

# Homelessness Review 2023

## Executive Summary for Shropshire Council

February 2024

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Homeless Link

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## Introduction

### Background

The Homelessness Act 2002 requires every local authority to carry out a review of homelessness every five years, to develop and publish a homelessness and rough sleeping strategy based on this review, and to consult with other local statutory and voluntary organisations. Tackling homelessness and rough sleeping is a key priority for Shropshire Council and its partner organisations. The comprehensive homelessness review will provide a sound evidence base to inform the authority's homelessness strategy. The homelessness review will provide a basis for a strategic approach to preventing homelessness and provide the services to support and accommodate those in housing need. This executive summary provides an outline of the main findings of the review, an analysis of future trends and identifies key issues for the strategy to address.

### Shropshire's Approach

Whilst Shropshire Council as part of its statutory duty has produced this document, it is not simply a review of the services provided by the Council. There are multiple and complex issues that can cause homelessness, therefore in compiling this review, Homeless Link together with the Council has worked closely with a variety of other statutory and voluntary agencies to gain a detailed understanding of homelessness across Shropshire. The review is a multi-agency document, which recognises that partnership working is key to preventing homelessness and developing sustainable housing and support solutions.

### Methodology

The homelessness review is required to cover an analysis of the past, current, and future levels of homelessness, an audit of the services aimed at preventing, accommodating, and supporting people who are or may experience homelessness, and a review of the resources available to spend on homelessness within the district. The review process has drawn upon a wide range of sources – including homelessness statistics, H-CLIC data, outreach data, and a series of consultation exercises. There are many complex issues that can give rise to homelessness, therefore, in compiling this review, the Council has worked closely with a variety of other statutory and voluntary agencies. Consultation with staff, partners, and customers was critical to the review process, and will continue to inform the development of the strategy and improvements to existing Council services. We have consulted extensively with service users and stakeholders through a range of methods to ensure that the review directly reflects the experiences of those who have experiences of homelessness and those working in the sector.

Homelessness in Figures

<p>In 2022/23, there were</p> <p><b>3,443</b></p> <p>approaches to the housing solutions service</p>	<p>In 2022/23, there were</p> <p><b>1,400</b></p> <p>homelessness duties owed</p>	<p>Family and friends is given as the main cause of homelessness, accounting for</p> <p><b>26%</b></p> <p>of cases</p>
<p>In the last year, there has been a</p> <p><b>33%</b></p> <p>increase in homelessness assessments</p>	<p><b>Mental Health</b></p> <p>is the most prevalent support need</p>	<p><b>676</b></p> <p>households had a support need</p>
<p><b>56%</b></p> <p>of those owed a homelessness duty are single</p>	<p><b>43%</b></p> <p>had their homelessness successfully prevented</p>	<p><b>18%</b></p> <p>had their homelessness successfully relieved</p>
<p>In 2022/23,</p> <p><b>633</b></p> <p>households were placed in temporary accommodation</p>	<p>Over the last 4 years, there has been a</p> <p><b>161%</b></p> <p>increase in rough sleeping</p>	<p>There are <b>6,259</b> households on the housing register accommodation, of which</p> <p><b>51%</b> have a need for one bedroom accommodation</p>

### Demand on the Housing Options Service

- In 2022/23 there were 3,443 approaches to the housing options service; there has been an 8.5% increase in demand over the last three years.
  - Just over 2,000 of these approaches were for advice and assistance only; the remaining 1,400 cases were experiencing homelessness or threatened with homelessness within 56 days.
- Caseloads are very high, which impacts upon the number of successful prevention and relief outcomes that the team is able to achieve.
- The number of homelessness assessments has increased by 33% in the last year.
- In 2022/23, 1,375 homeless duties were owed to households who were either experiencing homelessness or threatened with homelessness.

**Recommendation:** Consideration should be given as to how demand can be more effectively managed, and resources focused on cases where there is a threat of homelessness.

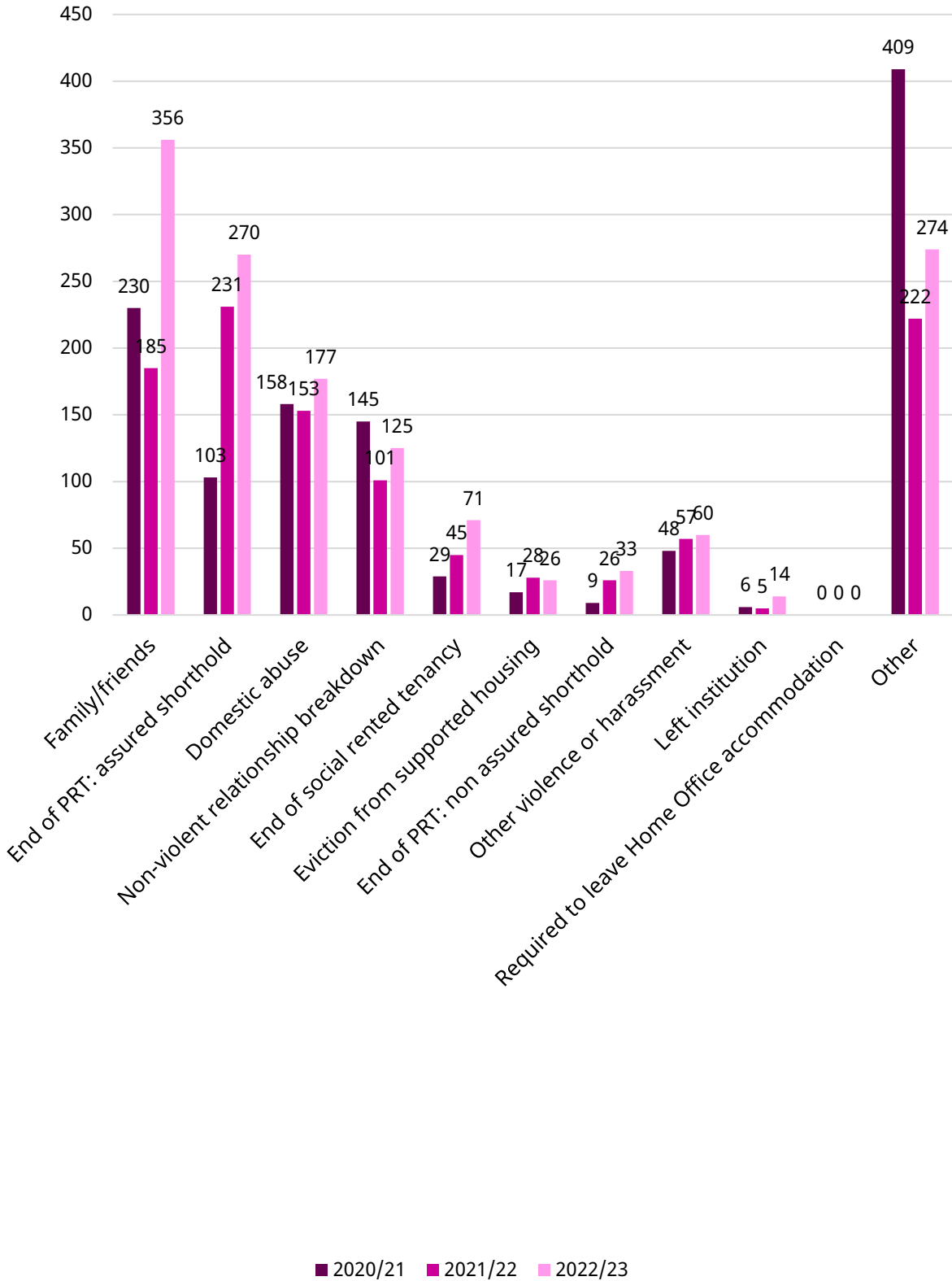
### Profile of Homelessness

- Of those owed a duty in 2022/23, a higher percentage of clients were owed a relief duty (70%) than a prevention duty (27%), suggesting that work may need to be done to encourage clients to access the service earlier to enable opportunities for prevention to be maximised.
- In total, singles account for 56% of all households owed a prevention or relief duty.
- In 2022/23, people aged 18-34 years accounted for 48% of all customers owed a duty.
- White households account for 90% of those owed a duty, and ethnicity is not known for a significant number of households each year. Moving forward, it will be essential to improve data capture in this area to have an improved understanding.
- In 2022/23, 49% of clients had a support need; a total of 1,113 support needs were identified for 676 households.
- The most frequently occurring support need is mental health, accounting for 26% of all declared support needs. Other frequently occurring support needs include physical ill health, domestic abuse, and offending history.

**Recommendation:** There is a need to raise awareness of the service with customers and partner agencies to encourage clients to access the service at an earlier point in order for opportunities for early intervention and homelessness prevention to be maximised.

Reasons for Experiencing Homelessness

Figure 1: Reasons for Homelessness



The main reason for experiencing homelessness in 2022/23 was due to family/friends no longer willing to accommodate accounting for 26% of all cases, followed by end of private rented accommodation (20%), domestic abuse (13%), and relationship breakdown (9%).

The number of social housing evictions has increased over the last three years, accounting for 15% of all cases in 2022/23.

### **Recommendations:**

- There is a need to ensure that there is a range of prevention tools in place targeted at the main causes of homelessness.
- Close work is required with the main social housing providers in Shropshire to reduce homelessness from social housing.

### **Prevention and Relief Outcomes**

- Homelessness was successfully prevented for 43% of households threatened with homelessness, which is below the national average of 53%.
- Homelessness was successfully relieved for 18% of households who were experiencing homelessness, which is below the national average of 36.2%.
- The service is more successful at helping households to secure alternative accommodation (80%) than enabling them to remain in their existing accommodation (20%).
- The majority of prevention and relief outcomes were achieved by accessing social housing. There was some success in accessing private rented accommodation.
- It is of note that in 2021/22, of the 185 cases of family eviction, 168 of these customers were owed a relief duty and only 17 were owed a prevention duty.
  - There is a need to try and work with these households at a prevention stage to focus on pro-active prevention work and planned moves. Moving to an approach where the council asks family members to give reasonable notice is likely to create a window of opportunity for prevention work to take place.
- There is a heavy reliance on social housing when preventing and relieving homelessness.

### **Recommendations:**

- There needs to be an increased focus on helping people to maintain their existing accommodation.
- There is a need to have more focused approach to preventing homelessness due to family and friends evicting.
- The council needs to make better use of the private rented sector for preventing and relieving homelessness.

### Main Duty Decisions

- In 2022/23, of the original 1,035 households owed a prevention or relief duty, 48% of households went on to have a main duty decision, and 35% a main duty owed (s193 duty). This is significantly above the national average.
- Households with dependent children make up the largest priority need group, followed by vulnerability due to mental health, physical health, and fleeing domestic abuse.
- In 2022/23, there were 274 offers of social housing to bring the main housing duty (s193 duty) to an end, this compares with 51 offers of social housing to end the prevention duty and 59 offers of social housing to end the relief duty.
  - While it is acknowledged that the focus of the service has been about moving households on from temporary accommodation, consideration needs to be given as to how households can be offered social housing as a successful prevention or relief option, reducing the demand on temporary accommodation, and providing improved customer outcomes, and reducing the pressure on the team.

### Recommendations:

- There may be an opportunity to increase the use of private rented accommodation to enable the council to successfully discharge its duty and move households out of temporary accommodation.
- Consideration needs to be given as to how social housing can be used to prevent and relieve homelessness, reducing the pressure on temporary accommodation.

### Rough Sleeping

- The numbers of people experiencing sleeping rough has remained at a significant level, and only once dipped below ten. In the last five years the numbers of individuals experiencing rough sleeping has ranged between 16 – 23 households.
- The majority of people experiencing rough sleeping are found in Shrewsbury.
- There has been an increase in rough sleeping over the last ten years.
- There are an average of 21 new individuals experiencing rough sleeping each month.
- There is a significant number of revolving door cases. These individuals have complex and/or multiple needs and are stuck in a cycle of repeat homelessness. At any one-time, Shropshire has a cohort of around 30 to 40 adults with high levels of support needs and long or cyclical histories of experiencing sleeping rough.
- The scale of hidden homelessness across Shropshire is not fully understood but is thought to be a significant issue, particularly in rural areas.

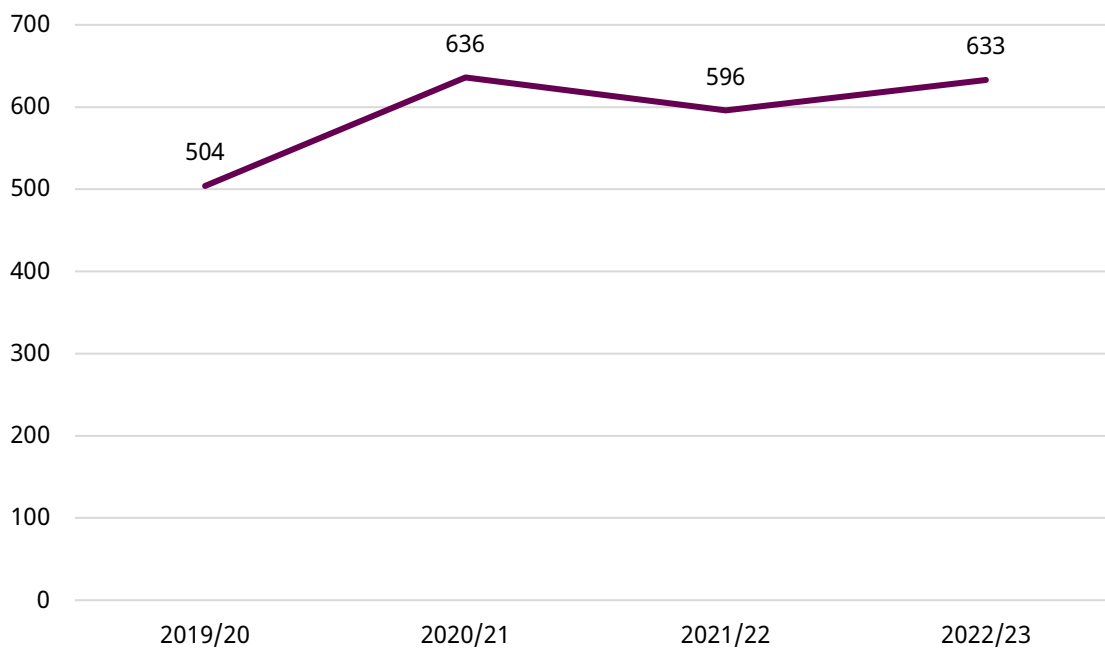


## Recommendations:

- In order to prevent rough sleeping in the first place, there is a need for an improved understanding of the causes of rough sleeping in order to ensure targeted prevention interventions are in place. There is also a need to improve data capture in relation to rough sleeping to inform future service development and interventions.
- There is a need to develop off the street accommodation, and a clear accommodation pathway, including safe accommodation for women.
- The development of a multi-disciplinary team would provide a joined-up approach to working with those with complex needs, alongside a multi-agency complex needs group to ensure a joined-up approach to working with individuals with the most entrenched experience of rough sleeping.

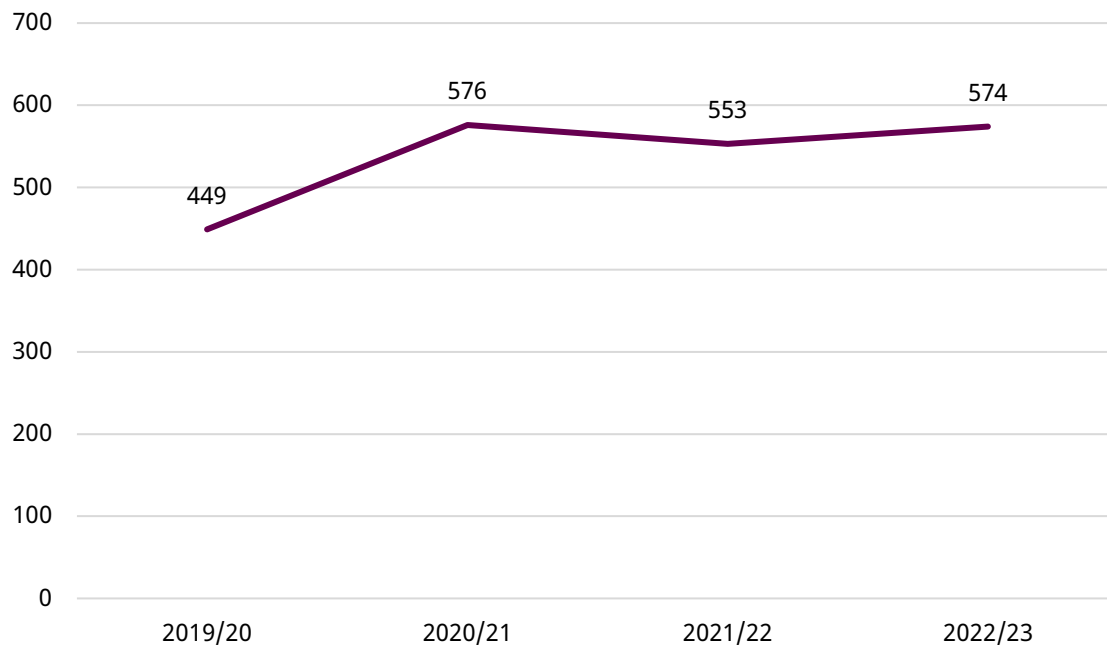
## Temporary Accommodation

Figure 2: Households Placed in Temporary Accommodation in Each Year



Source: Shropshire Council

The total number of annual placements shows that placements increased in 2022/23 compared with the previous year, and the placement numbers were very close to the peak in 2020/21. This is likely to be linked to the increased number of presentations and reduced prevention outcomes being achieved.

**Figure 3: Households Placed in B&Bs Each Year**

Source: Shropshire Council

- The data demonstrates that there is a heavy reliance on bed and breakfast accommodation, suggesting that there is currently an insufficient supply of suitable temporary accommodation.
- The average length of stay in bed and breakfasts is 75 days, although the longest period a household spent in a B&B during this time was 425 days.
- Expenditure on B&B has increased by 233% over the last four years.

**Recommendations:**

- There is a need for an increased focus on move on from temporary accommodation.
- There is a need to ensure that there is a sufficient supply of temporary accommodation, of the right type and in the right place. This will be essential to avoid the high use of bed and breakfasts.

### Homelessness Prevention and Support Services

#### Housing Options Service

- The demand on the housing options service, operational practice, and available resources has meant that the service has become largely reactive, with limited opportunities for early intervention and prevention.
- An increasing number of customers contact the service when they are already experiencing homelessness, or an experience of homelessness is imminent. Where customers do present when threatened with homelessness, limited capacity within the team means that prevention and early intervention work can be limited.
- The service is seeing an increased complexity of need amongst customers.
- There are challenges associated in delivering the service over such a large rural area, both in terms of accessibility, staff time taken when travelling to undertake home visits, and the ability to find affordable housing solutions in the areas where clients have connections, including employment and schooling.

#### Recommendations:

- A more detailed operational review of the housing solutions service would help to understand what resources are needed to manage demand and how improved customer outcomes can be achieved.
- There is a need to undertake a detailed review of the current customer journey with a view to redesign the journey to ensure a streamlined customer experience, whereby customers do not need to repeat their story, and ensuring the best use of resources by removing duplication and hand offs, while effectively managing demand, and having an increased focus on homelessness prevention.
- There is a need for an enhanced focus on prevention and early intervention, including enabling clients to retain their existing accommodation.
- Given the increasing number of social housing evictions there is a need to develop a local pre-eviction protocol, social and supported housing providers should be encouraged to sign up to the principles of Homes for Cathy.
- There is a need to ensure that prevention tools are targeted at the main causes of homelessness.
- There is a need to update the website to increase the amount of information and advice available to customers, increasing the amount of self-help information available and potentially reducing the demand from advice only cases.

#### Other Services

There are a wide range of services across Shropshire that provide a wide range of advice and services. Predicated increases in homelessness linked to the cost of living are likely to place increased pressure on many of these services.

## Settled and Supported Accommodation

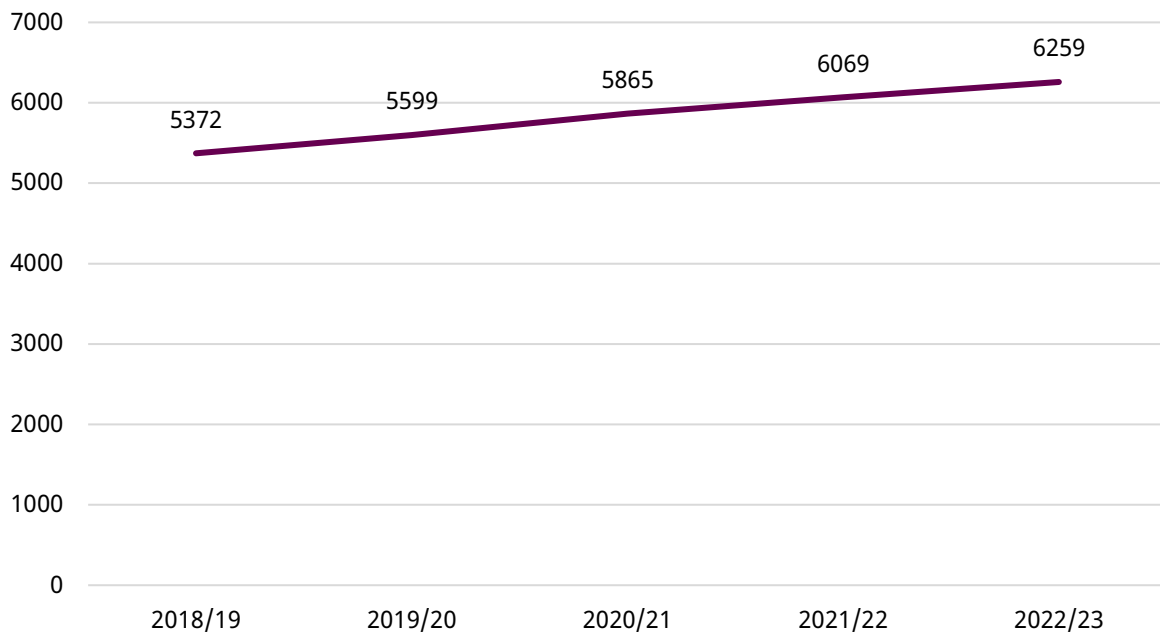
### Supported Accommodation

- There is a gap in provision for meeting the accommodation and support needs of the most complex clients with multiple needs.
- There is a gap in the provision of supported accommodation for women.
- There is a need to develop supported accommodation provision for young people with complex and multiple needs.
- Housing first is a potential solution to meeting this gap but will require a commitment from a range of key partners to ensure its success.

### Social Housing

- There is a total of just under 20,000 units of social housing, of which 20% are owned and managed by the council. There are 16,432 general needs units, of which 41% are three-bedroom properties and 39% is two bedroom accommodation.
- In March 2023, there were 6,259 households on the housing register, the number of households on the register has increased by 16.5% over the last five years. The greatest demand is for one bedroom accommodation, accounting for 51% of all applicants, followed by two-bedroom accommodation (30%) and three-bedroom accommodation (16%).

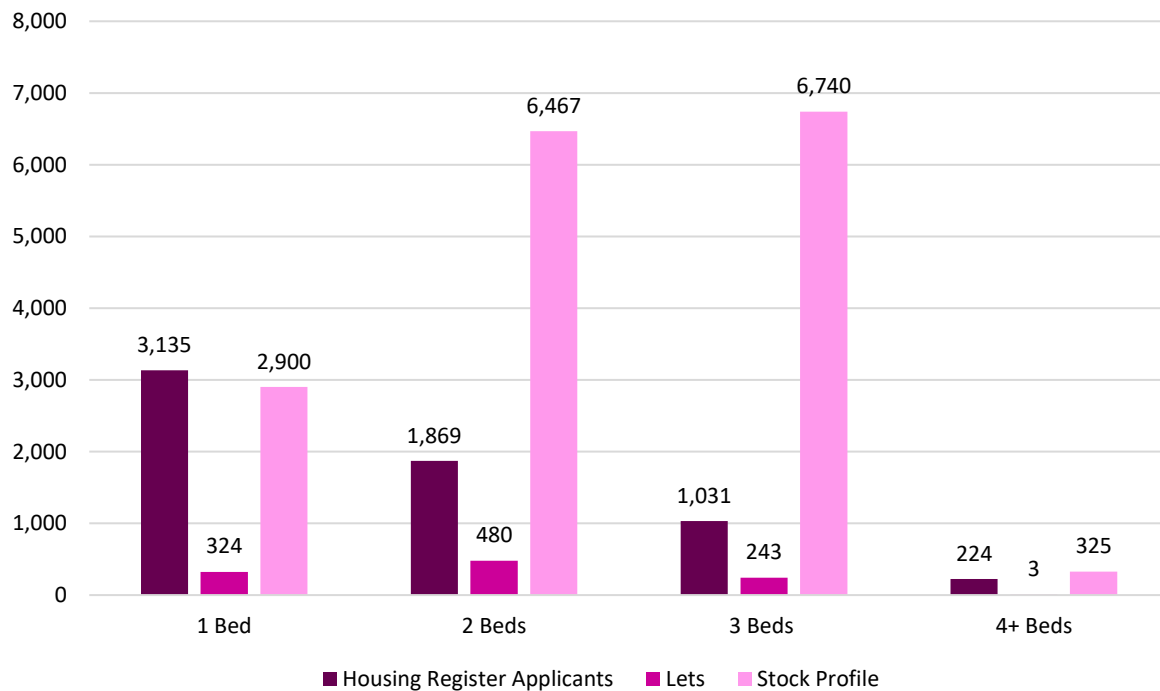
**Figure 4: Number of Applicants on the Housing Register**



Source: Shropshire Council

In 2022/23, there were 1,050 social housing lets, this represents a reduction in lets of 25.5% over the last five years. Demand exceeds supply for all property types; however, the greatest unmet need is in relation to one bedroom accommodation.

**Figure 5: Comparison of Applicants, Stocks, and Lets 2022/23**



Source: Shropshire Council

In total, 6.54% of the total social housing stock became void in 2022/23.

Shropshire Council do not routinely record the size of new housing completions, it is recommended that this is recorded moving forward to ensure that completions can be monitored in line with identified need.

**Recommendations:** Given the very high demand for one bedroom accommodation on the housing register, the number of new one bedroom properties being developed needs to increase or the re-designation of existing stock considered if demand is to be met.

### Private Rented Sector

The private rented sector is largely unaffordable with market rents in most areas being higher than local housing allowance. There is a need for the Council to make better use of the private rented sector to meet the needs of Housing Solutions customers.

#### Recommendations:

- A comprehensive landlord offer needs to be developed to increase access, and as part of this the Council may wish to explore leasing schemes and the development of social lettings agency, this could be explored on a sub-regional basis.
- There is a need to develop a greater range of options and provision for single people specifically for people under the age of 35.

### The Needs of Specific Client Groups

- Of all housing solutions customers who had a self-identified support need, 26% of these had a support need in relation to their mental health.
- Stakeholders identified mental health as a re-occurring issue, with a lack of supported housing provision for clients with very high and complex needs including dual diagnosis. There was a view amongst partners that many people were not getting access to mental health services and support at the point at which they need them.
- A third of housing solutions customers with a support need had a support need in relation to their physical health.
- There has been an ongoing annual reduction in the number of clients seen by the housing solutions team who have a support need in relation to a learning disability, the reasons for this are not clear.
- Young people are over-represented in the homeless population in Shropshire when compared with the population data.
- There is a gap in the provision of supported accommodation for young people with the most complex support needs.
- The service has seen an increase in the number of people who are experiencing homelessness and have a support need in relation to their older age.
- Domestic abuse was one of the main causes of homelessness in Shropshire. There will be a need to ensure that there is a range of options available to meet this increasing need.
- Homelessness amongst single people is an increasing issue, with limited affordable housing options available in the area.
- There is an increase in the complexity of issues that homeless households, both singles and families, are presenting with, and challenges in finding appropriate and sustainable solutions for these households.

## Homeless Link

- There has been an increase of 79% over the last three years in the number of customers presenting as experiencing homelessness with a support need linked to offending.
- The number of clients who are experiencing homelessness with a support need in relation to substance misuse has increased over the last three years.
- There is a need to ask the 'veteran question' to ensure that veterans can be identified in order to be able to signpost them to the wide range of help and support available to veterans and their families.
- There is no data captured to identify clients from the LGBTQ+ community by the housing solutions service.
- Ethnicity is not currently accurately captured during homelessness assessments, data capture in this area needs to improve.
- Homelessness amongst home owners has slowly begun to increase.
- Homelessness from Ukrainian guests is likely to increase, however, this client group is more likely to have their homelessness successfully relieved or prevented by accessing private rented accommodation, when compared with other customer groups.

### **The Views of Staff, Stakeholders, and Customers**

Consultation was a central component of the review, and a summary of the views of staff, stakeholders, and customers are detailed below.

#### **Views of Staff**

- Members of the housing options team feel there is a need for an enhanced focus on prevention and a need to review the customer journey.
- There is good working between the housing options service and partner agencies, with many partner agencies viewing the service positively; although it is evident that there is room for improvement in joint working arrangements with some partner agencies.

#### **Views of Stakeholders**

- Partner agencies raised concern in both their ability and that of customers to be able to access the housing options service, including challenges in accessing via the telephone line, and receiving updates.
- Partner agencies identified the need to focus more on prevention and early intervention, with the need for a more pro-active approach, alongside the need to raise awareness of the help available.
- The need for increased access to money advice and assistance with budgeting was identified.

- The issue of the lack of appropriate accommodation and support for the most complex customers was a re-occurring theme throughout consultation, including people experiencing rough sleeping.
- The need for more suitable temporary accommodation and support was a recurring theme identified through consultation.
- Stakeholders identified the need for a multi-disciplinary team to respond to homelessness, including housing, social care, substance misuse, and mental health.
- Stakeholders identified that the profile and needs of people experiencing rough sleeping and those with complex needs is not fully understood.
- Partner agencies identified the need for a return to face-to-face appointments, especially for vulnerable customer and those with complex needs.
- Partners suggested a multi-agency advice hub as a way to ensure customers can get a range of advice across the county.
- An action focused complex case group is needed to find solutions for the most complex cases.

### Views of Customers

- A number of customers didn't know who to initially approach for help with their homelessness and their feedback also indicated that opportunities for prevention were being missed by the housing options team.
- Customers indicated that they felt they needed more regular contact from the housing options team, and more information was needed in relation to temporary accommodation including an information pack.
- Customers felt that more support was required to both prevent homelessness and while in temporary accommodation.
- Customer responses indicated the need to raise awareness of the service, so that people know where to go to access help.
- Feedback from customers was very positive in relation to the quality of temporary accommodation, but less so in relation to support.

### Resources

- Expenditure on temporary accommodation and B&Bs has increased significantly.
- The service is heavily reliant on grant funding for funding a wide range of services; the impact of reductions in this funding would result in increased levels of homelessness and rough sleeping and the associated costs to the council. A risk matrix would help to better understand this impact.
- Financial support from the government through the homelessness prevention grant has an uncertain future and the potential for further pressure on council budgets should this funding be reduced or cease.



- The cost of living crisis, increasing interest rates, and changes to the private rented sector are likely to lead to increased homelessness levels at a time when future public funding seems precarious. Investment in homelessness prevention is essential if the impact of this on homelessness levels is to be mitigated.

### Future Levels of Homelessness

- Broader pressures within the wider housing market, anticipated changes to private rented sector tenancies, the cost-of-living crisis, increasing mortgage rates, and pressure around accommodating refugees indicates that demand for homelessness services will continue to rise for the foreseeable future.
- In order to recover from the impact of the pandemic, there is the need for more supported accommodation provision in line with identified need.
- In order to mitigate the impact of changes to the private rented sector, the council with its partners should consider the development of a competitive landlord offer, including exploring opportunities for a leasing or purchasing scheme.
- To mitigate increases in homelessness associated with the cost of living there is a need for an awareness raising campaign of the help available, alongside access to timely money advice.
- There will be a need to develop a range of housing options for Ukrainian guests and other refugee households.
- In preparation for further increases in the demand for temporary accommodation the council should enter into dialogue with social housing providers to identify additional units that can be used as temporary accommodation.
- The council will need to ensure that there are adequate resources in place to meet any increased demand and should monitor data regularly to identify increases and causes.

### Homelessness Strategy Development

Following this review, the Council will produce and publish a homelessness and rough sleeping strategy. This will ensure a strategic approach to tackling homelessness and rough sleeping across Shropshire, ensuring that local solutions can be developed to meet the needs of its community. Shropshire's Homelessness Forum will be fundamental to the development of this strategy, and the implementation and monitoring of the targets agreed within the action plan.

The strategy must reflect the joint approach by agencies to tackle and prevent homelessness in the borough, and therefore it is appropriate that a multi-agency approach is taken to:

- Agreeing priorities.

- Identifying key actions.
- Agreeing an action plan.
- Jointly delivering the action plan.

The Council is committed to working with its partners to preventing homelessness and ending rough sleeping across Shropshire.

### Recommendations

No.	Section	Recommendation
1	<b>Demand on the housing options service</b>	Consideration should be given as to how demand can be more effectively managed, and resources focused on cases where there is a threat of homelessness.
2	<b>Profile of homelessness</b>	There is a need to raise awareness of the service with customers and partner agencies to encourage clients to access the service at an earlier point in order for opportunities for early intervention and homeless prevention to be maximised.
3	<b>Reasons for experiencing homelessness</b>	There is a need to ensure that there is a range of prevention tools in place targeted at the main causes of homelessness.
4		Close work is required with the main social housing providers in Shropshire to reduce homelessness from social housing.
5	<b>Prevention and relief outcomes</b>	There needs to be an increased focus on helping people to maintain their existing accommodation.
6		There is a need to have more focused approach to preventing homelessness due to family and friends evicting.
7		The Council needs to make better use of the private rented sector for preventing and relieving homelessness.
8	<b>Main duty decisions</b>	There may be an opportunity to increase the use of private rented accommodation to enable the Council to successfully discharge its duty and move households out of temporary accommodation.
9		Consideration needs to be given as to how social housing can be used to prevent and relieve homelessness, reducing the pressure on temporary accommodation.
10	<b>Rough sleeping</b>	In order to prevent rough sleeping in the first place, there is a need for an improved understanding of the causes of rough sleeping in order to ensure targeted prevention interventions are in place. There is also a need to improve

		data capture in relation to rough sleeping to inform future service development and interventions.
11		There is a need to develop off the street accommodation, and a clear accommodation pathway, including safe accommodation for women.
12		The development of a multi-disciplinary team would provide a joined-up approach to working with those with complex needs, alongside a multi-agency complex needs group to ensure a joined-up approach to working with individuals with the most entrenched experience of rough sleeping.
13	<b>Temporary accommodation</b>	There is a need for an increased focus on move on from temporary accommodation.
14		There is a need to ensure that there is a sufficient supply of temporary accommodation, of the right type and in the right place. This will be essential to avoid the high use of B&B.
15	<b>Housing options service</b>	A more detailed operational review of the housing solutions service would help to understand what resources are needed to manage demand and how improved customer outcomes can be achieved.
16		There is a need to undertake a detailed review of the current customer journey with a view to redesign the journey to ensure a streamlined customer experience, whereby customers do not need to repeat their story, and ensuring the best use of resources by removing duplication and hand offs, while effectively managing demand, and having an increased focus on homeless prevention.
17		There is a need for an enhanced focus on prevention and early intervention, including enabling clients to retain their existing accommodation.
18		Given the increasing number of social housing evictions there is a need to develop a local pre-eviction protocol, social and supported housing providers should be encouraged to sign up to the principles of Homes for Cathy.
19		There is a need to ensure that prevention tools are targeted at the main causes of homelessness.
20		There is a need to update the website to increase the amount of information and advice available to customers increasing the amount of self-help information available and potentially reducing the demand from advice only cases.

21	<b>Supported accommodation</b>	There is a need to undertake a supported housing needs assessment and develop a supported housing strategy in line with the requirements of the Supported Housing (Regulatory Oversight) Act 2023.
22	<b>Social Housing</b>	Given the very high demand for one bedroom accommodation on the housing register, the number of new one bedroom properties being developed needs to increase or the re-designation of existing stock considered if demand is to be met.

### About Homeless Link

Homeless Link is the national membership charity for organisations working with people experiencing or at risk of homelessness in England. We aim to develop, inspire, support, and sustain a movement of organisations working together to achieve positive futures for people who are homeless or vulnerably housed.

Representing over 900 organisations across England, we are in a unique position to see both the scale and nature of the tragedy of homelessness. We see the data gaps; the national policy barriers; the constraints of both funding and expertise; the system blocks and attitudinal obstacles. But crucially, we also see – and are instrumental in developing – the positive practice and ‘what works’ solutions.

As an organisation we believe that things can and should be better: not because we are naïve or cut off from reality, but because we have seen and experienced radical positive change in the way systems and services are delivered – and that gives us hope for a different future.

We support our members through research, guidance, and learning, and to promote policy change that will ensure everyone has a place to call home and the support they need to keep it.

### What We Do

Homeless Link is the national membership charity for frontline homelessness services. We work to improve services through research, guidance and learning, and campaign for policy change that will ensure everyone has a place to call home and the support they need to keep it.

## Homeless Link

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@HomelessLink

# Let's End Homelessness Together

