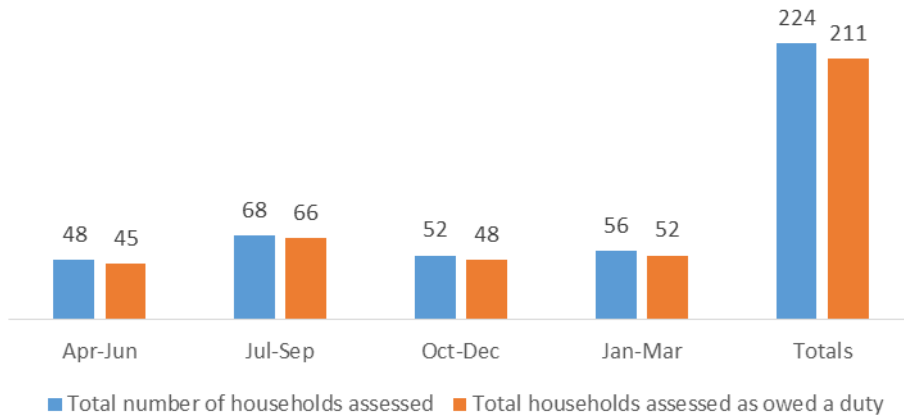
⁴⁰ <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/social-policy/housing/new-homelessness-statistics-what-do-they-tell-us/> (accessed 15/10/2019)

Duty(ies)	What the duty means in practice
Prevention only	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The household has approached the council for help and it is accepted they are threatened with homelessness within the next 56 days. • The case is resolved as the household is prevented from becoming homeless by being able to stay where they are or an alternative home has been found either by the council or the household themselves.
Prevention, then Relief	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As for Prevention only above, then • Prevention activity by the council and the household does not stop them becoming homeless, and after 56 days a Relief duty comes into effect. • If the household is priority⁴¹ homeless, emergency accommodation is provided. • If a suitable, alternative home is found before the end of the 56 day Relief period, then the household's homelessness is resolved.
Prevention, then Relief, then Main Duty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As above but it was not possible to find alternative settled accommodation for the household within the 56 day Relief period. • The council makes a decision on whether it owes a duty to house. • If the council accepts a duty to house and if they are a priority household, they continue occupying what is now termed temporary accommodation until a suitable alternative, settled home is found for them • If the council does not accept a duty house, then the council can discharge its duty and require the household to leave the accommodation they were given under the Relief Duty
Relief only	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The household approaches the council already homeless. If they are a priority household they are provided with emergency accommodation and the Relief duty starts. • Within the ensuing 56 days, alternative suitable housing may be found and the case is resolved
Relief, then Main Duty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As above, but after 56 days, if alternative accommodation has not been found, and the council goes on to make a decision on whether it does a duty to house. • If the council accepts a duty to house and if they are a priority household, they continue occupying what is now termed temporary accommodation until a suitable alternative, settled home is found for them • If the council does not accept a duty to house, then the council can discharge its duty and require the household to leave the accommodation they were given under the Relief Duty

At the end of each duty stage, a household has the right of review of the council's decision-making process, including whether they agree with the council's decision not to accept a duty to house or they disagree that accommodation found is suitable for them.

⁴¹ See Glossary

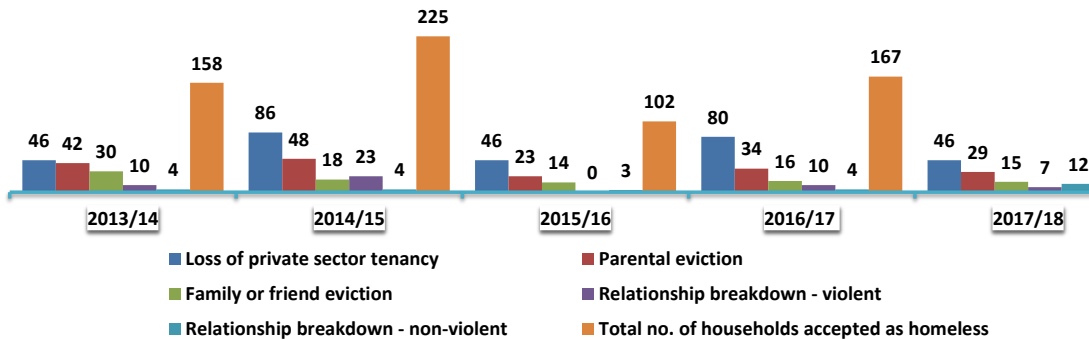
Households assessed and a duty owed 2018/19



The council is currently working on determining how many households there are in each duty scenario. As can be seen by the numbers in the above chart there are few households (13) where a duty, whether prevention, relief or main duty, is not assessed. The reason why a duty is not assessed is because, for example, the household is not threatened with homelessness within 56 days.

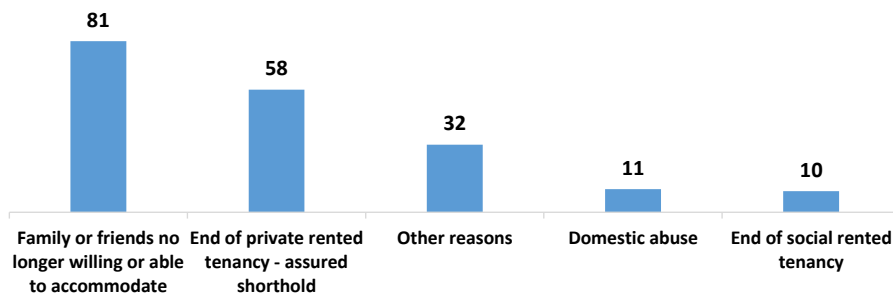
Main reasons for homelessness

Top five reasons for homelessness 2013-14 to 2017-18



During the period 2013/14 to 2017/18 (pre-HRA217), the most common reason for homelessness was loss of a private sector tenancy followed by parental eviction.

The top 5 reasons for loss of last settled home for households owed a duty under HRA17 2018-19



The HRA17 data for 2018/19⁴² indicates that the largest reason for the loss of the last settled home was “Family or friends no longer willing or able to accommodate”. In previous years by comparison, and aggregating “Family or friend eviction” and “Parental eviction” (see chart above), the relevant data is as follows:

Year	Family/friend/parental eviction	End of private rented tenancy
2013/14	72	46
2014/15	66	86
2015/16	37	46
2016/17	50	80
2017/18	44	46
2018/19	81	58

Except for 2013/14, the loss of a private rented tenancy was the main reason for homelessness through all years until 2018/19. Why the situation has changed for 2018/19 is not yet understood and may not be accurate given the experimental nature of the data. However, one speculation is that households are unable to afford the private rented sector in Watford and move straight to homelessness rather than entering the private rented sector first. Data in subsequent years may bear this out.

Types of households becoming homeless

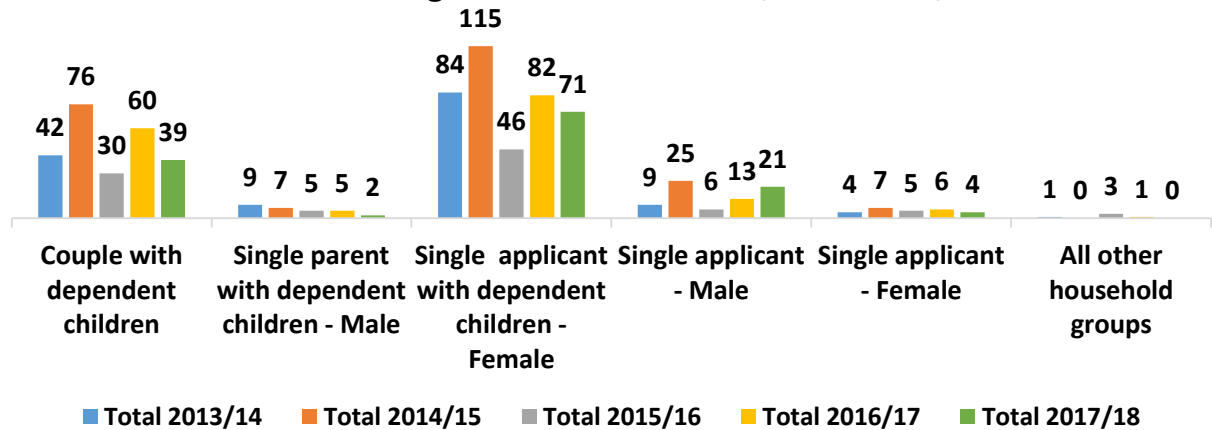
This section looks at the types of households becoming homeless in Watford over time. The data for the period 2013/14 to 2017/18⁴³ covers households where the council agreed a duty to house under the Housing Act 1996, Part 7 (the Main Duty) whilst the 2018/19 data looks at household types of those owed a Prevention Duty and a Relief Duty under the HRA17 – these are the two duties before a duty to house, or the Part 7 Main Duty, is considered if either prevention and/or relief activities have not succeeded in the household finding an alternative home. The first chart below shows the types of households for whom the council agreed a duty to house under the Housing Act 1996, Part 7 over the period 2013/14 to 2017/18.

⁴² Source: MHCLG Live homelessness tables 2018-19

(file:\Housing%20Strategy%20Projects\Housing%20&%20Other%20Data\P1E%20&%20H-CLIC%20published%20data\2018-19%20Live%20Homelessness%20Tables%20MHCLG\2018-19%20Assessment%20data.xlsx

⁴³ Data is [here](#); Source: P1E data

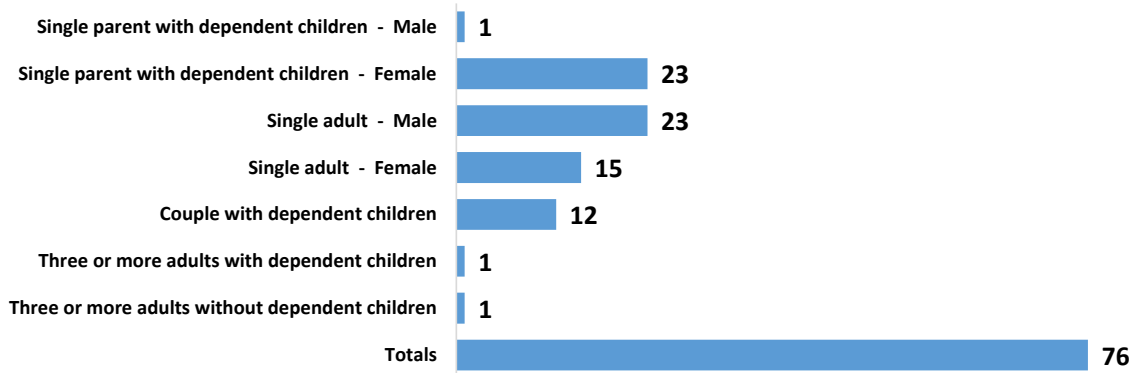
Types of households for whom WBC agreed a duty to house under Housing Act 1998 Part 7 2013/14 to 2017/18



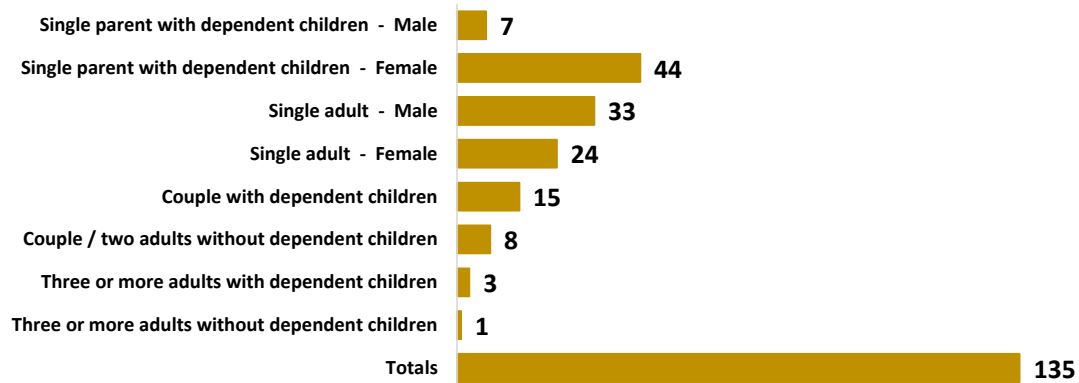
As can be seen the most predominant household for whom the council agreed a duty to house (a Main Duty decision) is female single parents with dependent children, with the second largest group being couples with dependent children. The number of single female applicants for whom the council agreed a duty is much lower than the number for single male applicants.

Turning now to 2018/19 Prevention and Relief data, household types are shown in the charts below:

Type of households owed a *Prevention* duty 2018/19



Type of households owed a *Relief* duty 2018/19

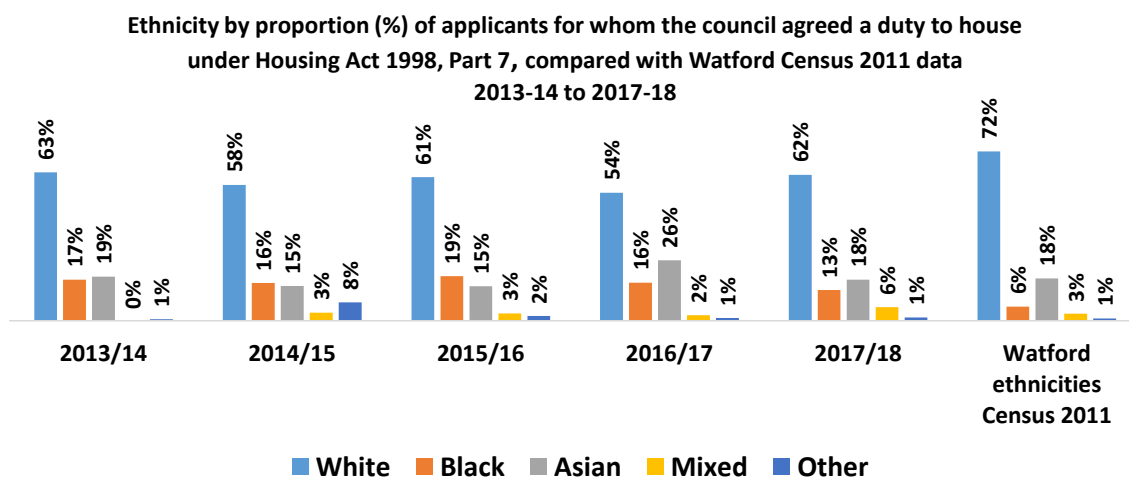


These charts show that of households with dependent children, single female parents continue to be the predominant group in both Prevention and Relief, as they were under the HA96 Main duty. However, a big change from HA96 is that under HRA17 single homeless applicants are a larger group within the homeless cohort than ever before and larger than the group of couples with dependent children. Within single applicants, male applicants are a larger group than female applicants which follows a similar pattern as under HA96. That more single applicants would be assisted via HRA17 was predicted and shows the new legislation is enabling a better housing outcome for this group of people.

Homeless households by ethnicity

This section looks at homeless applicants on the basis of the broad ethnic categories (White, Black, Asian, Mixed ethnicities and Other) and compares these with the main ethnic categories found in Watford in the 2011 Census.

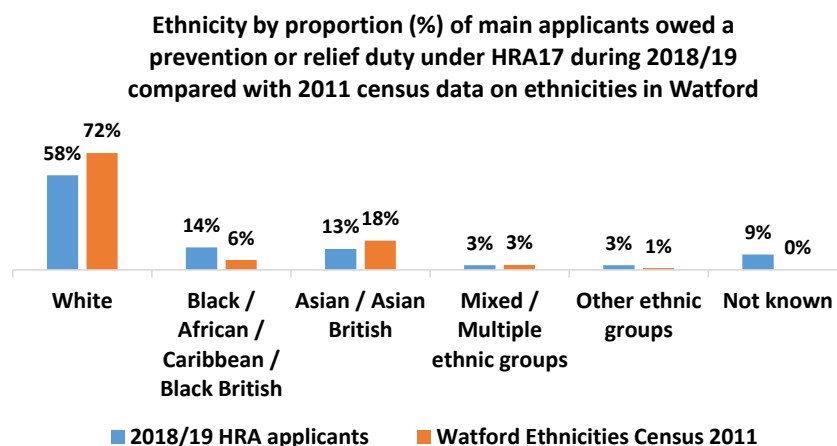
The chart below covers ethnicity data for the five year period 2013-14 to 2017-18



The chart shows that:

- White households are under-represented in homeless households for whom the council the agreed a duty to house compared with their representation in the Watford population by between 9% (in 2013/14) and 18% (in 2016/17)
- Black households are over-represented in the cohort of homeless households examined compared to their representation in the Watford population by between 13% (2017/17) and 13% (in 2015/16)
- For Asian households, for four of the years between 2013-14 and 2017-18 the proportion of homeless households assisted was roughly the same as their representation in the borough as per the 2011 Census. The year showing a larger variance between census and homeless households assisted is 2016/17 (26% Asian homeless households compared with 18% of the borough population)
- Mixed and Other ethnicity households are generally similarly represented in the homeless household population compared with the borough population

The chart below shows ethnicity data for the main applicants of households (rather than households) owed prevention and relief duties under HRA17 during 2018/19:



The key findings from the chart are that:

- White homeless applicants continue to be under-represented compared with their representation in the Watford population
- Black homeless applicants continue to be over-represented compared with their proportion in the Watford population
- Asian homeless applicants are under-represented compared with their proportion in Watford
- Mixed and Other homeless applicants continue to be similarly represented compared with their proportion in Watford

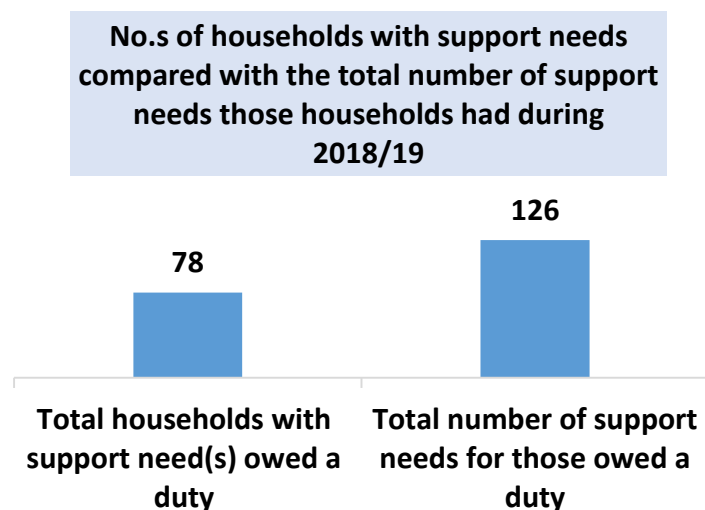
Research is needed on why Black households are over-represented in the homeless population compared with their representation in the borough.

The council does not have access to information on homeless gypsies and travellers in the Watford area for applications made prior 3 April 2018. During 2018/19, one homeless application was taken from a household who stated their ethnicity was White - Gypsy or Irish Traveller. For the year 2019/20 to the end of November 2019, no homeless approaches have been made by this group.

Support needs of homeless households

The HRA17 requires local authorities to explore the support needs of households as part of their assessment of their housing situation. Support needs include not just issues like mental or physical ill health but support issues arising out of their lived experience, such as a history of rough sleeping or being a victim of sexual or domestic abuse. Support issues was not a category of information previously collected so it is not possible to compare the 2018/19 support data with previous years.

The chart below shows the number of households to whom a prevention or relief duty was owed that had support needs during 2018/19. The number of support needs is higher than the number of households because some of the households owed a duty had more than one support need.



The following table breaks down the total number of support needs by type of support need, ordering them from largest to smallest number of households with the listed needs:

Support needs of households owed a prevention or relief duty:	Totals
History of mental health problems	41
Physical ill health and disability	12
Alcohol dependency needs	12
At risk of / has experienced domestic abuse	10
Offending history	8
Drug dependency needs	8
History of rough sleeping	7
Learning disability	7
Young person aged 18-25 years requiring support to manage independently	6
History of repeat homelessness	4
Young person aged 16-17 years	4
At risk of / has experienced abuse (non-domestic abuse)	3

Support needs of households owed a prevention or relief duty:	Totals
Young parent requiring support to manage independently	2
Access to education, employment or training	1
At risk of / has experienced sexual abuse / exploitation	1
Total	126

Mental health issues are by far the highest support need, with physical ill-health and disability and alcohol dependency needs coming next and domestic abuse issues next. Some households have multiple and complex needs which could include mental health and substance abuse as well as a history of repeat homelessness and/or rough sleeping.

More analysis is needed to bring out type of household and support needs to understand how these households can be supported better either through involving relevant professionals as soon as possible and/or ensuring appropriate support such as floating support is made available when a household moves into settled housing.

Domestic Abuse

Following on from the data on support needs above in which 10 households are shown to be at risk of or had experienced domestic abuse, the tables show where a prevention, relief and main duty has been owed to households whose main reason for the loss of their last settled home was domestic abuse.

The number of cases where prevention and relief duties were owed are shown only for 2018/19, the first year of HRA17:

Year	No. of cases involving domestic abuse where Prevention duty accepted	No. of cases involving domestic abuse where a Relief duty was accepted
2018/19	2	4

In the table below data on accepting a main duty to house is shown going back to 2014/15⁴⁴; this is a duty common to both HA96 Part 7 and HRA17:

Year	No. of cases where main reason for loss of last settled home was domestic abuse and a Main Duty to house was accepted
2014/15	0
2015/16	0
2016/17	2
2017/18	1
2018/19 (HRA17)	1

⁴⁴ Source data for 2014/15 to 2017/18 is from P1E submission. Source data for 2018/19 is H-CLIC data for HRA17

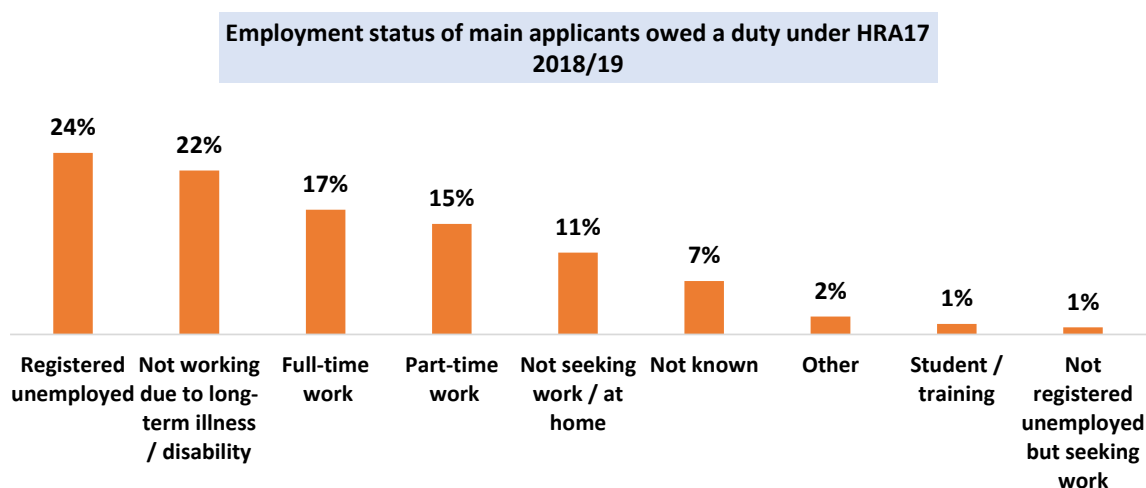
The number of cases where a main duty to house was accepted which involved domestic abuse has been low throughout the 5 year period shown.

Monitoring will take place over the coming years to see if this trend changes.

Households dealing with the experience of domestic abuse are usually assisted into women’s refuges out of Watford for their safety. They remain the responsibility of the council as required by the HRA17 until they are able to move into settled homes.

Employment status of homeless households

Data on the employment status of the main applicants (rather than the whole household) owed a duty under the HRA17 has been collected during 2018/19 and is expressed as percentages of the 211 households to whom the council owed a duty (prevention or relief duty). A quarter of households were unemployed and around a third working full- or part-time. Just under a quarter of households were not working due to long-term illness or disability.



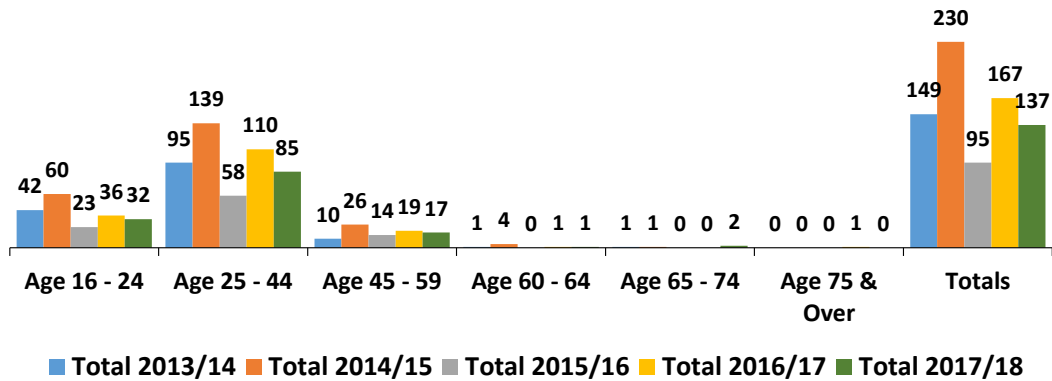
Employment status has a major impact on settled housing options. For example, those households with two or more children but are working more than 24 hours per week can escape the benefit cap which means they are in a better financial position to afford homes in the private rented sector or the affordable rents (as opposed to the social rents) charged by housing associations. Affordability of private and social housing in Watford, especially for those dependent on benefits and benefit capped is examined later in this review.

Ages of homeless households

Data on ages of homeless households was collected under the previous homelessness legislation as well as under the HRA17. The age ranges by which data is organised is slightly different in both data sets so are not fully comparable.

For the period 2013-14 to 2017-18, the chart below shows the age range of homeless households to whom the council owed a duty to house:

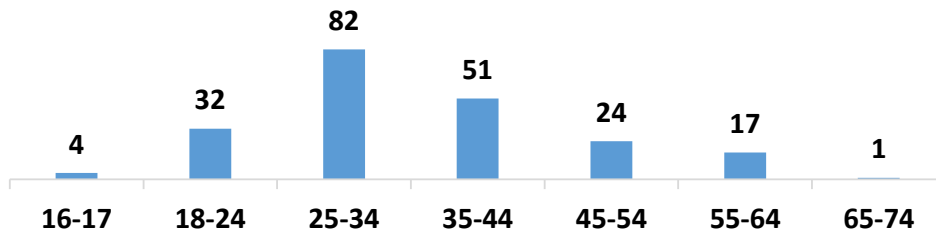
Age ranges of applicants to whom the council owed a duty to house under Housing Act 1998 Part 7 2013-14 to 2017-18



As can be seen the most common age range for homeless households is between 25 and 44 years old, whilst those aged between 16 and 24 years is the next most common age group.

The chart below shows that HRA17 age groupings separate 16/17 year olds as they are a priority group who may need emergency or temporary accommodation.

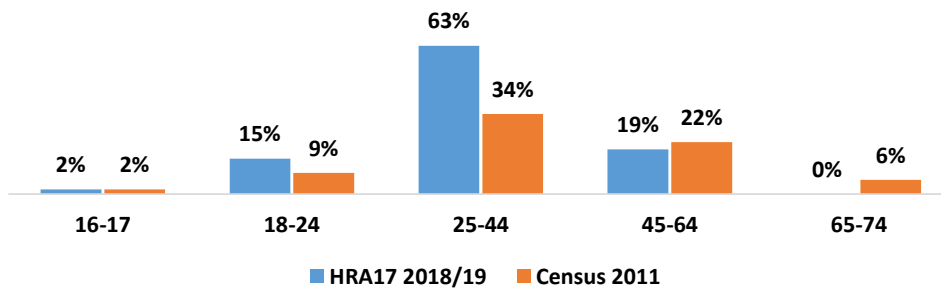
Age of main applicant owed a prevention or relief duty under HRA17 2018/19 (211 households)



In common with previous years, the age groups which face homelessness most are those in the 25-44 age groups comprising some 63% of all homeless households during 2018/19.

The HRA17 age data has been compared with age data in the 2011 census in the following chart:

Proportion by Age of applicants owed a duty during 2018/19 under the HRA17 compared with the 2011 Census



The chart shows that the representation of applicants in the age range 25-44 for whom the council accepted a duty to house is almost double that in the Watford's population as at 2011. An explanation of this needs to be investigated.

Further work is needed to cross-tabulate age ranges with household types and other variables to gain a richer picture of homeless households in Watford to help improve homelessness services to them.

Prevention of homelessness

The key idea of the HRA17 is for local authorities to intervene with households as early as possible to prevent their homelessness and the period over which can be taken was doubled from 28 to 56 days.

There is a range of prevention actions that can be taken

- Provision of advice on housing options and information on how to access alternative homes
 - Comprehensive information on what to do if faced with homelessness for people with different needs is set out in the council's [homelessness](#) web pages
- Mediation with parents or private landlords
- Negotiation with parents or private landlords to enable households to remain in their current homes
- Assisting with paying off rent arrears that may have accrued, eg, through the benefit cap or the spare room subsidy, if that will enable a household to remain in their current home. Discretionary Housing Payments and other funding such as Homelessness Grant and Flexible Homelessness Support Grant are used to enable this aspect of support
- Assisting households to identify an alternative home in the private rented sector in Watford or elsewhere in the UK, or through the Housing Register
- Using Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) and other funding to assist with rent deposits and rent in advance

Prevention work is carried out by housing solutions officers and caseworkers within the council's Housing Team. In addition, the Housing Team has an officer who administers DHP applications for applicants who are or are threatened with homelessness.

An invaluable role is played by New Hope's Tenancy Sustainment Team which also works with single households the council has placed in temporary accommodation.

Further work is needed on identifying upstream issues and developing timely responses to housing situations that may lead to homelessness, such as cuckooing, gangs, domestic violence, and modern slavery as well as challenging and tackling illegal evictions

Further work with private sector landlords is needed to enable the council to intervene early where there is a danger of eviction for a wide range of reasons so that households can progress to alternative accommodation without becoming homeless.

Temporary accommodation

Under the homelessness law⁴⁵, local housing authorities are required to provide temporary accommodation to households in priority need under the homelessness law, under the Relief Duty.

A household in priority need means the following types of household:

- Someone in the household is pregnant
- There are dependent children under 18
- 16 and 17 year olds
- 18-20 year olds who were accommodated or fostered between the age of 16 and 18
- Lost accommodation due to an emergency

In addition, households who are vulnerable because of the following issues may be accepted as having a priority need:

- Old age, mental illness or disability, physical disability or other special reason
- Have been looked after, accommodated or fostered and are aged 21 or over
- Have been a member of the armed or reserve forces
- Have served a custodial sentence, been committed for contempt of court or similar, or remanded in custody
- Have had to leave accommodation due to violence or threats of violence from another person that are likely to be carried out⁴⁶

It is important to note that “temporary accommodation” is a catch-all phrase for a number of legal labels of accommodation given at various stages of a priority need household’s homelessness application. The label given to the accommodation changes depending on the stage a homeless application has reached. The labels, explained in more detail in [Appendix 2](#) are: emergency accommodation, interim accommodation, temporary accommodation and discretionary accommodation.

The council has made use of a range of different types of temporary accommodation including:

- Council-owned hostels
- Council-owned self-contained flats and houses
- Homes owned by housing associations
- Private sector accommodation on different arrangements, such as leasing directly from private landlords or through private sector leasing arrangements set up by housing associations
- Spot purchase or nightly paid accommodation (self-contained homes or HMOs with shared facilities)
- Bed and breakfast (rooms in hotels, breakfast is not paid for)

By law, local authorities must not keep households with children under 16 or single people aged 16/17 in bed and breakfast (B&B) for more than 6 weeks. Watford has not breached the legislation in this respect. No households in these categories have been placed in B&B since April 2018.

⁴⁵ Housing Act 1996, Part 7, as amended by the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017

⁴⁶ Shelter England,

http://england.shelter.org.uk/legal/homelessness_applications/priority_need/who_has_a_priority_need

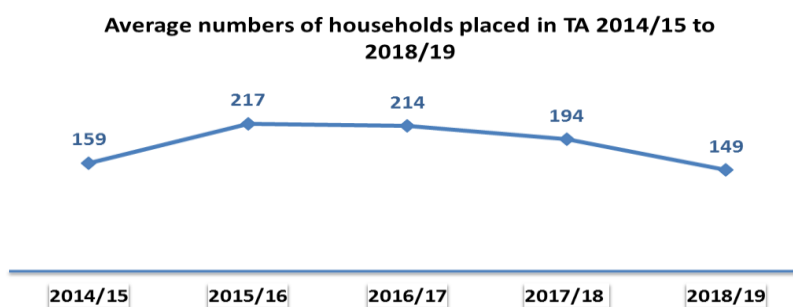
WBC's ethos on TA

Since 2016/17 to date, WBC's ethos with regard to TA has been the following:

- minimising the time households spend in TA so that households can resume their lives that have been disrupted by homelessness.
- reducing the costs of TA for the council by stopping the use of the most expensive forms of TA such as nightly paid accommodation and exploring ways of controlling costs and providing good quality TA which is an asset to the council and can provide surpluses in years to come
- keeping as much TA as possible within the borough boundaries
- working towards putting in place good quality TA

Numbers of households in TA

The council has been successful in reducing the numbers of households in TA over the years as the following chart shows:

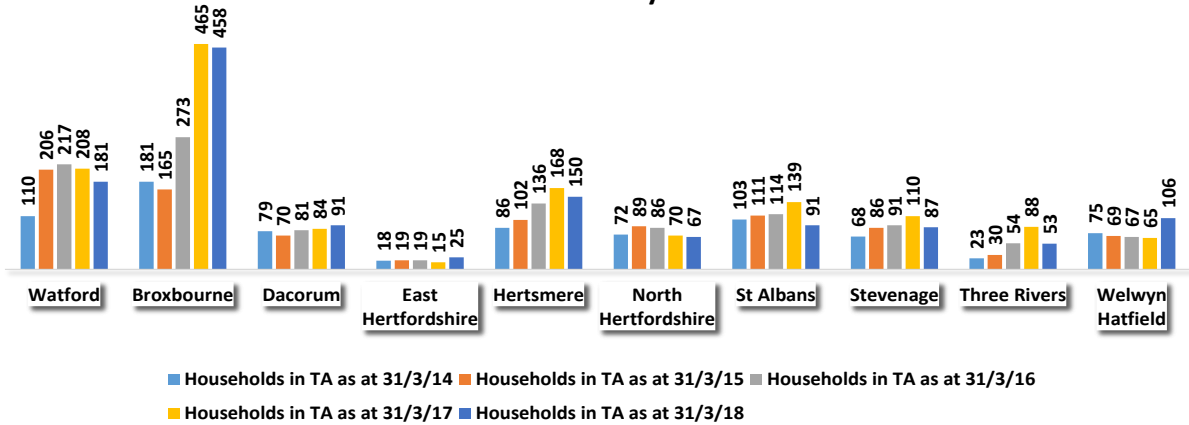


	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19
Highest number of households in TA during the year	233	220	181
Lowest number of households in TA during the year	208	179	110

During 2019, the number of households placed in TA have reduced to just under 100.

In comparison with other districts in Hertfordshire, Watford usually has the second highest number of households in TA in the county, the highest being Broxbourne.

No.s of homeless households in temporary accommodation as at 31 March 2014 to 2018 by Hertfordshire district

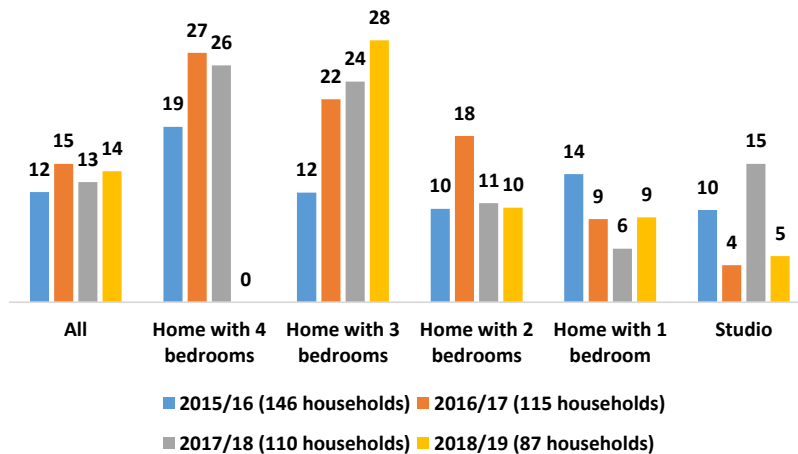


The two main sources of settled accommodation for homeless households in TA are housing association homes and private rented homes. The section on the Affordable Housing Supply provides the data on this.

Length of time spent in temporary accommodation

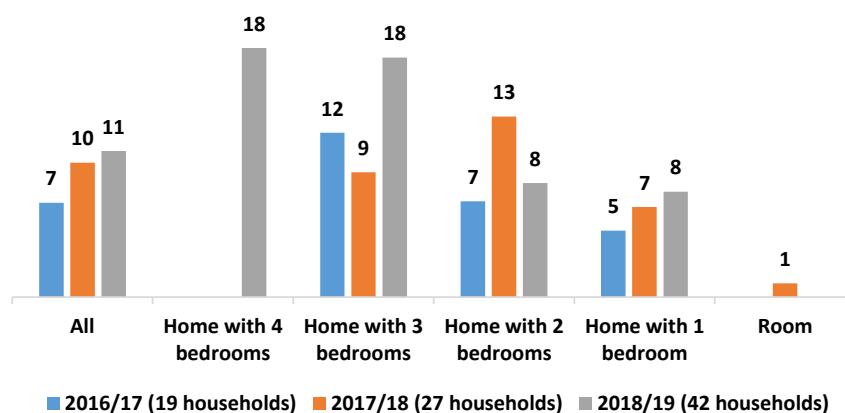
The following charts show the average number of months households stay in temporary accommodation before move to a settled home owned either by a housing association (social housing) or a private landlord.

Average no. of months wait in temporary accommodation before being housed in social housing



Households waiting for three and four bedroom homes wait the longest, indeed the wait for households needing a home with three bedrooms has steadily increased over the last 4 years. During 2018/19 no social homes with four bedrooms were let to households in TA. During that year only two social homes with four bedrooms became available to let and these were let to non-homeless households.

Average no. of months wait in temporary accommodation before housed in private rented home



The number of households being settled into a private rented home from temporary accommodation has increased significantly over the last three years. As can be seen the households with the longest wait are those needing three and four bedrooms (an average of 18 months). Households needing homes three or more bedrooms face issues with not just the lack of supply of larger homes but the cost of them too which is often prohibitive in the private rented sector especially if the household is also benefit capped.

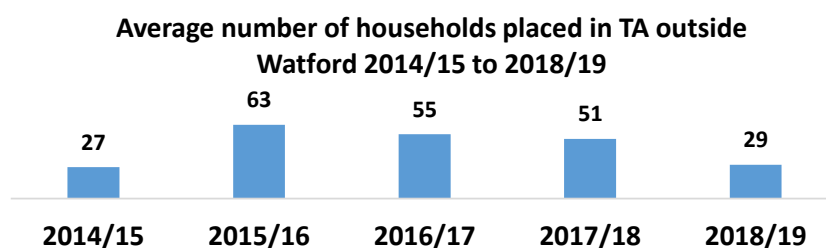
Costs of TA

In terms of costs of TA, bed and breakfast accommodation is the most expensive to the council costing £130-£200 pw whilst council-owned accommodation makes a surplus for the council offsetting the cost of other types of TA.

A frequent freedom of information request received is how much TA costs the council. The following table shows TA gross and net costs over the last 5 financial years:

Year	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19
Gross costs	£922,433	£2,212,720	£1,780,474	£1,015,404	£469,201
Less Rents collected	£595,151	£1,183,888	£1,068,077	£608,182	£284,546
Net cost	£327,282	£1,028,832	£712,396	£407,222	£184,655

The council has worked hard on reducing the number of households located in TA outside the borough. The following chart shows progress on this over the last 5 years:



In 2018/19 households in TA outside the borough returned to 2014/15 levels. In 2019/20 so far there has been an average of 12 households in TA outside the borough and these are mostly located in one facility in Harrow.

As can be seen there is a correlation between costs of TA shown in the table and chart above showing that placing households in temporary accommodation outside Watford is more expensive for the council. To respond to and cope with the increasing levels of homelessness faced during the period 2014/15 to 2015/16, the council had little choice but to quickly enter into more expensive nightly paid accommodation, lease and spot purchase deals. Withdrawing from these deals on a gradual basis since 2017/18 has resulted in costs of TA being contained and reduced.

Temporary Accommodation Strategy

During 2018, the Housing Team drafted a TA Strategy for the period 2019-2024 which reviewed the council's TA portfolio. It examined costs, identified where leases were coming to an end and which TA units currently in use were no longer fit for purpose. The Strategy aimed to plan in advance for the replacement of a number of TA units in the next 1-3 years due to lease ends, develop plans for TA units no longer fit for purpose and provide for the complex needs of some homeless households. Fundamentally the team was concerned about:

- Ensuring homeless households were placed in good quality, affordable temporary accommodation which was conducive to their well-being.
- Mitigating against the council spending over £1m a year from its General Fund on provision of TA as done in 2015/16.

The strategy was relevant to two of the council key priorities:

- Manage the borough's housing needs – through the provision of TA for homeless households as statutorily required
- Enable a sustainable council – enable a surplus to be generated for the council in the provision of TA to be ploughed back into the provision of homelessness services

In January 2019 The Corporate Management Team and Portfolio Holders endorsed the following eight principles governing the council's approach to acquisition, control, quality and management of its TA portfolio:

1. An optimum number of TA units is in place at any one time with minimum voids
2. The council controls any new housing acquired for TA to ensure availability of stock and effective management, the latter being outsourced
3. The council does not assume overcrowding in TA unless no other suitable units are available.
4. Replacement TA homes will need to take account of high turnover and sometimes overcrowding. Consequently TA units must be good quality, have suitable space standards (particularly storage) and robust fixtures and fittings.
5. Most replacement units should be self-contained apart from one hostel with shared facilities for families and one hostel for single people with complex needs.
6. Hostel facilities for singles and families should be separate.
7. Self-contained units should be convertible to social housing if needed or sold.
8. TA is responsive to people with complex needs

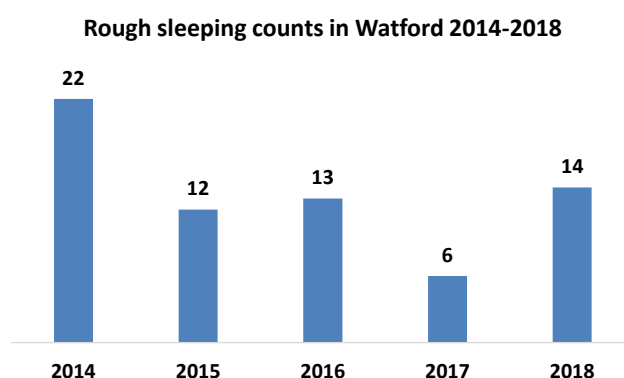
The all Members group, the Housing Policy Advisory Group, also endorsed these principles at its meeting in February 2019.

The TA strategy is deliberately flexible in its approach because even as it was written the number and mix⁴⁷ of TA units required has reduced considerably over the last few months. That said, decision-making can be slow around developing new TA units on council land and redeveloping council-owned TA to meet current needs. There is therefore no guarantee that the council could avoid using expensive spot purchase, lease and nightly paid accommodation in the future.

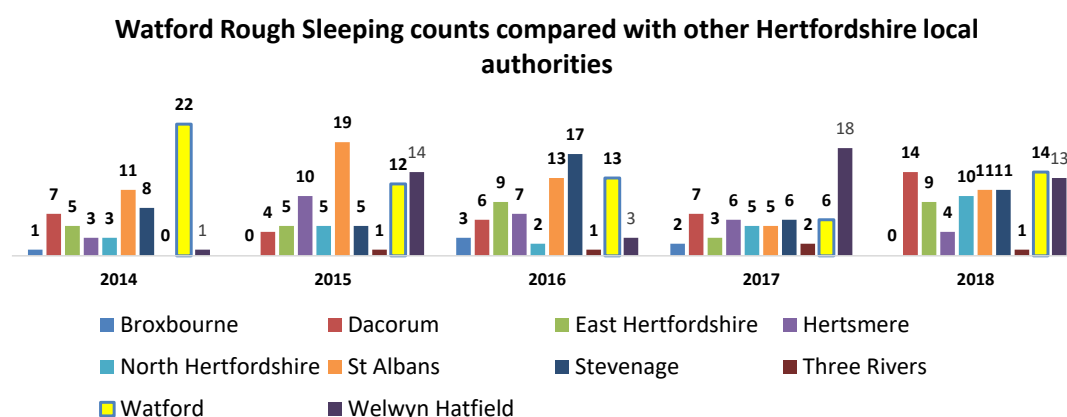
Rough Sleeping in Watford

Levels of rough sleeping in Watford

Levels of rough sleeping in Watford have varied over the years as can be seen in the following chart showing the outcomes of annual rough sleeping counts in the years 2014-2018:



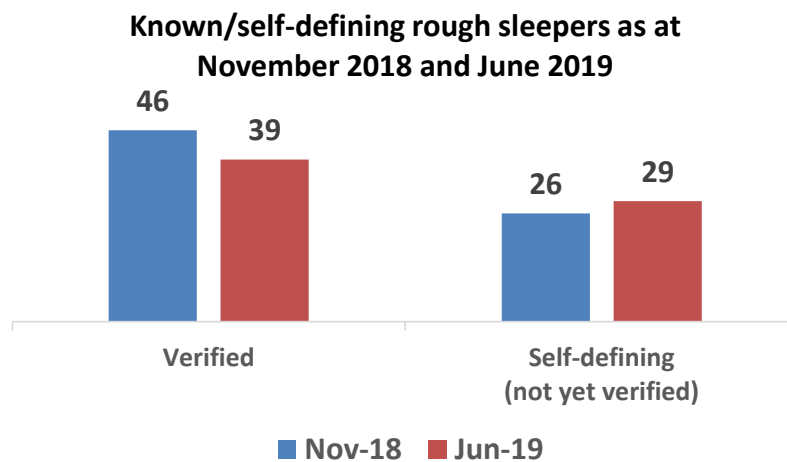
The chart below shows rough sleeper counts in all ten Hertfordshire districts since 2014:



Apart from 2014, when the rough sleeper count was particularly high in Watford – and the highest in Hertfordshire - other Hertfordshire districts have found more rough sleepers at their counts than Watford. For example, in 2015, St Albans had the highest number of rough sleepers in Hertfordshire, whilst in 2016, it was Stevenage and in 2017 Welwyn Hatfield had the highest number. In 2018, Watford, Dacorum and Welwyn Hatfield had similar numbers.

⁴⁷ In terms of sizes and number of bedrooms

The experience and evidence gathering of one of Watford’s long-established voluntary agencies, New Hope, demonstrates that the number of rough sleepers identified at a count is usually a quarter to a third of the number known to be rough sleeping: so where 14 people were found sleeping rough in Watford in 2018, there will be some 40-60 people actually rough sleeping within Watford on the streets, in its parks, in encampments and other, usually hidden, places. This is demonstrated in the chart below showing data from New Hope on the number of their service users they have verified as rough sleeping and those self-defining as rough sleepers at two points in time, November 2018 and June 2019:



Effective outreach activity started in July when the Street Outreach Service became fully staffed and began undertaking regular early morning and late evening patrols of the borough to locate rough sleepers. In addition to engaging with rough sleepers, the team began to gain a better understanding of who is sleeping on the streets of Watford. Data collected for MHCLG⁴⁸ by the team is beginning to provide us with a consistent picture of the number of rough sleepers in the borough.

⁴⁸ Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government

		Sep-19	Oct-19	Nov-19	Dec-19
Rough Sleeping Population	Best estimate	89	93	89	99
	No. of rough sleeping individuals identified by outreach this month	58	50	40	69
	<i>Female</i>	14	8	8	16
	<i>Male</i>	44	42	32	52
	<i>Don't ID as M/F or Transgender</i>	0	0	0	1
	<i>Unknown / undeclared</i>	0	0	0	0
Of which	Flow (not known to have slept rough prior to the month)	0	1	0	0
	Returned (known to have slept rough prior to the month but not considered "stock")	1	1	0	3
	Stock (known to have regularly slept rough for at least 6 consecutive months)	25	48	40	66
	w/o Local connection	23	26	17	30
	w/o Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF)	9	6	5	5

The section below sets out who is rough sleeping in Watford looking at gender, age, and ethnicity, how many have a local connection with Watford, their support needs and activities.

Who is rough sleeping in Watford?

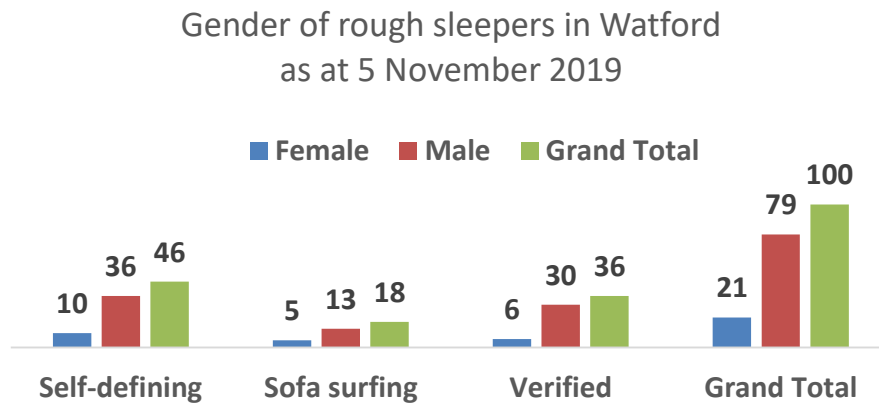
Quite detailed data about the rough sleeping population in Watford is collected by both the Street Outreach Service and the New Hope's Rough Sleeping Prevention Service. This data is broken down into three categories of rough sleepers:

- Verified rough sleepers: the known sleeping places of individual rough sleepers has been established by the Street Outreach Service
- Self-defining rough sleepers: the known sleeping place has not yet been established
- Sofa surfing: individuals who have no settled place to live and are moving from place to place and are only a step away from rough sleeping

The Street Outreach Service based at New Hope engage with the verified and self-defining rough sleepers. The following data analysis relates to rough sleepers as at 5 November 2019. As can be seen there are 100 people who either verified rough sleepers, self-defining or sofa surfing. Fourteen

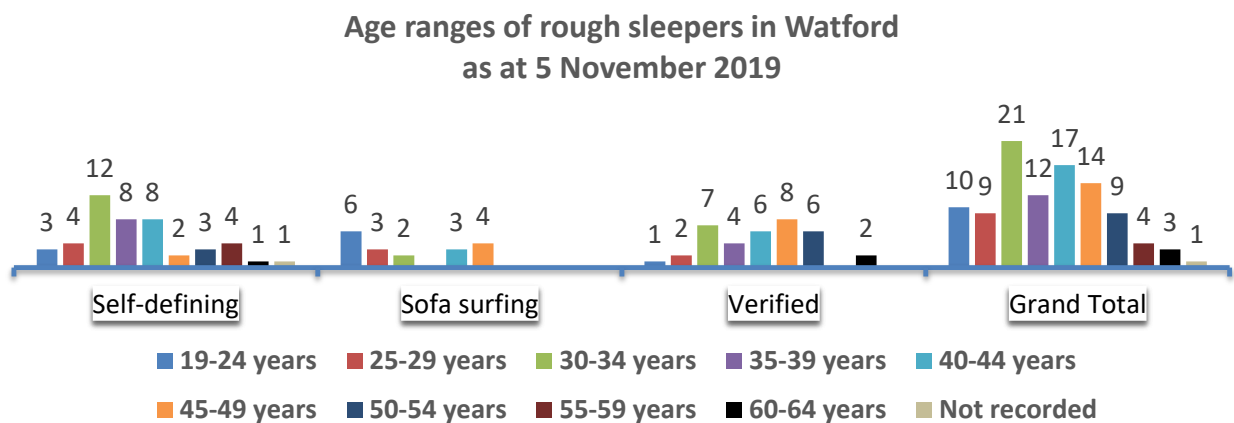
of these were being assisted through the council's HRA⁴⁹ services with a further 17 who had engaged with council HRA services in the past but had closed housing advice, homeless or housing register applications as at November 2019. The council is committed to engaging with all rough sleepers in the town to assist them to leave the streets of Watford.

Gender of rough sleepers



There are around 4 times as many male rough sleepers as female. The number of female rough sleepers is of concern as they are particularly at risk on the streets and as noted above, their number doubled in December 2019.

Age of rough sleepers

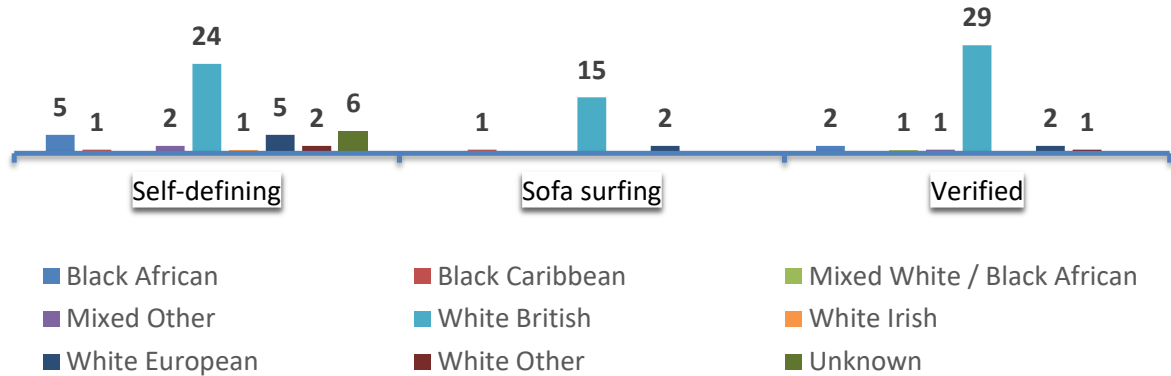


The largest age group within verified and self-defined rough sleepers, and overall, is 30-34 years of age, with those aged 40-44 the next highest age group, the latter predominantly also in the verified and self-defining groups of rough sleepers.

⁴⁹ Homelessness Reduction Act

Ethnicity of rough sleepers

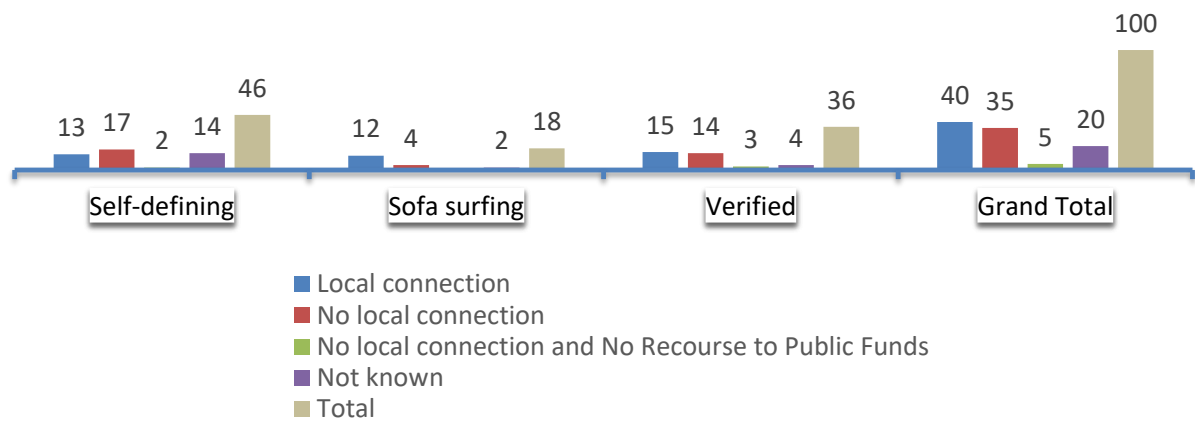
Broad ethnic category of rough sleepers in Watford as at 5 November 2019



The largest ethnic group amongst rough sleepers by far is White British. Black and minority ethnic people constitute around 13% of the rough sleeper population⁵⁰. White European rough sleepers include people from Romania, Poland, Slovakia and Portugal. Although not part of this particular dataset, there are a very small number of Asian rough sleepers in the borough.

Connection with Watford

Local connection with Watford



Local connection means where someone has lived 3 out of the last 5 years in Watford or has close relatives living in the town.

As can be seen 15 (42%) of the verified rough sleepers have a local connection with Watford, whilst the number of self-defining rough sleepers with a local connection to Watford is 13 (28%). There are a small number of rough sleepers who have No Recourse to Public Funds for whom housing options are extremely limited.

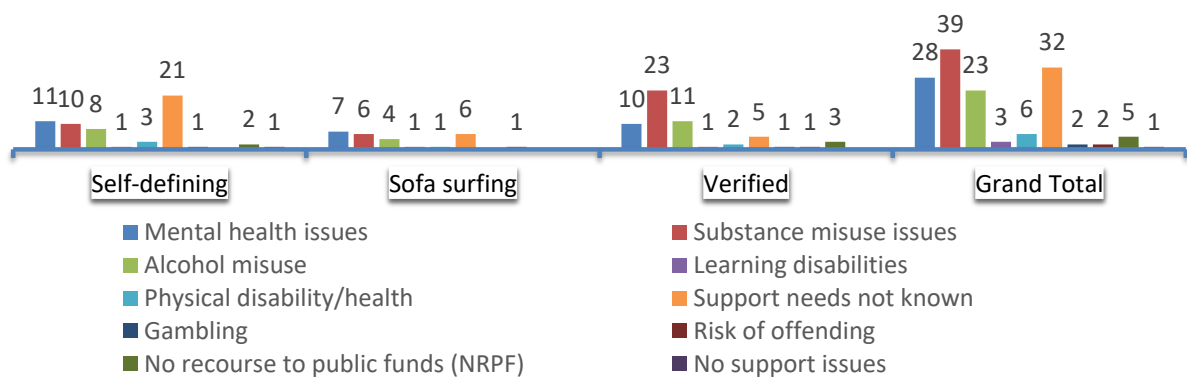
⁵⁰ When totalling verified, self-defining and sofa surfing

Support Needs

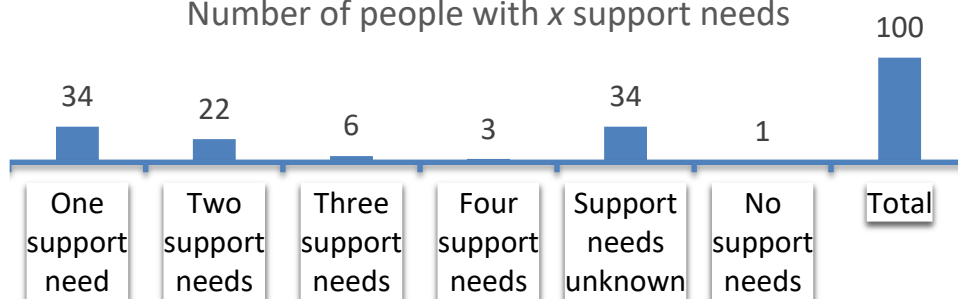
The following charts show the range of support needs within the verified and self-defined rough sleeper cohort and sofa surfers. The support need is not known for around a third of individuals. It is important to note that for the rest of the cohort examined here, many have more than one support need: for example, just over 30 individuals have complex needs, meaning they have between two and four support needs in addition to being actually or effectively homeless.

The most prevalent support need among this cohort is recovery with substance misuse, followed by mental health issues and then alcohol misuse.

Support needs of Rough Sleepers in Watford



Number of people with x support needs



The effects of austerity and the rationing of health services have been sharply felt in this group. Individuals with both substance misuse and mental health problems find themselves in a “Catch 22” situation where they are routinely denied access to services to assist with their mental health issues until their substance misuse issues are under control and vice versa. This is almost impossible to do whilst still on the streets.

To meet this gap in dual diagnosis provision, the council and New Hope are working closely with HPFT⁵¹ to recruit a community mental health practitioner to work with rough sleepers on the streets. Together with the existing substance misuse recovery worker based in the Street Outreach Service and also in the Intervention/Navigator Team it is hoped that a level of dual diagnosis support can be

⁵¹ Hertfordshire Partnership University Foundation Trust

provided which can help improve the likelihood of rough sleepers in this situation moving off the street.

Known street activities

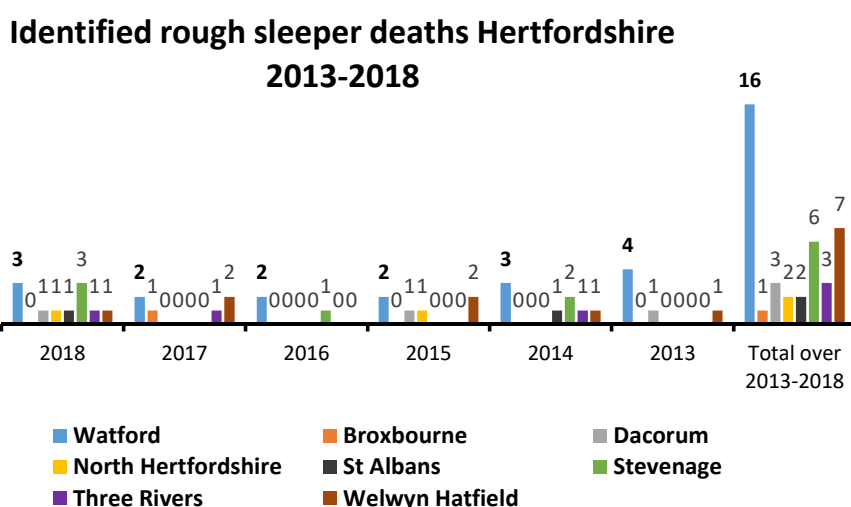
The most noticeable activity for rough sleepers is begging but in fact relatively few of the verified and self-defining cohort of rough sleepers are engaged in this activity: some 15 (20%) of the 82 in this cohort are engaged in begging, with no begging being undertaken by sofa surfers.

Deaths of rough sleepers in Watford

Rough sleeping throughout the UK has increased by 165% since 2010⁵² years and Office of National Statistics (ONS) experimental⁵³ data published in October 2019 found there were 22%⁵⁴ more deaths of rough sleepers in 2018 than there were in 2017 and over the last 6 years the number has increased by 51% with seven times more male rough sleeper deaths compared with female rough sleepers. Widespread concern has amplified in recent months about the increasing number of deaths of rough sleepers in this country.

The source of data used by the ONS for its results included death registration records together with “a statistical method called capture-recapture modelling ... applied to estimate the most likely number of additional registrations not identified as homeless people.”⁵⁵ In Watford, during the period 2013 to 2018, 16⁵⁶ deaths of rough sleepers were identified through death registrations whilst estimating that 20 rough sleepers had died through applying its statistical method.

The chart below compares identified rough sleeper deaths with other boroughs in Hertfordshire:



⁵² Homeless Link, “Rough sleeping – our analysis” <https://www.homeless.org.uk/facts/homelessness-in-numbers/rough-sleeping/rough-sleeping-our-analysis> (accessed 21/10/19)

⁵³ Office for National Statistics, “Deaths of homeless people in England and Wales: 2018” <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/bulletins/deaths-of-homeless-people-in-england-and-wales/2018> (accessed 21/10/19)

⁵⁴ Ibid

⁵⁵ Ibid

⁵⁶ Deaths of homeless people in England and Wales Dataset, Experimental Statistics showing the number of deaths of homeless people in England and Wales by six, five-year age group and underlying cause of death. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/datasets/deaths-of-homeless-people-in-england-and-wales>

Watford has the highest number of recorded rough sleeper deaths in Hertfordshire with Welwyn Hatfield the next highest whilst East Hertfordshire and Hertsmere have none recorded (and do not appear in the chart). Watford is one of 45 local authorities in England and Wales with between 11 and 20 identified rough sleeper deaths over the period 2013-2018.

The most common cause of death in 2018 was drug-related poisoning (40%) whilst suicide and alcohol-specific causes accounted for 12% respectively.

Neither the council nor the voluntary agencies working with rough sleepers are aware of the full extent of rough sleeper deaths in the town. Knowledge of rough sleeper deaths within Watford is confined to those rough sleepers known to services in the area. In that respect over 2018, the deaths of four rough sleepers are known, two of which were alcohol-related, one drug-related and for one the cause of death was unknown.

Preventing the death of rough sleepers in the town is of utmost importance. The rest of this chapter on rough sleeping covers a range of services already in operation or planned which will contribute to reducing rough sleeping in Watford including the untimely deaths of rough sleepers.

The role of government funding

Intervention Team (Rough Sleeper Grant)

In 2016, a joint bid, comprising the council together with New Hope, CGL Spectrum, hertsyounghomeless and Watford Citizens Advice, was successful in securing £338,000 from the MHCLG's Rough Sleeper Grant. The funding was used to set up a multi-agency, multi-disciplinary Intervention Team to provide a wraparound service to local rough sleepers and those in danger of rough sleeping for a two year period starting April 2017 and ending in March 2019.

Prior to the Intervention Team, New Hope already had in place a Rough Sleeper Prevention Team (RSPS) which continues now to provide humanitarian support to rough sleepers at its Haven facility (a day centre for rough sleepers or in immediate risk of rough sleeping) in Whippendell Road, Watford including hot breakfasts and packed lunches, showering and clothes washing facilities, as well as access to advice, support and emergency accommodation where possible. The RSPS also delivers a reactive outreach service to rough sleepers which is funded by WBC. This provides 6 hours per week of staff time to seek out rough sleepers where they are on the streets and encourage them to access the services at The Haven or other appropriate agencies and try to get them into accommodation and off the streets. The service is also required to track what happens to those contacted and worked with and measure how many were moved off the streets into accommodation within 7 days of initial contact and of those, how many returned to the streets within 3 months.

Of the between 60 and 120 rough sleepers assisted every quarter through the RSPS outreach service, data collected shows that between 30-50% are helped off the street into emergency or more long-term accommodation, usually provided by New Hope itself, and of these between 40-60% returned to the streets. The quite high failure rate is linked to service users' inability to maintain accommodation licence conditions due to their often highly complex needs. Those who are not helped into accommodation, or leave it, are often entrenched rough sleepers who are particularly hard to reach and have often cycled in and out of supported accommodation and other types of assistance over a period of years.

The advent of the Intervention Team helped to take the support for rough sleepers and those in danger of it begun by the RSPS, to a new level with multi-agency expertise delivered in a wraparound format, in one place. The Intervention Team comprised a substance misuse recovery worker (supplied by CGL Spectrum), a mental health worker (not clinical, supplied by hertsyounghomeless) and financial and legal support (provided by Watford Citizens Advice). New Hope provided the management of the team. Previously, service users would have to make separate trips to CGL Spectrum or Watford Citizens Advice at their respective offices and often not make it to appointments. Where they did, the agencies may not necessarily talk to each other. The new Intervention Team with all the expertise in one place made life much easier for rough sleepers, enabling comprehensive support plans to be devised and:

- increased their chances of getting off the streets and staying off or if not yet rough sleeping
- or were prevented from slipping into a life of rough sleeping because of substance misuse, mental health or financial or legal problems brought about by unemployment, bereavement or other issues that can disrupt peoples' lives.

The Intervention Team began work in April 2017 with 40 service users, four of which were in danger of rough sleeping, the rest were already sleeping rough. From the start, the services of the substance misuse recovery worker were oversubscribed and there was difficulty accessing the Community Mental Health Team to assist and provide clinical services for service users with more serious mental health issues. In Watford itself, illicit drug activity was increasing and there was a lack of suitable, affordable accommodation, including supported accommodation, for this cohort in the town. All these issues continued throughout the life of the Intervention Team. Indeed the illicit illegal drug activity, particularly in Watford's town centre, became more prevalent in the summer of 2018 and was impacting on local businesses and the reputation of the town. The situation led to the formation of the Town Centre Task Group chaired by the elected Mayor (see the section on Partnership Working for further information on the [Town Centre Task Group](#)).

Data collected by the Intervention team showed service users prevented from rough sleeping averaged 66% of those assisted whilst the proportion of those sleeping rough who were assisted into accommodation averaged 40%.

Intervention (Navigator) Team (Rapid Rehousing Pathway)

From April 2019 the good practice and service format established through the Intervention Team was transferred to a revised Navigator Team, also funded by MHCLG but this time through its Rapid Rehousing Pathway for Navigators (RRP) and continues to be based at New Hope. RRP funding also includes resources for:

- a fifth post earmarked for appointing a medically qualified practitioner
- £20,000 for up to £500 per person in personal budgets to assist with prevention of rough sleeping or enable a rough sleeper to get off the streets.

Further funding has been secured from MHCLG (as of January 2020) to enable this team's work to continue for 2020/21.

Partnering with HPFT⁵⁷ several attempts have been made to recruit a medically qualified practitioner to deliver mental health services to rough sleepers on the streets. It is intended this post holder

⁵⁷ Hertfordshire Partnership University Foundation Trust

would work together with the Intervention Team's existing substance misuse recovery worker to begin to address a long unmet need for rough sleepers to access substance misuse and mental health services simultaneously. If it is not possible to recruit to this post through HPFT, other routes, such as agencies will be pursued to deliver this objective.

On the personal budgets element of RRP funding, examples of expenditure have included:

- Clothing for attending interviews
- Household equipment
- Bedding
- Therapy sessions
- Fees for obtaining identity documents

The team continues to work with those facing rough sleeping and actually rough sleeping, receiving referrals from the RSPS (see above) and the Street Outreach Service (SOS – see further below). The team works with between 25 and 35 service users at any one time. Of the service users worked with so far, some 28 have been referred into non-accommodation-based services, including substance misuse recovery services, mental health or alcohol recovery, assistance with benefit applications and appeals, family reunification, and so on. Some 15 service users have been referred into accommodation. The lower number of referrals into accommodation is because, as noted above, suitable supported, affordable accommodation is lacking in Watford. Service users' progress is monitored.

Street Outreach Service (Rough Sleeper Initiative)

At the same time as Watford gained RRP funding (see above) it was also successful in obtaining further MHCLG funding through the Rough Sleeping Initiative (RSI). Like RRP above, RSI funding is for one year. The funding enabled a proactive Street Outreach Service (SOS) to be set up comprising three staff: a street outreach co-ordinator, a substance misuse recovery worker and a generalist outreach worker.

This team followed the same multi-agency approach as for the Intervention Team with the co-ordinator post delivered by New Hope, the substance misuse recovery worker delivered by CGL Spectrum and the generalist outreach worker supplied by hertsyounghomeless. The team co-ordinator is also responsible for organising Watford's Winter Night Shelter.

The team was fully staffed from July 2019. Working in pairs and in shift patterns the SOS works on finding and proactively engaging with rough sleepers in the town on early mornings, late nights and weekends. Staff in the SOS and RSPS teams all wear branded clothing (jackets) which show they are from the SOS at New Hope. The aim of staff is to encourage rough sleepers to access services principally at The Haven, including the Intervention (Navigator) Team.

Data collected by the SOS so far on Watford's rough sleeper population is set out above in the section on [levels of rough sleeping in Watford](#).

Relationships of trust are being built between the SOS staff and rough sleepers to gain their confidence, find out their needs and refer them into the Intervention Team or other appropriate agencies, such as the local Meadowell Clinic in Watford which provides GP services for rough sleepers and other vulnerable people. The majority of the cohort has significant substance misuse issues. Of the cohort currently being worked with, some 15 are on the waiting list for vacancies

arising at New Hope's Sanctuary hostel facility. Within the cohort of rough sleepers are a number without recourse to public funds (NRPF) for whom the options for settled housing are extremely limited. Some have been helped to reconnect with families abroad whilst one has been accepted into a branch of Emmaus, a voluntary agency providing shelter together with support, training and work for homeless people.

The Street Outreach Service have had a number of successes in assisting rough sleepers. For example:

- Enabling two rough sleepers to return to their homes in Romania,
- Enabling access to support beds in New Hope,
- Persuading an entrenched rough sleeper with 8 years on the street and with alcohol dependency to accept alcohol detox services. This person then accessed New Hope's night shelter. Although behavioural issues meant they had to leave temporarily, this case illustrates they are on the path to recovery which may see several setbacks until finally achieved.

The RSI funding includes a requirement to carry out rough sleeper counts on a bi-monthly basis over the year of the funding. Counts conducted at the end of July and end of September found 20 and 13 rough sleepers respectively. As observed at the beginning of this section on rough sleeping in Watford, the numbers found rough sleeping at counts does not generally reflect the full population.

Accessing MHCLG funding has been through a bidding process and a requirement to submit bids within short timeframes. The longevity of the funding is an issue: RSG funding was for two and one quarter years. Subsequent RRP and RSI funding have been for 12 months only. On several occasions, the council has raised its concerns over the short term and uncertain nature of the funding available to work with rough sleepers. It has explained how funding structured in this way makes it hard to keep staff in place, or enable services to be consolidated or developed. As a result the effectiveness of work with rough sleepers is undermined.

The council welcomed MHCLG's co-production process to determine funding needs for 2020/21 that began in November 2019. In January 2020 the council was awarded with most of the funding it required to enable the Intervention/Navigator Team and the Street Outreach Service to continue for 2020/21.

Role of Housing Related Support funding

As stated earlier, Hertfordshire County Council uses housing related support (HRS) funding to commission local voluntary sector partners in the county to deliver accommodation and support services to rough sleepers and single homeless people with complex needs.

After cutting HRS funded agencies by 15% in January 2017, HCC has undertaken a much welcomed comprehensive county-wide review of HRS funding with a view to consulting on a draft HRS/complex needs strategy for the use of this funding, and tendering and finalising HRS/complex needs contracts later in 2020.

Some £1.2m in HRS funding is currently granted to three voluntary agencies in Watford:

- OneYMCA to support 150 units of accommodation, accessible by all single homeless people in Hertfordshire, not just Watford
- New Hope for supported housing and floating support (Watford connection)

- GROW for supported housing (Watford connection)

The current level of HRS funding will continue until March 2021.

Contractually, HRS funding requires measurement of the progress of service users to independence and stability using tools like Outcome Star with move-on plans put in place. It is also time limited to providing service users with support for no more than 18 months.

Winter Shelter

In 2018/19, a 15-bed winter shelter for rough sleepers was run for the first time in Watford, set up and run by a partnership of the council, New Hope, St Mary's Church, Wellspring Church, One YMCA and 60+ volunteers from Watford's community, including several councillors and the elected Mayor of Watford. Initially the shelter was to run from 1 December 2018 to 31 January 2019 but was extended when OneYMCA offered to host it throughout February and March 2019.

One hundred and five individuals benefited from this humanitarian initiative which gave shelter from the worst of the winter weather to any rough sleeper in Watford who wanted it. A number of the rough sleepers assisted in the winter night shelter were vulnerable due to ill health and some had no financial means whatsoever. This initiative undoubtedly saved lives.

The shelter was funded partly by WBC and also by the MHCLG's Cold Weather Fund.

Some key facts and outcomes about the 105 individuals who accessed the shelter:

- There were 84 men (80%) and 21 women (20%)
- 33 (31.5%) moved into various forms of settled or supported accommodation instead of returning to rough sleeping
- Just under half the WNS occupants had a local connection with Watford (46.7%), some 12.4% came from neighbouring Hertfordshire boroughs and 34.3% did not have a local connection with Watford
- The largest support need among occupants was with mental health (51%) with substance and alcohol misuse next most prevalent (41% and 34% respectively). Physical health issues affected a quarter of the occupants whilst risk of abuse or exploitation and having no recourse to public funds each affected 15% of the occupants

In terms of the shelter itself and its context:

- From 1 December 2018 to 31 January 2019 the shelter was based at St Mary's Church in central Watford apart from one week when it was based at Wellspring Church nearby. From 1 February to 31 March the shelter was based at OneYMCA at its building in Charter House.
- Three paid waking night staff and 60+ volunteers were involved in running the shelter
- There were 21 nights when the temperatures were at or below 0°C
- On 13 nights all 15 beds were filled
- Additional beds were needed on two nights for 3 people (provided at a local B&B)
- In total 696 referrals were made to the shelter via New Hope's facilities including the RSPS, its emergency homelessness line and The Sanctuary and 51 police referrals

- Not everyone who was referred to the shelter took up the offer of a bed: this happened 166 times

Watford's Winter Shelter will be run again from 1 December 2019 to 31 March 2020, based at OneYMCA's premises at Charter House, with 60+ volunteers involved: indeed all but 5 of the volunteers from last year have agreed to help again this year. A great deal was learned from running the first shelter last year including:

- Provision of hot food on some nights
- Packs to be given to rough sleepers to include fresh socks, toothpaste and toothbrushes
- The Street Outreach Service have used the opportunity of the shelter to continue their active engagement with rough sleepers to assist them off the streets, as well as targeting those that do not take up the offer of a bed

Plans for a Complex Needs Housing Scheme in Watford

WBC's role is mainly to provide relief under the HRA17 for those rough sleepers who are in priority need⁵⁸ which as stated earlier in this review document is "... assessed within the context of whether the council thinks someone can cope with being homeless, for example: how any disability or illness affects daily life, what support is available from friends, family or other services and whether being homeless makes the person being assessed more vulnerable than an ordinary person made homeless."

As noted in the section on Temporary Accommodation above, the number of single people placed in TA has risen in the last year as a result of the HRA17. However, people with complex needs to whom the council has accepted a duty, are placed in TA without any support at all as the Housing team has no expertise to provide it. Without support a TA placement with someone with complex needs⁵⁹ quite often breaks down and the council has found itself discharging its duty with the result that the person returns to the streets.

Recently, the council and the Tenancy Support Team at New Hope have been working closely together with some single people placed in TA with a good deal of success in terms of moving a number on into independent accommodation or enabling others to manage their finances and lives better so they are no longer in arrears and can be made ready to move on into independent living.

Despite these successes, there continues to be little provision locally for those with complex needs, particularly those who need simultaneous access to substance misuse and mental health services as outlined in the section on the Intervention Team above. The gap in dual diagnosis provision is a result of existing mental health services not being able to work with people who have substance misuse issues unless these are first resolved and vice versa, substance misuse recovery services are unable to support those with enduring mental health problems even though the two issues are often intertwined. A common outcome for people with needs is street homelessness where access to medical support reduces, self-medication with addictive street drugs and/or alcohol becomes a feature of their lives together with exploitation, abuse, petty crime, begging and self-neglect. Over time, they cycle repeatedly between local support services and rough sleeping.

⁵⁸ See definition above

⁵⁹ See Glossary for definition of complex needs

WBC has been working with various local and national organisations to develop a complex needs housing scheme in Watford to respond to the issues outlined above. Such a scheme would include 24 hour support including waking night staff and project workers with small caseloads to provide a safe and structured environment which facilitates intensive, holistic support to service users, enabling access to substance misuse recovery, mental health services, and a range of other support which will eventually enable independent living. The service would work towards service users becoming stabilised to a degree where they can move on to less supported accommodation within 6-18 months.

Funded mostly through enhanced housing benefit, the council is looking at other funding sources to increase the viability of this much needed provision.

Move-On Accommodation

WBC, in conjunction with voluntary sector partners have a clear vision for a joined up pathway for rough sleepers to leave the streets of Watford. Having obtained just over £500,000 in RSG, RSI and RRP funding for the Intervention Team and Street Outreach Service as well as developing plans to deliver a complex needs housing scheme, the next stage in the pathway is making sure there is a form of accommodation providing low levels of support for occupants of the complex needs housing scheme to move on to.

Watford has some accommodation which enables move-on from supported hostels. These units are owned by New Hope, and GROW. Currently the extent of provision is as follows:

Organisation	Type of move on	No. of bed spaces
New Hope	Shared move-on up to 18 months stay	40
	Self-contained move-on up to 18 months stay	6
GROW	Shared move-on – no time restriction	6
Total		52

There is still a great need for adequate move-on and in particular the stage between the planned complex needs housing project talked about in the previous section and independent living in the private rented or housing association sectors.

Homes England published details of its Move-On Fund in August 2018. The council is currently searching for a housing association partner to acquire a number of two- and three-bedroom second hand properties in Watford to provide between 20 and 30 medium-term move-on bed spaces. Because of the subsidy provided by the Move-on Fund, it is hoped to set rents for these bed spaces at a level equivalent to 40-45% of the Universal Credit rate for a single person under 25. This approach will ensure these homes are affordable to the full age range of people who could access these homes and support residents as part of their recovery to be able to seek work.

If this funding was to be successfully applied in Watford, it would provide much needed move-on and be an essential element in creating the pathway for rough sleepers to move off the streets permanently.

Housing First

New Hope, one of the key organisations working with rough sleepers in Watford undertook research in 2018 on the viability of Housing First in Watford and came to the conclusion that it was something of great value and would work in the town. The infrastructure (accommodation and workers) to support Housing First needs to be put in place whilst a number of known rough sleepers have been identified who would particularly benefit from a Housing First offer.

Homeless Link gave a presentation about the principles and examples of Housing First to the Watford Strategic Homelessness Forum at its meeting in May 2019. It was agreed then that a Housing First Task and Finish Group (HFTFG) would be set up comprising Forum members to take the idea further.

The HFTFG currently comprises representatives from New Hope, OneYMCA, Watford Community Housing, Aldwyck Housing Group, Hightown Housing Association, JobCentre Plus, Meadowell Clinic and the council. It is hoped Watford Police will also be involved.

The activities of the Group have so far been exploratory, with visits to existing HF schemes, identifying potential funding and potential residents around whom to build the scheme. One of the housing association partners has said they are willing to commit one home to the scheme. Up to five further units are required. The private rented sector is being looked at as a possibility although currently one bedroom homes in Watford are not affordable by those who are benefit-dependent, so a long-term subsidy of some sort will be required.

Like the work to expand move-on accommodation talked about in the previous section, a Housing First scheme is also another piece in the jigsaw creating a pathway from street-living to a home for life for former rough sleepers. MHCLG funding for 2020/21 enables the appointment of a Housing First worker to take this initiative forward and make it a reality in Watford.

Single Homeless Hub

To respond to the sustained increase in the number of rough sleepers in Watford and their complex needs, New Hope is spearheading an initiative to build a one stop shop, a Single Homeless Hub, which offers rough sleepers essential support, emergency accommodation, health care and other services under one roof. This initiative is separate to the complex needs housing scheme detailed above. Although the two have similar elements, such as provision of accommodation and access to support and health care, they are distinct in that the complex needs scheme will not have a day centre and will not be a hub for a range of services aimed at rough sleepers who may still be on the streets or those in danger of ending up there. The planned hub will house New Hope's existing staff, the multi-agency staff delivering the Intervention Team and Street Outreach Services, a range of other partners would also be brought together within the Hub to provide services needed, including the council housing and homelessness services and local health services.

New, purpose-built accommodation will be required which would replace and bring together New Hope's current provision located at two separate buildings called The Haven (the day centre) and The Sanctuary (the night shelter and emergency accommodation) which will in the future be no longer fit for purpose.

The council supports this initiative and is ensuring cross-departmental representatives are involved in putting together a package which will enable the Single Homeless Hub to become a reality. It is expected the Hub will come into being over the next 3-4 years.

Working with rough sleepers in Watford – services available and best practice guidelines

As in the rest of England, rough sleeping is much more noticeable now. Like many local authority areas, Watford has seen an increase in the number of individuals and groups who wish to support rough sleepers and help make a difference to their lives. Unwittingly some help given to rough sleepers has the effect of maintaining a rough sleeping life rather than encouraging them to leave it. The support provided can also undermine the efforts of existing, well-established groups carrying

out government-funded activities aimed at encouraging rough sleepers off the streets on a permanent basis. In addition there have been concerns about safeguarding the privacy, safety and dignity of rough sleepers where social media was used to raise the profile of individual rough sleepers.

With these issues in mind, and inspired by a similar document adopted by Manchester Homelessness Partnership, the Watford Strategic Homelessness Forum adopted "[Working with rough sleepers in Watford – services available and best practice guidelines](#)". Aimed at charities, voluntary and statutory agencies working with rough sleepers as well as individuals who want to support them, the document does a number of things:

- Defines what a rough sleeper is
- Provides information about the services available for rough sleepers in Watford, who provides them and how to access them
- Shares advice on working with rough sleepers safely and avoiding helping to keep them on the streets
- Sets out the three best things people can do to help rough sleepers in Watford, namely:
 - Refer rough sleepers they are concerned about to services who can help
 - Volunteer with existing agencies in the town who provide a wide range of services for rough sleepers already
 - Donate to an established organisation rather than supporting begging

Staying off the streets is not made easy

Short term government funding, inadequate Local Housing Allowance (LHA) for rents, and attitudes and concerns of private and social landlords towards rough sleepers do not help resolve the following common scenarios they face, together with the agencies in Watford who work with them:

- 18 months (the time limit for HRS funded support work with individuals) may not be sufficient to enable a person to be worked with and stabilised to the degree where they can live independently, especially those with a background of entrenched rough sleeping. Where move-on is not available to enable them to progress further, agencies can often be faced with the invidious decision of evicting the person back onto the streets
- Placements in hostels often break down where a service user's behaviour leads to a breach of their licence conditions and/or is dangerous to fellow service users and/or to staff and/or there is insufficient support with, say, concurrent mental health and substance misuse issues; there is nowhere for these individuals to go except back to the street. They may be able to go re-enter the hostel they were evicted from or another one at a later date but this means the cycling between hostels and the streets continues with no way out
- People who move from supported hostel environments into lower support shared move-on accommodation (say in a shared house or flat) can relapse because the issues that led them to rough sleeping in the first place reoccur. If there are no places in a supported hostel for them to revert back to, and they breach their licence conditions in their move-on, the only option for them is back to the streets

- For those in shared move-on accommodation who wish to work, it is almost impossible to get by on a low income. The LHA rate for a single person is £83.29 pw⁶⁰ whilst the rent in move on accommodation may be over £300 pw, the financial gap is simply too much to manage. If a working resident accrues rent arrears, they again face eviction and with nowhere to go they are back onto the streets
- Moving into a private rented home is almost impossible: even if the private rent were affordable (an issue explored further later on in this review), a deposit is needed which many move-on residents do not have and/or a personal rent guarantor is needed, which again they are unlikely to have.
- Social landlords are often concerned about risks to rental income and to other social rented tenants and have been known to refuse their Housing Register nomination without financial security and support packages being in place

What is needed to enable a life off the streets to be truly sustained is an accommodation and support system for rough sleepers including those with complex needs that:

- enables flexibility for them to move back and forth within the supported housing environment as their support needs change
- provides medium term move-on and long-term settled accommodation which, above all, is affordable

Cuckooing and homelessness

Cuckooing is the process whereby a vulnerable person is befriended by a drug dealer who then takes over their home and exploits the home and the resident for their own purposes. The vulnerable person, who can be elderly or young, or disabled mentally or physically can be exploited physically, mentally, financially and sexually. As in the rest of the UK, cuckooing is increasingly an issue in Watford fuelled by county lines activities. County lines is the approach used by drug dealers living in large urban areas, who recruit and exploit children and vulnerable people to courier drugs and cash into county and coastal areas of the country.

In Watford there have been six cases of cuckooing the homes of vulnerable people recorded since March 2019, most of whom are social housing tenants. There is some evidence that rough sleepers in Watford may be involved in cuckooing and drugs activities. Others are also at risk if they have been witnesses to violence in or near a cuckooed home. Those cuckooed are often unable to remain living in Watford as their lives are in danger. However, moving out of the borough can be particularly difficult for vulnerable people who may lose important networks that sustain their lives including to health services they need.

The links between cuckooing and homelessness are clear and partnership working between the council, other local authorities, housing associations, the police and the voluntary sector to tackle it and prevent the homelessness of cuckooed victims as well as create a pathway to safety is an area of development for the council.

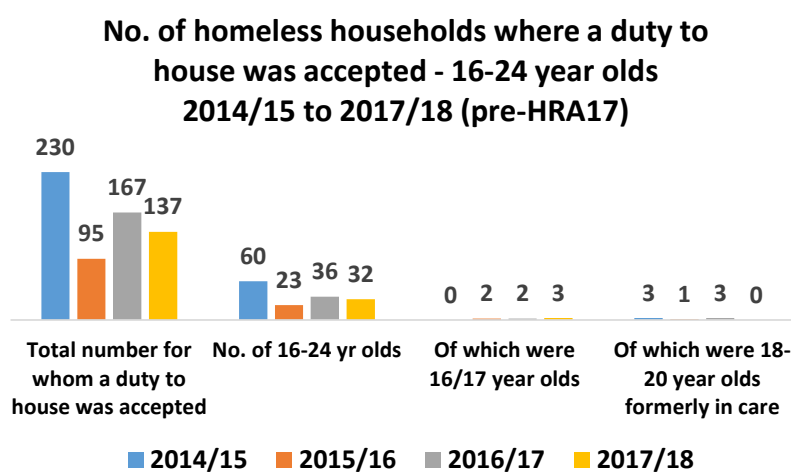
⁶⁰ For 2019/20 in Watford

Youth Homelessness

In this section, homelessness amongst 16 to 24 year olds is examined and within this, 16 and 17 year olds and those leaving care are explored in particular. Both the latter groups are priority need groups under the homelessness legislation which means the council will have a duty to house an individual if it is not possible to prevent or relieve their homelessness.

Data over the last 5 years shows that 16/17 year olds and those leaving care have been a very small proportion of the households facing homelessness that the council has assisted. The first chart includes data for the last four years before the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 came into force⁶¹ and shows data for which a duty to house was accepted. In the case of 16/17 year olds and those leaving care who were homeless, the duty to house was mostly automatic.

Source: P1E data



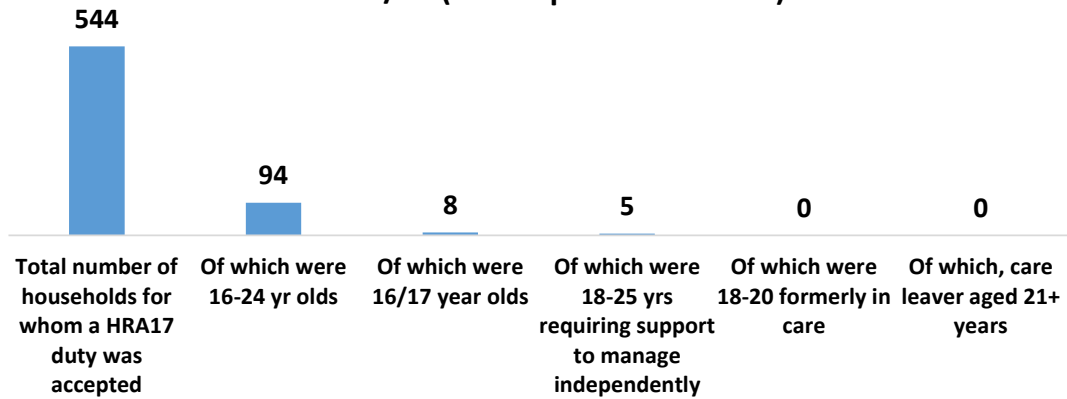
The [table](#) below shows the number of households aged 16-24 assisted under the Homelessness Reduction Act during 2018/19. It is difficult to compare the two sets of data because the duties under the Homelessness Reduction Act are more extensive than under the Housing Act 1996⁶². As pointed out earlier, the data collected during 2018/19 must be regarded as indicative only because a new data collection system was introduced by the government which has been difficult to implement for most local authorities.

⁶¹ From 3 April 2018

⁶² For further explanation, see section on The council's duties in relation to homelessness

Source: H-CLIC data

Homeless households aged 16-24 with support needs to whom the council owed a duty under the HRA17 2018/19 (NB: Experimental data)



A key change is that the number of 16/17 year olds recorded as being assisted by the council appears to have increased, whilst there were no ex-care leavers assisted.

The Hertfordshire Joint Housing Protocol⁶³ between Hertfordshire County Council and the ten district and borough councils in Hertfordshire sets out how they will work together to prevent youth homelessness and support families with children who are at risk of homelessness or have been deemed intentionally homeless. A revised Protocol is currently being drafted and will be published in early 2020.

The current protocol aims to ensure that the needs of young people aged 16 and 17 are appropriately assessed and services delivered which meet their needs. Currently, young people in this age group can present as homeless to their local authority, HCC's Children's Services or to hertsyounghomeless⁶⁴. Where a young person presents as homeless to one of the ten local authorities or to HCC's Children's Services, they will ensure the young person has interim accommodation for up to 15 working days within which time a Joint Housing Support Meeting will be arranged to share information (with appropriate consent) and decide a way forward for a young person, usually under Section 17 (assessment of support needs) and/or Section 20 (support needs and accommodation) of the Children Act 1989. Where a young person presents to hertsyounghomeless (hyh), hyh will liaise with Children's Services on interim accommodation and all LAs can also refer young people to hyh's Crashpad emergency accommodation which can be available for up to 28 days. All parties to the protocol have agreed that bed and breakfast should not be used as interim accommodation for 16/17 year olds.

Hertsyounghomeless works in partnership with OneYMCA to deliver a Homeless Hub which provides advice and support to young people on preventing homelessness. The Hub prioritises 16 and 17 year olds and works with their families/carers to help them stay together. As a result of this approach, across Hertfordshire, some 95% of young people requesting support were prevented from needing access to Children's Services and 93% were prevented from needing to make a homeless application.

⁶³ Hertfordshire Joint Housing Protocol, May 2015

⁶⁴ A charity in Hertfordshire providing service to support vulnerable people, preventing homelessness from education in schools and family mediation through to supporting 16-24 year olds in their first homes or caring for adults of all ages who have mental health issues and housing needs.

In terms of assistance to Watford-connected young people: during 2018-19, of 469 young people aged 18-25 years old calling the Homeless Hub's 18+ Advice Line, 57 were from Watford. During that year also, hyh's floating support service worked with 23 young people from Watford of whom:

- 17 were care leavers
- 4 were leaving supported accommodation
- 2 were in a tenancy but at risk of eviction

Lastly, there were 44 referrals from Watford to the Homeless Hub's support for 16-17 year olds from a total of 559 for Hertfordshire as a whole.

Housing options for young people under 24, other than remaining with parents/carers are particularly challenging because of the low incomes and/or Universal Credit entitlements which apply to this age group.

The situation is easily demonstrated in Watford where the median rent for a room in a private rented shared house in Watford at the end of November 2019 was £150 pw (£650 per month) whilst the Universal Credit for a single young person in this age group is around £250 pw including rent. This would mean a young person paying approximately 60% of their income on housing costs leaving the rest (about £100 pw) to cover eating, heating, telephone/internet data, clothing, transport and other expenses.

The council intends to explore the possibility of cheaper housing options that are affordable within 40%-45% of the Universal Credit applicable for this age group.

Generally for people aged under 35, the homeless charity, Crisis, recently observed "Over the last decade there has been an increase of nearly 700,000 in the number (or 28% in the share) of 20- 34 year olds living with their parents, with no less than 48 per cent increase in London and the South East. The flipside of this is that the proportion of younger adults heading households has fallen markedly, particularly in London and the South East where rates are 32 per cent below those in the early 1990s. These pronounced declines in household headship rates are associated with the impacts of a tight housing market and also of worsening real income/living standards among younger working age people in this period. Thus, a decade after the onset of the financial crisis and recession, and despite gradual improvements in employment levels and "recovery" in the housing market, the chances of many young adults being able to form separate households are severely diminished"⁶⁵

The council contributes funding to hyh to run training sessions called "Home Truths" which raise awareness of the realities of homelessness and what support is available. These sessions are aimed at 16-18 year olds in local schools and colleges.

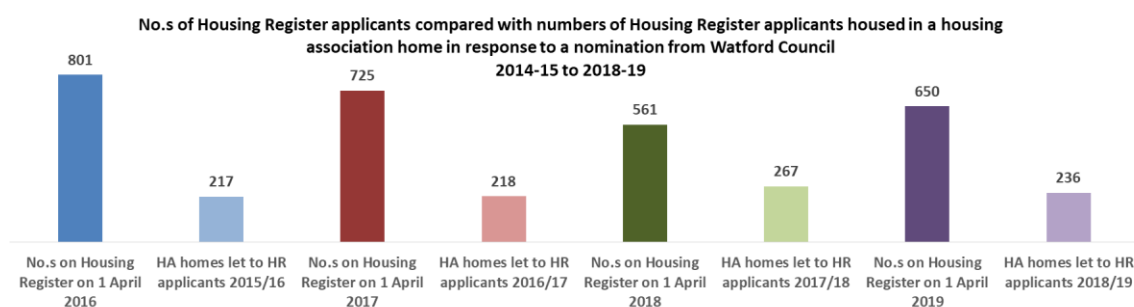
⁶⁵ Fitzpatrick, S, et al (2019), The homelessness monitor: England 2019, Crisis, https://www.crisis.org.uk/media/240421/the_homelessness_monitor_england_2019_es.pdf

Affordable Housing Supply for homeless households and households in general

Demand and supply of housing association homes

The council does not own social rented housing of its own and depends on partner housing associations to put forward vacancies for Housing Register applicants to bid for through the choice based lettings system.

The following chart, showing the number of homes let each year compared to the number of applicants on the council’s Housing Register at 1 April, demonstrates that demand for housing association homes far outstrips supply:



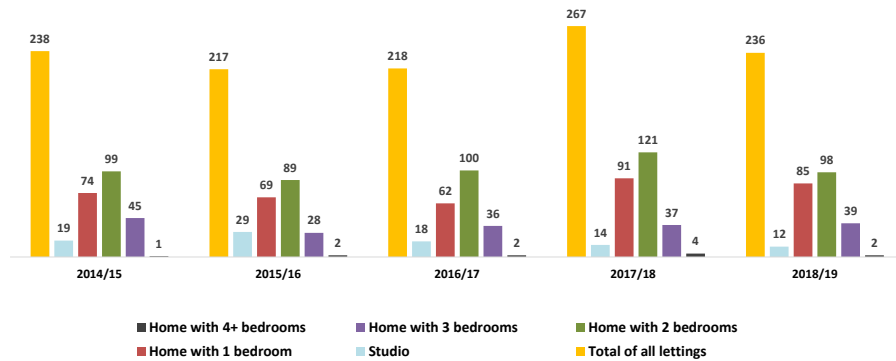
The next chart shows the number of lettings of social and affordable rented homes owned by housing associations in Watford over the period 2014/15 to 2018/19.

Lettings of homes with three and four bedrooms remain low throughout the 5 year period, particularly four bedrooms with an average of two per year. The highest number of lettings consistently across the period are homes with two bedrooms and then those with one bedroom. In addition, over the five year period, lettings of newly built affordable rent homes with 3+ bedrooms was very low with only 12 homes with three bedrooms and eight with four bedrooms newly built homes becoming available for letting⁶⁶.

The number of housing association homes of all sizes becoming available to let over the last five years has ranged between 217 and 267. This is compared with 2012/13 and 2013/14 when there were respectively 471 and 397 housing association lettings that became available for letting.

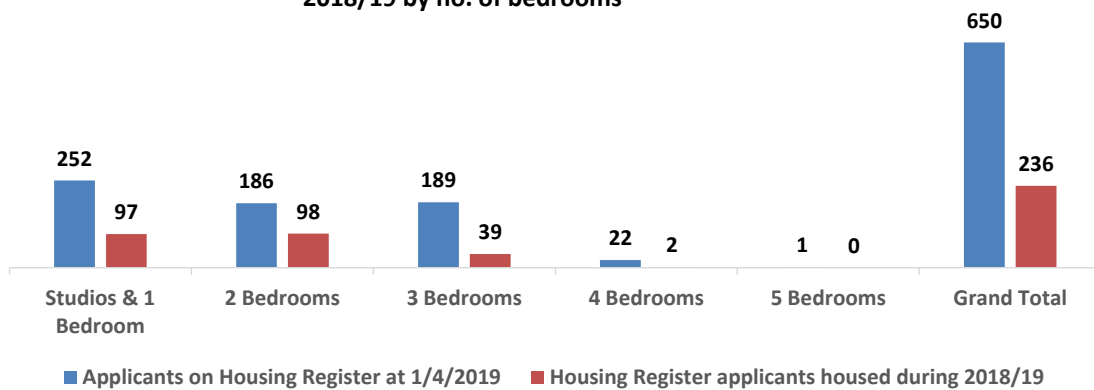
⁶⁶ CDPSmart HCC data, Annual Completions by Size, Type and Provider 2014-15 to 2019-19

Social / affordable lettings in Watford 2013/14 to 2018/19 by size of home let



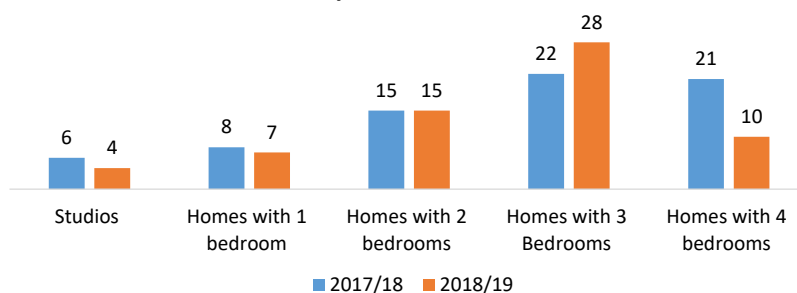
Below shows the number of lettings by number of bedrooms in 2018/19 compared with the number of Housing Register applicants requiring them as at 1 April 2019. The demand for studios and homes with one bedroom outstrips supply by 2.5:1, for two bedrooms by 2:1, for three bedrooms by 5:1 and 4 bedrooms by 11:1.

Housing Register applicants as at 1/4/2019 compared with no.s housed during 2018/19 by no. of bedrooms



The chart below shows the number of months waited by those actually housed during the years 2017/18 and 2018/19. For the most part, the larger the home required, the longer the wait to be housed because of lack of supply. In 2018/19, the wait increased particularly for those who needed a home with 3 bedrooms. The reduced time for 4 bedroom homes in 2018/19 reflects the increased priority of the households involved which led them to be housed more quickly.

Average time waited in months for Housing Register applicants who were actually housed in 2017/18 & 2018/19

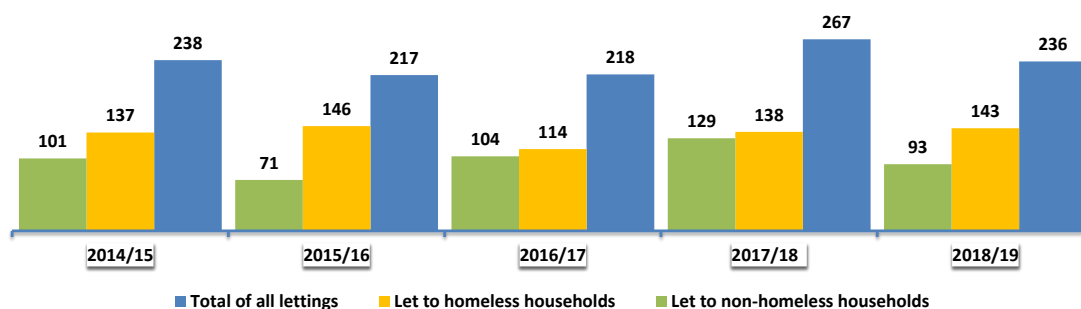


For current Housing Register applicants, that is people who have **not yet been housed**, the average wait since application is 12 months. However if this is broken down by number of bedrooms needed:

- The average time waited so far by those needing a home with one bedroom is 10 months
- The average time waited so far by those needing a home with two bedrooms is 11 months
- The average time waited so far by those needing a home with 3 bedrooms is 15 months
- The average time waited so far by those needing a home with 4 bedrooms is 14 months

The chart below sets out lettings broken down by homeless households and non-homeless households. As can be seen, in each year, homeless households are the biggest group housed each year.

Social / affordable lettings 2013/14 to 2018/19 by total lettings, homeless and non-homeless



In terms of all housing register applicants housed, homeless applicants made up the following proportions:

Year	Proportion of all Housing Register applicants housed who were homeless ⁶⁷ (%)
2014/15	58%
2015/16	67%
2016/17	52%
2017/18	52%
2018/19	61%

Tackling Under occupation in housing association homes in Watford

The council will be working in partnership with Watford Community Housing (WCH) on implementing its Rightsizing policy. The Rightsizing policy enables WCH to make best use of its housing stock by incentivising and moving existing tenants in homes that are larger than they need or can manage into smaller homes. WCH estimate that some 40% of its homes have a spare capacity

⁶⁷ The council had accepted a duty to house under the homelessness legislation

of one or more bedrooms. Along with the Rightsizing policy, WCH has developed a new offer in its housing schemes aimed at those aged 50+, particularly those currently occupying larger general needs homes. WCH believe the Rightsizing scheme has the potential to free up around 50 much needed family-sized homes. The council will contribute towards:

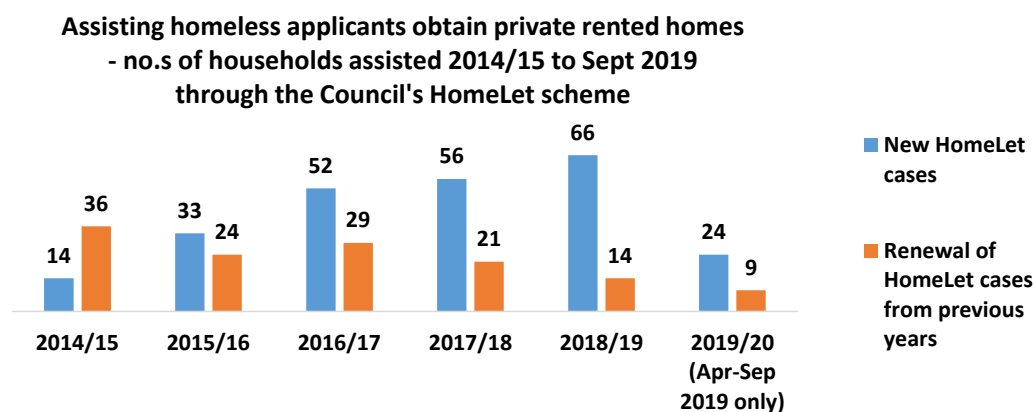
- the cost of a Housing Options Resident Liaison post who will work proactively with tenants wishing to right size, providing them with whatever support they need.
- Rightsizing incentives
- Joint marketing and promotion

Assisting homeless households into the private rented sector

The other key source of homes for homeless households is the private rented sector. The council runs its own free of charge private renting incentive scheme which matches landlords who have available homes with prospective tenants looking for a private rented home. The council can assist with covering some of the costs for landlords and for tenants.

Priority for consideration is:

1. Those placed by WBC in temporary accommodation
2. Those who are threatened with homelessness who would otherwise be placed in temporary accommodation by WBC
3. Those in high need on WBC's Housing Register



HomeLet financial assistance will only be paid where the assured shorthold tenancy (AST) is at least 12 months long and, preferably, AST lengths of two years are often obtained. Private rented homes accessed through the scheme have been located all over the country including Bradford, Birmingham and Norwich as well as closer to home in London, St Albans, Hemel Hempstead and of course Watford. Moves outside Watford are always voluntary. Whilst other issues such as work or family may take households away from Watford, affordability of private rented homes locally is a major concern and a key factor in why access to private lettings via the Homelet scheme is going to be lower in 2019/20 than in previous years. The next section explores the issue of affordability in more detail.

Affordability

Affordability is a major issue for homeless households, many of whom are on low incomes and/or dependent on benefits. In the section above on the main reasons for homelessness, loss of a private rented sector home has been the biggest reason for homelessness. The underlying reason for this is often the inability of the household made homeless to afford the private rent being charged. If not working or working part-time and dependent on benefits, households do not have enough income to afford local rents. If working and solely dependent upon earned income, households are still often in the position of not being able to afford private rents in Watford.

What level of rent is affordable in Watford for someone earning the median income in Watford?

The council carried out an exercise in August 2018 looking at median private rents for different sizes of homes and assessing which were affordable for a full-time worker resident in Watford earning by the net monthly median income £1,967 pm (that is after tax and national insurance). The following situation was found:

Size of home	Median rent as at August 2018	Difference between net monthly income and rent	% of net income spent on housing	Affordable?
Room	£ 650	£ 1,317	33%	Yes
One bedroom	£ 897	£ 1,070	46%	Possible
Two bedrooms	£ 1,200	£ 767	61%	No
Three bedrooms	£ 1,499	£ 468	76%	No
Four bedrooms	£ 2,149	-£ 182	109%	No
Five bedrooms	£ 2,776	-£ 809	141%	No

Homes with two or more bedrooms are more likely to be occupied by families which means, that without the assistance of Local Housing allowance, or a second adequate income, a home charging a median private rent is not affordable by a Watford resident working full-time and earning a median net income for the borough.

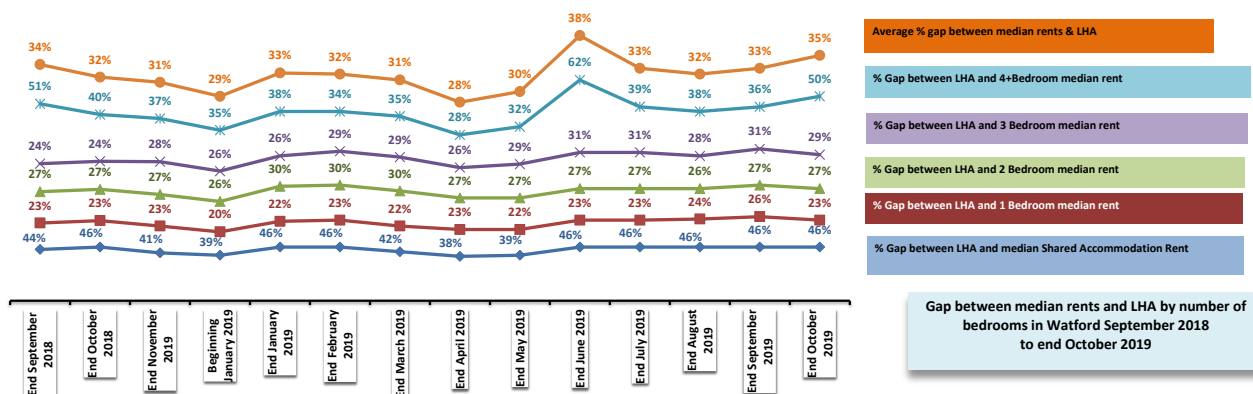
The gap between Local Housing Allowance and private rents

Local Housing Allowance (LHA), which helps households on low incomes to afford private (and housing association) rents was originally designed to enable access to the bottom 5 in 10 private rented homes in any area. The idea was that households on benefits and those earning should face the same choices about what housing they could afford. That 50% proportion was reduced to the bottom 3 in 10 private rented homes in 2011. From 2013, no effort was made to match LHA to private market rents and then the decision was made in 2016 to freeze LHA rates for 4 years until March 2020. For some areas like Watford, the LHA was tweaked slightly upwards over the course of the last three years but no way near enough to keep pace with actual advertised private rents. For example:

	LHA rate @ September 2016 pw	LHA rate @ April 2019 pw	Increase in LHA pw over the period	Median Private Rent* at October 2016 pw	Median Private Rent at September 2019 pw	Increase in median private rent pw	Gap between LHA and private rents
Room in shared accommodation	£78.50	£83.29	£4.79	£137	£150	£13.79	43-45%
One bedroom	£156	£165.50	£9.50	£201	£216	£15.00	22-23%
Two bedrooms	£196.96	£208.96	£12	£273	£273	£0	23-28%
Three bedrooms	£247.20	£262.26	£15.06	£350	£357	£7	27-29%
Four+ bedrooms	£358.80	£358.80	£0	£473	£508	£35	29-30%

*Source of median private rents Home.co.uk

Over the course of the last 3 years the council has mapped the average gap between LHA rates and median private rents: the gap is around 32% across all sizes of homes in the private sector. The following graph shows the gap between LHA and median private rents for different sizes of homes in Watford during the last year alone:



The council has also examined on a monthly basis how many homes are advertised for rent in Watford at the LHA level. The following table shows the outcome of that investigation over just the last year:

No. of properties available at LHA rate within 3 mile radius of centre of Watford	Sep 18	Oct 18	Nov 18	Jan 19	Feb 19	Mar 19	Apr 19	May 19	Jun 19	Jul 19	Aug 19	Total for the year	Average no. of private rented homes available at LHA rate per month	Average no. of all private rented homes advertised monthly
No. of homes with one bedroom	2	1	0	0	0	1	0	2	1	2	1	10	1	124
No. of homes with two bedrooms	1	0	0	0	2	1	1	2	1	2	3	13	1	184
No. of homes with three bedrooms	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	4	0	34
No. of homes with 4+ bedrooms	1	1	1	1	7	4	1	0	1	0	0	17	2	10

- on average less than a handful of homes advertised have rents at the LHA level.
- Only 10 (8%) out of the average 124 one bedroom homes advertised had rents at the LHA rate
- Only 13 (7%) out of the average 184 two bedroom homes advertised had rents at the LHA rate
- No three bedroom homes were advertised at the LHA rate
- Ironically, there is more likelihood of a four bedroom home being advertised at LHA rate but only 2 (20%) out of an average of 10 per month advertised

There is growing pressure on the government to restore some parity between LHA rents and at least the 30th percentile of market rents⁶⁸, especially where there is a severe lack of social housing.

The impact of the Benefit Cap

Another issue undermining affordability is the Benefit Cap for many households dependent on Universal Credit (UC). If living outside London, households with children are not allowed to receive more than £20,000 per year or £384.62 per week in benefits and for single people the benefit cap is £13,400 pa or £257.69 pw. UC covers a standard living allowance, plus additional amounts for children, housing and other needs as relevant. Being benefit capped means a household's UC is limited and usually this means they do not receive enough money to fully cover their rent and service charge. Any gap between the amount of UC they are given to pay for their rent and their actual rent has to be paid for out of the rest of the money they have for food and bills. Any household with two or more children will be benefit capped and this affects households renting homes in both the private rented and the housing association sector. Low income households are placed the position of having to cut back on eating, heating and other essentials in order to afford their rent and/or accumulate rent arrears and face eviction.

The Benefit Cap and housing association rents

Affordability of housing association rents is a key issue, particularly for those affected by the Benefit Cap. Housing associations can charge social or affordable rents. The difference between the two types of rent is that:

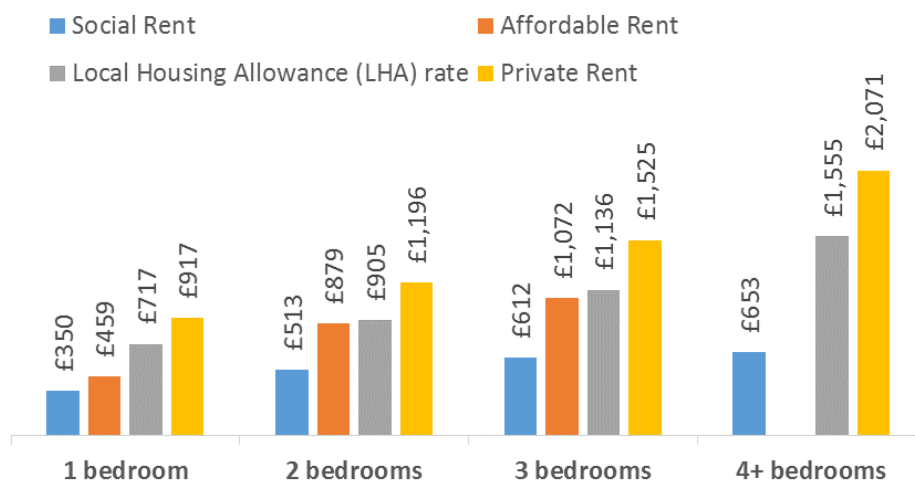
- Affordable rents should be set at no more than 80% of the local market rent or the Local Housing Allowance rate whichever is the cheaper
- Social rents are usually 20-30% cheaper than Affordable rents

The following graph shows a comparison between homes of different sizes with local median private rents, affordable rents and social rents against the local housing allowance in Watford. The social and affordable rents were taken from housing association lettings made to Watford Housing Register applicants over the last year:

- All median private rents are higher than the local housing allowance (as seen above)
- Affordable rents for homes with two and three bedrooms are quite close to the LHA rate (no affordable rent rate was available for homes with 4+ bedrooms)
- Social rents are considerably below LHA rates in all sizes of homes

⁶⁸ Tanner, B, (2019) "DWP pitches £800m cost to restore LHA rates to 30th percentile" 24 Housing, <https://www.24housing.co.uk/news/dwp-pitches-800m-cost-to-restore-lha-rates-to-30th-percentile/> accessed 24/10/19

Social, Affordable, LHA & Private Rents in Watford compared (per month)



Households paying a social rent also face benefit capping like those paying affordable rent or private rent. The big difference is that households paying social rents have more disposable income and therefore a significantly better quality of life. For example, for a couple with three children in receipt of UC and living in a home with three bedrooms, if the household were paying:

- a social rent they would have £259 UC income left to live on per week
- an affordable rent they would have £157.19 left to live on per week
- a private rent they would have just £67.42 pw left to live on per week

The affordability of Affordable Rents

Central government cuts in affordable housing investment and consequent increases in borrowing has required housing associations to be more business oriented in their approach including ensuring their income stream from rents is protected. One outcome of this is that new applicants are required to go through affordability checks. New applicants will be mainly Housing Register applicants nominated to the housing associations by local authorities. If a housing association finds that its intended rent charge comprises around 45% or more of a household's, the applicant's nomination is often refused. Such a decision happens more frequently where the affordable rent is set at or close to LHA levels.

To pay an affordable rent set at LHA level of say £1,136.46 per month for a three bedroom home, requires a monthly disposable income of £2,561.32.10 or £30,735.84 per annum after deductions (£40,000 gross) if 45% of income on rent is assumed. For a two bedroom home with an affordable rent set at the LHA rate of £905.49 pm a monthly income after deductions of £1,995 per month (£30,000 gross) is required.

The median gross pay for Watford residents is currently £27,647⁶⁹. Assuming 45% of disposable income being used for rent, a maximum rent payable for a household earning this amount is £838 per month. A household earning this amount would not be able to afford even a one bedroom home in the private rented sector but could comfortably afford a one bedroom housing association

⁶⁹ Table 8.7a, Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings 2018 (provisional) – employees only

home in Watford. They would be priced out of a two bedroom home charging an Affordable Rent but could very comfortably afford a two, three or four bedroom home charging a social rent.

For most households approaching WBC for assistance because they are threatened with or actually homeless, their income is frequently much less than the median gross pay for a Watford resident of £27,647.

The impact of getting a job for households on UC does make a big difference to the amount of income they have left to live on. For example, a household working 30 hours per week at £8.21 per hour (the minimum wage), who pays for childcare at £209 pw, does not have a car, and has their income topped up by UC, their disposable income would increase by £340 pw, if they were paying a *social* rent. But this is not straightforward. The reality faced by most low income households is that:

- jobs at minimum wage levels are precarious: they are not long-term, zero hours contracts are common and the number of hours is not guaranteed
- It is incredibly difficult for households in this situation to budget adequately no matter how careful they are. Where working income is reduced, the DWP is slow to move, payment errors and variations are an issue⁷⁰, and UC is paid in arrears. A loan from the DWP is possible but this becomes an added debt to be repaid within 12 months
- The prospects of increasing hours or the hourly rate is minimal for those on low wages
- The likelihood of accruing significant arrears, leading to homelessness, increases where rents are higher

How many households does the council know about who are either benefit capped now or could be if they moved into settled accommodation? In September 2019, the council had 101 households placed in temporary accommodation. Of these 54 had two or more children and were either benefit capped then or would be if they moved to settled accommodation. On the Housing Register, there were just under 200 households needing homes with 3 or more bedrooms (not including those in temporary accommodation) because they had two or more children. These households if not working will be benefit capped.

As we have seen in the previous section on supply of affordable housing only 12 homes with three bedrooms and eight with four bedrooms becoming available for letting that were newly built homes (as opposed to relets of existing homes) in the last 5 years and households needing these sizes of homes are waiting longer to be housed.

Financial Resources available in Watford to tackle homelessness

Central and regional government funding for the prevention and relief of homelessness is set out in the table below:

Name of grant	Provider	How used
Preventing Homelessness Grant	MHCLG	To prevent homelessness: eg, to pay off rent arrears, top up gap between LHA and rents, access private rented

⁷⁰ An example is the CPAG report on the impact of UC on families in Tower Hamlets (October 2019), <https://cpag.org.uk/file/4576/download?token=cQ9GCFxo>

Name of grant	Provider	How used
		homes for households through financial incentives to private landlords (see HomeLet above), reconnection fares. In addition, the funding is used to fund, for example, homeless education programmes, eg, Home Truths aimed at Year 12 and 13 students in schools and FE college students, Severe Weather Emergency Protocol payments, rough sleeper outreach programmes and kick starting a rent deposit savings programme with Watford Credit Union
Flexible Homelessness Support Grant ⁷¹ Paid annually since 2017/18.	MHCLG	Replaced temporary accommodation management fee previously paid by DWP. Largely used to top up the gap between temporary accommodation rents and HB. Costs the council more to provide TA than before.
Discretionary Housing Payments	DWP	Assists with the prevention and relief of homelessness through payments for rent deposits, rent in advance, benefit cap top ups, moving costs.
New Burdens funding	MHCLG	Contribution for implementing the Homelessness Reduction Act
Rough Sleeper Grant (RSG)	MHCLG	Two and one quarter years of funding to set up a multi-agency, multi-disciplinary Intervention Team providing low level mental health support, substance misuse recovery and legal and financial support. Agencies involved with the council: New Hope, CGL Spectrum, hertsyounghomeless, Watford Citizens Advice.
Rapid Rehousing Pathway (RRP)	MHCLG	Continuation of Intervention Team but more in-depth and longer term support provided to a range of service users who were facing rough sleeping or actually sleeping on the streets
Rough Sleeper Initiative (RSI)	MHCLG	Funding to provide a proactive street outreach service, comprising a co-ordinator, a substance misuse recovery work and general outreach to engage with all rough sleepers found in the town, encouraging them, including taking them, to seek medical help and help with leaving the streets, eg, accessing the emergency and assessment beds at new Hope's The Haven, etc.
Housing-related Support	Hertfordshire County Council	£1.2m pa. Paid to OneYMCA (hostel accommodation), New Hope (hostel accommodation and floating support) and GROW (hostel accommodation). This funding supports anyone with a Hertfordshire address not just Watford residents.

Government funding streams like RSG, RRP and RSI have all had short application deadlines with requirements to be innovative and show how the initiative can continue when funding stops. The funding has also been short term, eg, RRP and RSI was only for 12 months which has made recruitment and retention of staff difficult. Sustainability of any of these initiatives after government funding ceases is virtually impossible. Applying for these grants is time-consuming and so is gathering the required monitoring information. In the context of 50% cuts to local government funding over the last 9-10 years, resources are particularly stretched so that time for forward

⁷¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/flexible-homelessness-support-grant-2017-18-to-2018-19>

strategic thinking and consulting has consequently been minimised. A period of reliable funding of at least 5 years is required to enable consolidation of the efforts of the council and its partners around reducing homelessness and rough sleeping in particular.

Watford Strategic Homelessness Forum – key homelessness issues for Watford

In September 2018, Watford Strategic Homelessness Forum discussed what they thought were the key homelessness issues in the borough. These were identified as the following:

- A lack of affordable housing in the town for families and single people
- A lack of supported accommodation for those still using drink and drugs and/or with complex needs
- A lack of accommodation to move on to from supported housing
- The residence requirement for accessing social and affordable housing excludes single people. This is because they are less likely to stay and build up the required residence locally due to affordability issues in the private rented sector
- More prevention of homelessness was needed rather than crisis intervention
- Benefit issues were contributing to homelessness, particularly the benefit cap and Universal Credit
- Services for supporting complex needs was needed (drugs, alcohol and mental health issues), although funding for this was uncertain
- Increased communication was needed between agencies in Watford

In a subsequent Forum meeting in November 2018, members discussed what they could do together to tackle all of the issues identified above.

Their response was as follows:

The lack of affordable housing in the town for families and single people

- Combining Local Authority strategy with the specialisms of the voluntary sector
- Look at co-housing for young people
- Could Hart Homes develop more affordable homes for families
- Making best use of existing housing association homes through Rightsizing by making downsizing options attractive, modern and fit for purpose
 - *But this could reduce availability for single people*
- Tackling expectation – ensure people know what is possible
- Work with Landlords
- Work with Developers
- More Hope Homes
- More shared housing
- Encourage social rent rather than affordable rent

The lack of supported accommodation for those still using drink, drugs and/or with complex needs

- More funding needed for officers to work with people with complex needs
- More specialised accommodation was needed, eg, wet house / damp house

- There was a need to share services and knowledge
- Extend the Intervention Team – so that all accommodation services in Watford can access its services
- Extend services that already work, eg, GROW
- Put in place integrated working (One Stop Shop)

The lack of accommodation to move on to from supported housing

- It is a question of finding the right land in the right place and talking/communicating together
- Set up a Housing First project in Watford
- Change the number of local connection years (currently 5 years) for people in supported housing such as hostels, night shelters etc, to access housing association homes in Watford.
- Build more affordable houses
- Have a centralised system for empty (void) hostel bed spaces
- Build more housing like HopeHomes (shared medium- to long-term accommodation)
- Letting other organisations' voids
- Keep the direct let process going

Prevention of homelessness rather than crisis intervention

- Education
- Watford Community Housing (WCH) Tenancy support team
 - more intensive housing management
- Credit Union / Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) – to promote savings
- Website – ensure it has up-to-date information
- Schools work – Herts Young Homeless
- Funding beds in homeless services
- Offering support in independent accommodation to prevent homelessness
- Getting the person the right service rather than what's available
- Tenancy sustainment
- Resource pack, group training
- Protecting HRS funding
- Police / Social Services – Hospital referrals
- Planned discharges (ask agencies if they can visit hospitals/wards for assessments)
- More mediation

Benefit issues for clients, e.g. Benefit Cap and Universal Credits

- Professional Support – get access to all potential benefits
- Secured Email Portal – for all to send evidence etc.
- Website to be working
- Maintain Citizen Advice Bureau (CAB) role with Intervention Team
- Better information sharing/partnership working
- Publicise more widely Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP)
- Create our own grant system to top up benefits
- Create our own replacement of Social Fund System – like the old Crisis budget loan system.
- Credit Union support
- Discourage zero hour contracts/living wage
- Purpose built co-housing for under 35's at LHA 1 room cap

The need for services to support people with complex needs (drugs, alcohol and mental health issues) when funding is uncertain

- Strategy in place to innovate
- Joint working – inter-agency forums
- Understanding where to signpost - balance between highlighting services available without attracting users from out of the borough.
- Put in place Information Protocol Agreements between agencies in the borough
- Have specialised Community Mental Health Team workers as part of the Intervention Team
- Negotiate with senior levels within CMHT to enable people with complex needs to get the support they need

Increased communication needed between agencies in Watford

- ‘Linked in’ network - easy to update, keeps current
- Share News via:
 - Newsletters
 - Conferences / Workshops
 - Email / Bulletins
- What about keeping residents in loop?
 - Eg, what action is being taken about street begging?
- Case Studies
- Create a shared vision
- Multi-agency meetings to look at specific clients (i.e. Top 5 rough sleepers) – (Similar to MARAC)
- Partnership working
 - Open days
 - SLA agreements
- Maintain the Homelessness Forum and encourage visits between members
- Use the example of Manchester

Summary of Homelessness Review findings

This section of the Homelessness Review 2019 picks out the key findings from this document.

- Changes in national government housing and welfare policy encompassed by austerity have led to the significant rise of homelessness nationally which has also been seen in Watford.
- The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 (HRA17), brought into force in April 2018, was a welcome piece of legislation which brought about the biggest change in a generation in the approach of councils to assisting households threatened with or actually homeless. The Act’s focus is on early intervention to prevent homelessness if at all possible and if not, then relief, that is assistance with accommodation. The Act meant that instead of just considering whether a the council had a duty to house it is now required to put in place a personal housing plan which takes a more holistic understanding of a household’s housing and support needs. This places responsibilities for resolving a household’s housing needs on both the household and the council. The only drawback was that little resources were made available to increase the supply of affordable housing to assist with increased number of homeless households councils were required to deal with.

- At a regional level, Hertfordshire County Council has responded to the needs of homeless households through putting in place its Families First Homeless Prevention Team to assist with households ultimately found intentionally homeless by local councils and a comprehensive review of housing related support funding which provides a significant contribution to services for single homeless people in the county
- At a local level, the levels of affordable homes owned by housing associations have remain static over the last 5 years whilst housing in the private sector has increased. Census data, although rather outdated now, indicated a significant increase in the private rented sector (from 9% of all tenures in 2001 to 19% of all tenures in 2011 and an 11% reduction in owner-occupation).
- Partnership working on homelessness is very strong in Watford through forums such as the Watford Strategic Homelessness Forum and the Town Centre Task Group which both bring together a wide range of voluntary, and statutory bodies working in the town and in the latter, includes businesses. Both have Mayoral and Member support.
- The top reasons for homelessness in Watford until the HRA17, were loss of a private rented tenancy, parental eviction, family or friend eviction, and relationship breakdown (non- and violent). Data collection since the HRA17 came into force appears to indicate that the top reason for homelessness during 2018/19 was family or friends no longer able to accommodate, followed by loss of a private rented tenancy.
- The predominant group to whom the council owes a homelessness duty has been families with children headed by single women. The second largest group is couples with dependent children. By contrast, in terms of single homelessness, the number of women for whom a homelessness duty is owed is much smaller than the number of men.
- The number of single homeless applicants being assisted has grown significantly particularly during 2018/19 in line with predictions and shows the new legislation is enabling a better housing outcome for this group.
- Black households are over-represented in the homeless cohort compared with their representation in the Watford population as a whole, whilst White households are under-represented.
- In terms of support needs for households to whom the council owes a homelessness duty, a history of mental health problems is by far the most predominant issue, followed by physical ill-health and disability and alcohol dependence.
- The largest age group in the homeless cohort is those aged between 25 and 44. They are significantly over-represented (at 63%) when compared with 2011 census data (34%).
- The council has been able to significantly decrease the number of households in temporary accommodation from a height of 233 in 2016/17 to 110 in 2018/19. This has been achieved through actively working with households to minimise the time they spend in temporary accommodation before moving on to settled accommodation.
- Levels of rough sleeping have varied over time, with a high of 22 found at the rough sleeping count in November 2014 to a low of 6 in 2017. In 2018, the level of rough sleeping increased to 14. In reality, the cohort of rough sleepers is much larger. In November 2018 the cohort of known and verified rough sleepers was 46 whilst in November 2019 there were 36 known and verified rough sleepers with a further 46 who were self-defined as rough sleeping.
- In terms of support needs, mental health is by far the most prominent issue for homeless households, including rough sleepers

- Working together with New Hope, CGL Spectrum, hertsyounghomeless and Watford Citizens Advice, the council has been successful in securing £1,063,000 in government funding since 2016 for working with rough sleepers to get them off the street. A multi-agency, multi-disciplinary Intervention team has operated since April 2017 comprising expertise in substance mis-use recovery, legal and financial support and mental health recovery. Since July 2019 a multi-agency proactive street outreach service has also operated comprising workers with mental health and substance misuse recovery expertise, engaging with rough sleepers where they are, on the streets.
- Health services, such as Meadowell Clinic, the local GP clinic working with rough sleepers and other vulnerable people, are now members of the Watford Strategic Homelessness Forum and working very closely with the council and other partners on providing a holistic service to this part of Watford's community.
- Housing-related support funding from Hertfordshire County Council which currently contributes to rough sleeping activities in the borough through is under review and will be subject to a tender process during 2020/21
- A winter night shelter was started in Watford in December 2018 for the first time which gave shelter to 105 individuals over the period to end of March 2019. Based initially at two local churches and then at oneYMCA premises at Charter House, central Watford, the shelter was run by three paid staff and over 60 volunteers. The second winter night shelter started in December 2019.
- As part of the Homelessness Forum's vision for setting up a robust pathway for single people with complex needs which breaks the cycle of frequent return to the streets, several initiatives are being pursued:
 - A housing scheme aimed at rough sleepers to whom the council has a duty under the HRA17 and other vulnerable single homeless people engaged with by the Street Outreach Service. The scheme will provide support and access to mental health and substance misuse recovery. Currently the council places those with complex needs in temporary accommodation without support; these placements often break down. The pathway will include adequate move-on accommodation from the complex
 - Move-on accommodation
 - A Housing First scheme
 - A private sector access scheme
- A Single Homeless Hub is planned, spearheaded by New Hope, and supported the council to provide a one stop shop offering rough sleepers access to essential support emergency accommodation, health care and other services under one roof.
- The Homelessness Forum adopted an important document, "[Working with rough sleepers in Watford – services available and best practice guidelines](#)" in May 2019
- The prospects for rough sleepers achieving a settled home are particularly difficult due to the combination of unemployment, mental health and substance mis-use support issues, high rents in supported accommodation and the private rented sector, and housing association reservation about accepting this cohort as tenants. A truly sustainable pathway for rough sleepers off the streets is one:
 - that recognises flexibility, enabling rough sleeper users to move back and forth in the single pathway reflecting progress and then support if and when relapse with mental health or substance mis-use occurs

- where medium term move-on and long-term settled accommodation is affordable within Universal Credit limits
- The incidence of cuckooing has increased in Watford over 2019. Working with partners to create a pathway to safety is an area of development for the council.
- Homeless 16/17 year olds are a small proportion of the households facing homelessness. Work with hertsyounghomeless has been successful in preventing 93% of this age group from having to make a homeless applications
- Demand for housing association homes let on social or affordable rents far outstrips supply: The demand for studios and homes with one bedroom outstrips supply by 2.5:1, for two bedrooms by 2:1, for three bedrooms by 5:1 and 4 bedrooms by 11:1. The average number of homes with 4 bedrooms becoming available to let is two per year.
- The number of housing association homes of all sizes becoming available to let over the last five years has ranged between 217 and 267. Lettings have halved when compared to 2012/13 when 471 homes became available to let.
- Homeless households on the Housing Register are the biggest group housed each year with more than half of all housing association lettings going to this group.
- Under occupation in homes owned by Watford Community Housing (WCH) is estimated to be 40%. The council will be working in partnership with WCH to make best use of these homes through implementation of a rightsizing policy which includes financial incentives and support to help free up around 50 much needed family-sized homes.
- The private rented sector is a key source of settled homes for homeless households. Together with social rented homes, these are used to discharge the council's duties to prevent, relieve and where it has accepted a duty to house. The number of private rented homes used to assist homeless households increased from 36 during 2014/15 to 66 in 2018/19. Private rented homes accessed through the scheme have been located all over the country including Bradford, Birmingham and Norwich as well as closer to home in London, St Albans, Hemel Hempstead and of course Watford. Whilst other issues such as work or family may take households away from Watford, affordability of private rented homes is a major issue. Moves outside Watford are always voluntary.
- Affordability of housing is a major issues for homeless households, many of whom are on low incomes and/or dependent on benefits.
- For someone earning the net monthly median⁷² income in Watford £1,967 per month (that is, after tax and national insurance) it was found that only a room or a home with one bedroom was affordable. Homes with two or more bedrooms are more likely to be occupied by families which means that, without the assistance of Local Housing Allowance or a second adequate income, a home charging a median private rent is not affordable by a Watford resident working full-time and earning a median net income for the borough.
- Welfare benefit reform has had a significant impact:
 - Local Housing Allowance (LHA) has been frozen since 2016. There is an average gap between LHA rates and median private rents in Watford of 32% across all sizes of homes. On average less than a handful of vacant private rented homes advertised every month have rents at the LHA level. The government has just announced the freeze on LHA rates will end from April 2020 which is welcomed but there is no detail yet on what this will mean in practice.

⁷² That is, the half way point of the range of incomes earned by local residents

- Benefit capping – the limiting of welfare benefits to specific levels – means that households do not receive enough money to fully cover their rent and service charges. Any gap has to be paid out of money households have for food and bills. Any household with two or more children will be benefit capped: this affects households renting in both the private sector and the housing association sector. In the latter sector, homes can be available at a social rent or an affordable rent. Social rents are around 50% of market rents whilst affordable rents can be up to up to 80% of market rents.
 - A two bedroom housing association home let on an affordable rent is not affordable in Watford to households on a median income
 - Households paying a social rent also face benefit capping like those paying affordable rent or private rent. The big difference is that households paying social rents have more disposable income and therefore a significantly better quality of life.
 - Getting a job enables households to escape the benefit cap and can make a big difference to disposable income. However, many jobs available are at minimum wage, not long term and on zero hours terms, making budgeting and financial planning for households difficult
 - In September 2019, the council had over 50 households in temporary accommodation with two or more children that were already benefit capped or would be if they moved into settled accommodation. On the Housing Register there were just under 200 households needing homes with 3 more bedrooms, who if not working would be benefit capped.
- Key homelessness issues identified by Watford Strategic Homelessness Forum were:
 - A lack of affordable housing in the town for families and single people
 - A lack of supported accommodation for those still using drink and drugs and/or with complex needs
 - A lack of accommodation to move on to from supported housing
 - The residence requirement for accessing social and affordable housing excludes single people. This is because they are less likely to stay and build up the required residence locally due to affordability issues in the private rented sector
 - More prevention of homelessness was needed rather than crisis intervention
 - Benefit issues were contributing to homelessness, particularly the benefit cap and Universal Credit
 - Services for supporting complex needs was needed (drugs, alcohol and mental health issues), although funding for this was uncertain
 - Increased communication was needed between agencies in Watford

Appendices

Appendix 1 - Glossary

Term	Definition
Priority need household	<p>A household in priority need means the following types of household:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Someone in the household is pregnant • There are dependent children under 18 • 16 and 17 year olds • 18-20 year olds who were accommodated or fostered between the age of 16 and 18 • Lost accommodation due to an emergency <p>In addition, households who are vulnerable because of the following issues may be accepted as having a priority need:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Old age, mental illness or disability, physical disability or other special reason • Have been looked after, accommodated or fostered and are aged 21 or over • Have been a member of the armed or reserve forces • Have served a custodial sentence, been committed for contempt of court or similar, or remanded in custody • Have had to leave accommodation due to violence or threats of violence from another person that are likely to be carried out⁷³
P1E	<p>Pre-April 2018 government form for collecting quarterly aggregated data on homelessness cases dealt with by local authorities. Information collected and supplied included on the number of households where a decision had been made under Part 7 of the Homelessness Act 1996 was provided, together with numbers of households in temporary accommodation, and types of accommodation used, and for those households to whom a main duty to house had been accepted, the sort of accommodation they eventually moved to when the duty was discharged. The homeless tables published by the government using the P1E can be found online here: https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-homelessness</p>
H-CLIC	<p>Stands for Homelessness Case Level Information Collection. H-CLIC replaced the P1E. A wide range of data on all prevention, relief and main duty cases is supplied to the government on a quarterly basis. The system has been a challenge for most local authorities to comply with and so is incomplete and may not be accurate. Consequently, the government labels homelessness data collected via H-CLIC as experimental and this remains the case almost two years after the system was introduced. H-CLIC</p>

⁷³ Shelter England, http://england.shelter.org.uk/legal/homelessness_applications/priority_need/who_has_a_priority_need

Term	Definition
	aggregated data can be found here: https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-homelessness
Complex needs	<p>A person with 'complex needs' is someone with two or more needs affecting their physical, mental, social or financial well-being. Such needs typically interact with and exacerbate one another leading to individuals experiencing several problems simultaneously. These needs are often severe and/or long standing, often proving difficult to ascertain, diagnose or treat. Individuals with complex needs are often at, or vulnerable to reaching crisis point and experience barriers to accessing services, usually requiring support from two or more services/agencies. Someone described as having complex needs will have (although not limited to) a co-morbidity of two or more of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mental health issues • Substance misuse issues • A dual diagnosis of mental health and substance misuse issues • A physical health condition • A learning disability • A history of offending behaviour • A physical disability • Employment problems • Homelessness or housing issues • Family or relationship difficulties • Domestic violence • Social isolation • Poverty • Trauma (physical, psychological or social) <p>These needs are often severe, longstanding, difficult to diagnose and therefore to treat. Ongoing inequalities continue to exist and are only likely to increase as people live longer with a wider range of needs.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Source: All Party Parliamentary Group Complex Needs and Dual Diagnosis: http://www.turning-point.co.uk/media/636823/appg_factsheet_1_-_june_2014.pdf
SWEP	<p>The Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP) requires all local authorities to respond by providing accommodation when periods of severe weather is forecast. Severe weather can include temperatures below 0°C, snow, storms, high winds, or heavy, prolonged rain.</p> <p>The aim of SWEP is to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prevent harm or death to those sleeping rough during severe weather

Term	Definition
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide shelter for rough sleepers who under normal circumstances would not be owed a statutory duty under the homelessness legislation (Part VII of the Housing Act 1996) or who would not normally engage with services • Provide the opportunity to help prevent those accessing SWEP provision from having to return to the streets <p>It is important to note that rough sleepers cannot be compelled to use SWEP provision if they do not want to take it up.</p> <p>For several years now, Watford Borough Council and Three Rivers District Council have both contracted the local homelessness organisation, New Hope, to provide the SWEP shelter on their behalf. Six places are funded by Watford and three are funded by Three Rivers.</p> <p>Where is shelter provided? The SWEP shelter is provided at New Hope’s Haven Support Centre at 4 Whippendell Road, Watford. Additional spaces are sometimes required and New Hope has negotiated the help of St Mary’s Church in the town centre who enable 10 additional spaces to be provided in their church building.</p> <p>How do rough sleepers access SWEP shelter? Referrals for SWEP shelter are via:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visiting the Rough Sleeping Prevention Service at the Haven Support Centre which is open between 8:30am to 1.00pm and 1.45pm 3:30pm, and • Ringing New Hope’s 24 hour helpline on 0300 012 0168 • Contacting the national organisation Streetlink through their website <p>If SWEP is running over a weekend, rough sleepers can also present in person at New Hope’s Sanctuary, at 124 Exchange Rd Watford WD18 0PP</p> <p>Advice and support is available for SWEP users through New Haven’s long-established Rough Sleeping Prevention Service at the Haven Support Centre. This is open Monday- Friday from 8:30-1pm and 1:45-3:30pm. A hot breakfast is provided there from 8:30-10:30am.</p> <p>The Street Outreach Service also engages with SWEP users and, together with the Intervention Team, also based at the Haven Support Centre, they are assisted to access services they need to get off the streets permanently.</p>
NRPF	No Recourse to Public Funds. S115 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 states that a person will have no recourse to public funds

Term	Definition
	if they are subject to immigration control. This means they cannot claim benefits or obtain help from the local authority because they are homeless.

Appendix 2 – temporary accommodation, legal terms explained

There are several labels given to the accommodation provided by the council to homeless households under the homelessness law. The label used changes depending on the stage a homeless application has reached:

- A household is in **emergency accommodation** when the household is in priority need and the council is either assisting the household to find alternative accommodation (under the Relief provisions of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017) or is investigating whether it has a duty to house them (under the Main Duty provisions of the Homelessness Reduction Act).
- Where a household with children or a pregnant woman is moved within 6 weeks from hotel accommodation to alternative homeless accommodation, or a household without children remains in hotel accommodation, this is known as **interim accommodation** while they are in the Relief or Main Duty stages of their homelessness application
- If the council decides to accept a duty to house, the household may continue occupying the same accommodation but it then becomes known as **temporary accommodation**.
- If the council decides **not** to accept a duty to house under the homelessness law, and the household asks for a review of the council’s decision, the accommodation becomes known as **discretionary accommodation** pending the outcome of the review.

Appendix 3 – Services in Watford for homeless households (including rough sleepers)

Service	Capacity/coverage/ client group	Provider
24/7 emergency phone line	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Watford area • Rough sleepers 	New Hope
Street Outreach Service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Watford area • Rough Sleepers • Three members of staff including mental health and substance misuse recovery worker. • Engagement with rough sleepers on the streets. Assist/encourage access to services needed, including accommodation, usually through Intervention / Navigator Team • Caseload for team: 30 	New Hope
Rough Sleeper Prevention Service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Watford area • Rough sleepers • Showers, hot breakfasts, change of clothes, laundry, advice, collecting post, packed lunches, signposting and support, support plans aimed at getting people off the street and to tackle any needs they have which prevent them leading independent lives in their own accommodation 	New Hope
Rough Sleeper Intervention / Navigator Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Watford area • Those threatened with or actually rough sleeping. • Multi-agency, multi-disciplinary team providing wrap around service including mental health recovery, substance misuse recovery and legal and financial support in one place. Aims to stop single people reaching the street or enable them to access accommodation and support so they can live independently • Works in close co-operation with the Street Outreach Service (see above) • Caseload for the team: 45 	New Hope , CGL Spectrum, hertsyounghomeless and Watford Citizens Advice
Tenancy Sustainment Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working with those in council-provided temporary accommodation or in New Hope accommodation to sustain current housing tenure and/or move on to more sustainable accommodation. 	New Hope
Assessment and Emergency Beds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Watford area 	New Hope

Service	Capacity/coverage/ client group	Provider
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aimed at those who have recently slept rough • Open to those with no local connection and no recourse to public funds. • 6 x Assessment beds – aimed at those facing rough sleeping for the first time; • 14 x emergency accommodation beds • Support provided with working towards independent living 	
Watford's Winter Shelter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Watford area. • December to March winter night shelter open for any rough sleeper in Watford including those with NRPF • 15 beds (+4 if needed for Severe Weather Emergency Protocol – see below) • No drugs or alcohol permitted • Supper provided • Free to service users • Access to Rough Sleeper Prevention Service / Intervention Team 	New Hope , Watford Borough Council, OneYMCA
Emergency Night Shelter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SWEP provision – 9 beds (6 for Watford, 3 for Three Rivers) when temperature drops below 0°C. Usually Winter Night Shelter extended to support. Open to any rough sleeper including those with NRPF. B&B also used if needed (can also take dogs) • Free to service users • No drugs or alcohol permitted • Access to Rough Sleeper Prevention Service / Intervention Team 	New Hope
Community Home	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Watford • Hostel for those with substance misuse issues who are motivated to change • 6 beds 	New Hope
New Hope Hostel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Watford • Keyworker support provided • 10 beds 	New Hope
Sanctuary Cluster Flats	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Watford • Move-on Accommodation from supported hostel • Low levels of support provided • 11 beds 	New Hope
The Manse	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Watford • Move-on Accommodation from supported hostel • Low levels of support provided • 4 beds 	New Hope

Service	Capacity/coverage/ client group	Provider
Tolpits Lane	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Watford • Move-on Accommodation from supported hostel • Low levels of support provided • 9 beds 	New Hope
Hope College	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Joint project between New Hope & West Herts College • Aimed primarily at those with lived experience of homelessness in the Watford area • Enables access to qualifications and courses, eg, Maths, English, IT, Customer Service, construction and related qualifications • Help with getting a job, eg, writing CVs, finding a job, application writing, interview skills • Workshops – creative, therapeutic and personal growth oriented, eg, gardening, poetry and creative writing, music, arts and crafts, well-being. 	New Hope / West Herts College
Community Market Garden	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One acre plot near Watford's Cassiobury Park. • Volunteer and skills development through ecotherapy • Gardening, woodwork, art, sewing, knitting, willow sculptures, music, craft and creative re-use, bush-craft, creative writing, poetry and story-telling, discussion sessions 	New Hope
Hostel for single homeless men with complex needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Watford • Provides support and accommodation for single homeless men aged between 25 and 65, • Specialises in working with service users with complex needs particularly those with drug and/or alcohol issues. • Priority given to people with a Watford or Hertfordshire connection and should be able to claim housing benefit. • Accommodation provided includes a 12 bed high support hostel and 9 bed spaces in shared housing. • Comprehensive and holistic support provided which considers service users' well-being from all aspects including social, medical, physical and psychological. 	GROW (Group for the Rootless of Watford)

Service	Capacity/coverage/ client group	Provider
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support is aimed at stabilising substance use and reducing risky behaviour and criminality through assertive engagement together with talk and complementary therapies. 	
Hostel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Watford Single homeless people between 18 and 59 Proof of low income and/or benefits required Police criminal record check Professional character reference required Applicants with offending histories relating to violence, sex offences, arson or intent to supply drugs unlikely to be offered accommodation but will still be considered 150 single rooms, sharing shower and toilet with one other Up to 18 months stay Breakfast and dinner provided Resident communal area with computer room, pool table, TV, coffee bar and gym Regular social events to promote social inclusion Key worker support to help overcome any barriers to obtaining and sustaining independent accommodation Access to vocational training, work experience and paid employment 	OneYMCA
16/17 year olds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hertfordshire Crashpad service (supported accommodation facility) for 16/17 year olds at risk of street homelessness Homeless Hub telephone support and housing advice 	DePaulUK / hyh hyh / OneYMCA
18-24 year olds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hertfordshire Homeless Hub telephone advice for 18-24 year olds requiring guidance on their current housing situation. 	Hertsyounghomeless/ OneYMCA
Dual diagnosis link worker for 16-65 year olds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hertfordshire Assistance with mental health and substance misuse issues 	hertsyounghomeless
Complex needs service for 18+	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hertfordshire Housing expertise and community support to people recovering from 	hertsyounghomeless

Service	Capacity/coverage/ client group	Provider
	mental health and additional complex needs such as substance misuse and learning disabilities.	
Primary health care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Watford • GP service for rough sleepers and other vulnerable people 	Meadowell Centre
Legal and financial advice and support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Watford • Advice and support with benefit applications, debt issues, housing issues, immigration issues 	Citizens Advice Watford
Homeless Prevention and Housing Options Service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Watford • General housing advice • Provision of temporary accommodation • Access to settled private and social rented accommodation 	Watford Borough Council
Community Safety Partnership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Watford • Community Protection Group (operational) and Joint Action Group (strategic) comprising WBC Community Safety and Housing, Police and New Hope monitors anti-social behaviour and rough sleeping in the borough. 	Watford Borough Council, Police, New Hope
Rough sleeper count	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Watford 	New Hope-led
Addiction recovery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Watford • Addiction recovery charity offering group therapy sessions for all addictions 	The Living Room
Accommodation and support with substance mis-use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hertfordshire • Safe accommodation and support with severe drug and alcohol mis-use issues provided for those who are homeless, rough sleepers and street drinkers • Housing clinic provided at CGL Spectrum • Floating support service provided to enable individuals to maintain their existing home 	Emerging Futures

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