

# Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy Consultation

Public and stakeholder feedback

July 2024



# 1 Introduction and Methodology

Between 25<sup>th</sup> April and 5<sup>th</sup> July 2024 Shropshire Council invited members of the public, partner organisations and other stakeholders to have their say on Shropshire's Draft Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2024 to 2029. The draft strategy aims to demonstrate how Shropshire Council and partners will work to prioritise the prevention of homelessness and aim to end rough sleeping in the county. Homelessness goes beyond just lacking shelter, affecting physical and mental health, educational attainment, employment prospects, and straining personal and familial relationships.

The draft strategy explains that, over recent years, there have been key changes including the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act and the Domestic Abuse Act, both positive steps for vulnerable groups. This has been set against a backdrop of other challenges including Welfare Reform, Universal Credit changes, the Covid-19 pandemic and the cost of living crisis. The strategy is designed to deliver services in a way that will help people as soon as possible. It emphasises the importance of getting the right advice and support at the right time, maximising opportunities for early intervention and prevention.

The consultation was shared via Shropshire Council's newsroom, through the 'Get Involved' pages on the Council's website, through local newsletters and mailings and through more targeted invitations to participate issued to stakeholders.

The public consultation ran for just over 10 weeks. It was extended from an initial 8 week timescale due to the fact that participation within this consultation was poor. This lack of interest was unexpected, but it is accepted that Shropshire Council was simultaneously conducting other high-profile budget related consultations and attention could have been drawn away from this important topic. Additional communication activity and an extended timescale were used to boost participation but were ineffective in increasing engagement.

24 people participated in the consultation. Despite the smaller response rates the responses were comprehensive and have produced a range of feedback to influence the draft strategy document and work to complete the strategy prior to final decision. The feedback is presented in this report as fully as possible. The report is structured into the following sections:

- Section 1 (this introduction) provides a description of the survey background and methodology.
- Section 2 outlines the profile of consultation respondents.
- Section 3 covers the overall feedback and detail of the comments provided.
- Section 4 provides a brief summary of key findings and conclusion of the report.

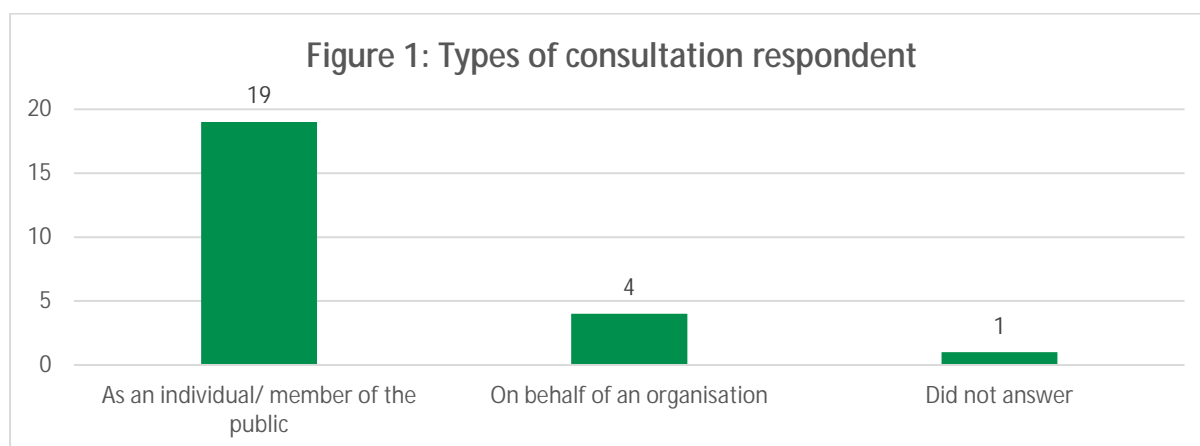
## 2 Profile of Respondents

24 respondents completed the online consultation survey. Although it is important to consider the characteristics of the survey sample, to understand any bias in responses and any under representation within the feedback obtained, caution should be applied when using this data (note percentages against a small sample should be applied cautiously and where possible respondents numbers are stated alongside any percentages used). The questions within this part of the survey were not optional and respondents could chose to skip the personal questions within the survey.

The type of respondent is shown in **Figure 1**. The chart illustrates that 79% (19) of the respondents described themselves as individuals or members of the public and 17% (4) as representatives of a local group or organisation. 4% (1) did not specify. Many thanks are extended to the organisational respondents. Those who were happy to be identified included:

- Housing Plus Group/Homes Plus
- Wrekin Housing Group

2 of the organisational responses were from individuals working in partnership with other organisations, 1 was a local government worker and more were individuals living in Shropshire.



**Figure 2** displays that more women responded to the consultation (34%, 8) compared to men (25%, 6). This pattern is seen within most, but not all, of Shropshire Council's consultations. Research suggests that women are more likely to respond when a consultation response is submitted on behalf of a household. 8% (2) preferred not to say/provide a gender. 10 survey respondents did not answer the question. Based on these small numbers it is difficult to draw too many conclusions from this gender analysis. In the same way, only 10 survey respondents completed the question asking for age group. The responses are shown in **Figure 3**.

Figure 2: Gender of consultation respondents

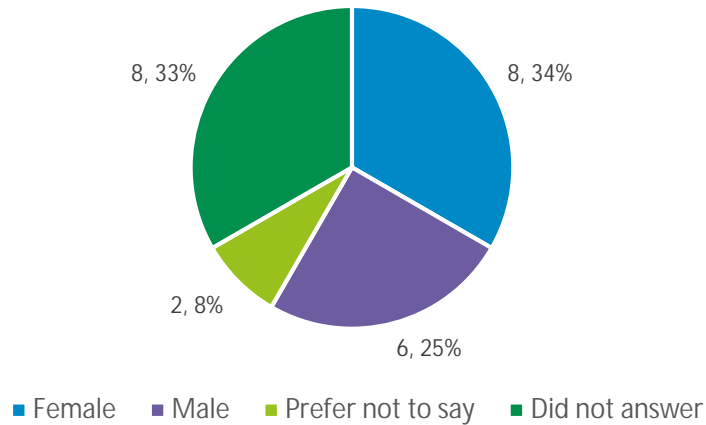
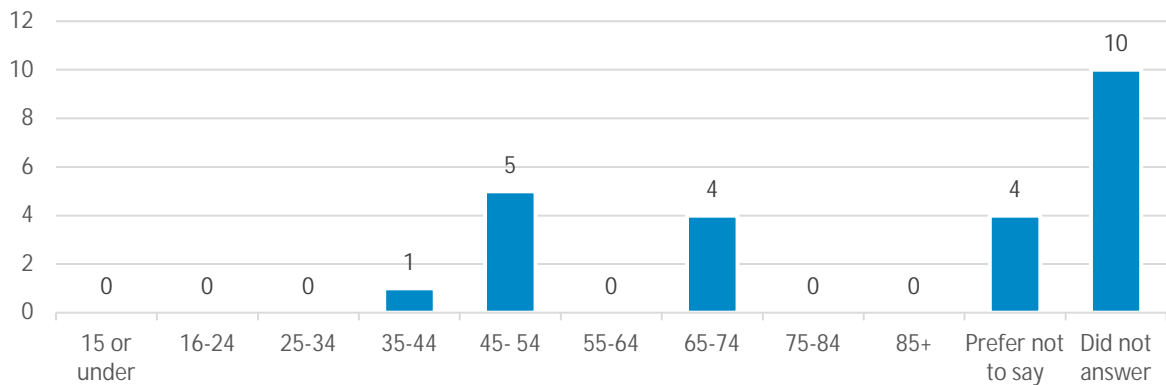
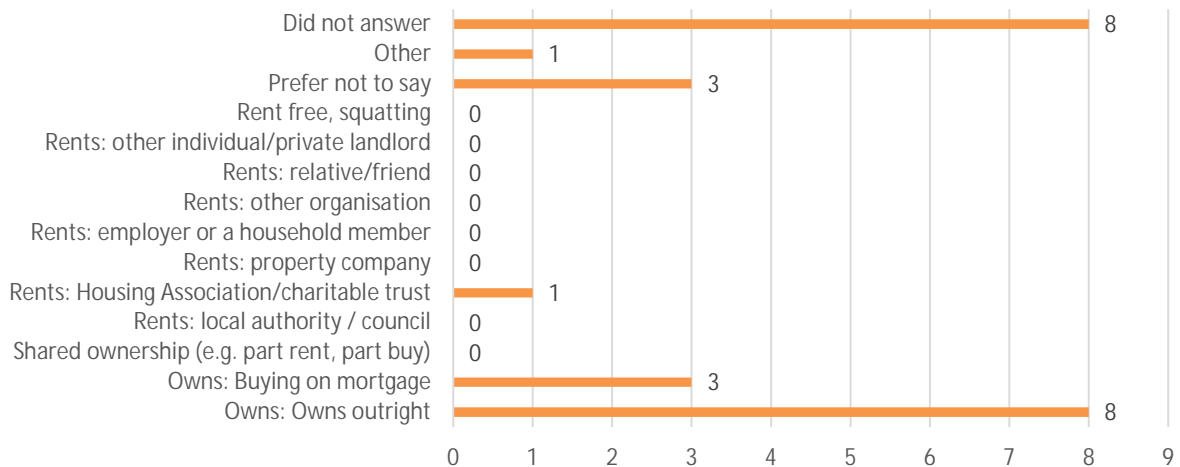


Figure 3: Age group of consultation respondents



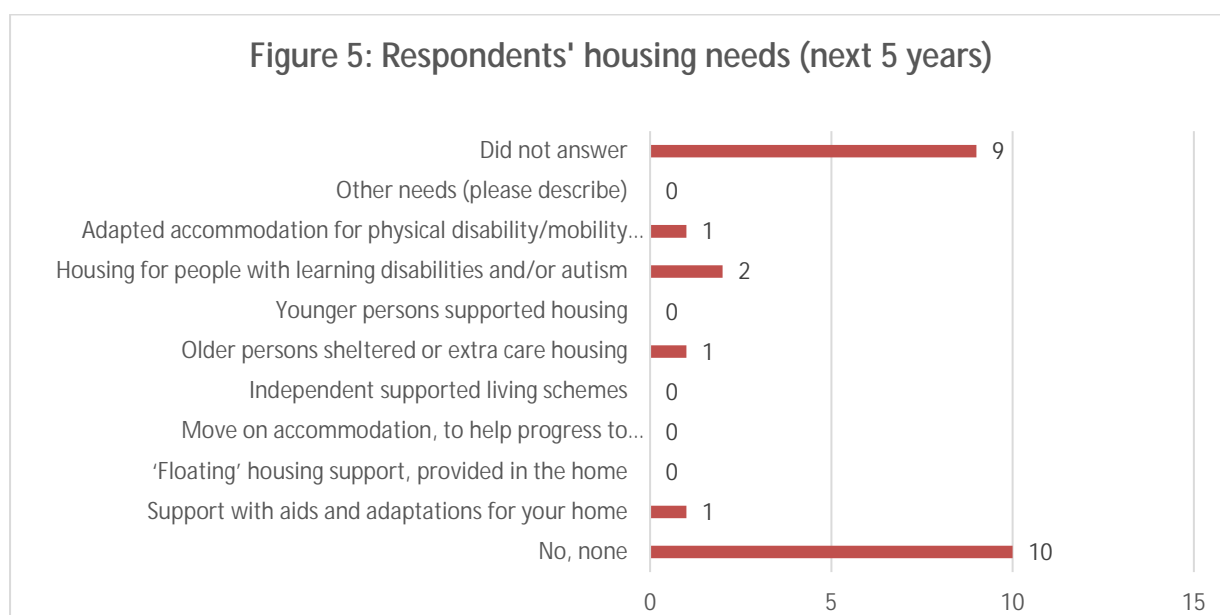
The survey respondents were asked a few questions about their housing status and needs. The first question asked ‘Does your household own or rent accommodation?’. The results are shown in **Figure 4** below.

Figure 4: Consultation respondents by household type



11 of the 24 survey respondents are homeowners, either with a mortgage or through outright ownership. As Figure 4 illustrates, the responses to the consultation were not necessarily from those in need of housing, although it should be noted that 8 people did not complete this question.

**Figure 5** illustrates the response when survey respondents were asked ‘Within the next 5 years, do you anticipate anyone in your household making use of any of the following types of support or accommodation?’ The response to this question highlights that a small number of respondents (who could select multiple options) are looking ahead to consider future accommodation needs. Support for people with learning disabilities and/or autism, sheltered housing or extra care housing, support with aids and adaptations and adapted accommodation for physical disabilities or mobility needs were all selected as Figure 5 displays.



The age of some of the survey respondents could have been behind some of the thoughts to the future. To check needs of the sample further, the respondents were asked if they have any long-standing illness or disability that limits their daily activity. Three survey respondents answered ‘yes’ and 10 said ‘no’. 2 preferred not to say and 9 skipped the question. The needs of the survey sample, when described in more detail included mobility and hearing concerns. Respondents were given the opportunity to add a comment to describe any of their own needs in relation to the information set out within the draft strategy. There were 2 comments in response to the question, shown below.

- *“I am fortunate to have no personal needs in this respect (and doubt I ever will) but am very concerned about the support for those less fortunate than myself. “My husband has mobility issues.”*
- *“Not enough options locally and staff are poorly paid and low on skills and experience so too many are failing.”*

Survey respondents were also asked if they are serving members of the armed forces, veterans or a family member of a veteran or serving member. This

information can help Shropshire Council in understanding, and meeting the needs of, those linked to the armed forces. None of the respondents within this survey indicated any links to the armed forces.

In most public consultations Shropshire Council works to understand the ethnic background and religion of respondents. This is important information and can illustrate if people of different backgrounds and characteristics have, or have not, had their views considered in the decision-making process. In this instance the sample was very small and it is too difficult to draw too many conclusions from the data but the responses suggest that those survey respondents within the same who chose to complete the questions are predominantly white (British; Irish; Welsh) Christians. As a result it is recommended that the feedback is used with some caution since it is unlikely the feedback reflects a full diversity of different needs from people with different characteristics. Despite this, the strategy itself and the supporting Equality and Social Inclusion Health Impact Assessment, highlight the need to consider potential impact on people with different protected characteristics and those who may be vulnerable and in more need of homelessness and housing support.

**Figure 6** displays the employment/ daily lives of survey respondents. 16 of the 24 respondents provided information, and of those 5 are retired, 6 work either full time or part time, 3 selected other and 10 didn't answer or preferred not to say.



The last question within the demographics section of the online consultation survey, asked about home location. This is included to allow Shropshire Council to understand if responses are representative of the whole county or limited to certain geographical areas. Due to the small sample, the **Map 1** shown on the following page, only shows approximate locations (based on partial postcodes). This prevents anyone from a small respondent sample from being identified. As the map illustrates, despite the low numbers there is a good spread of responses from the whole county.

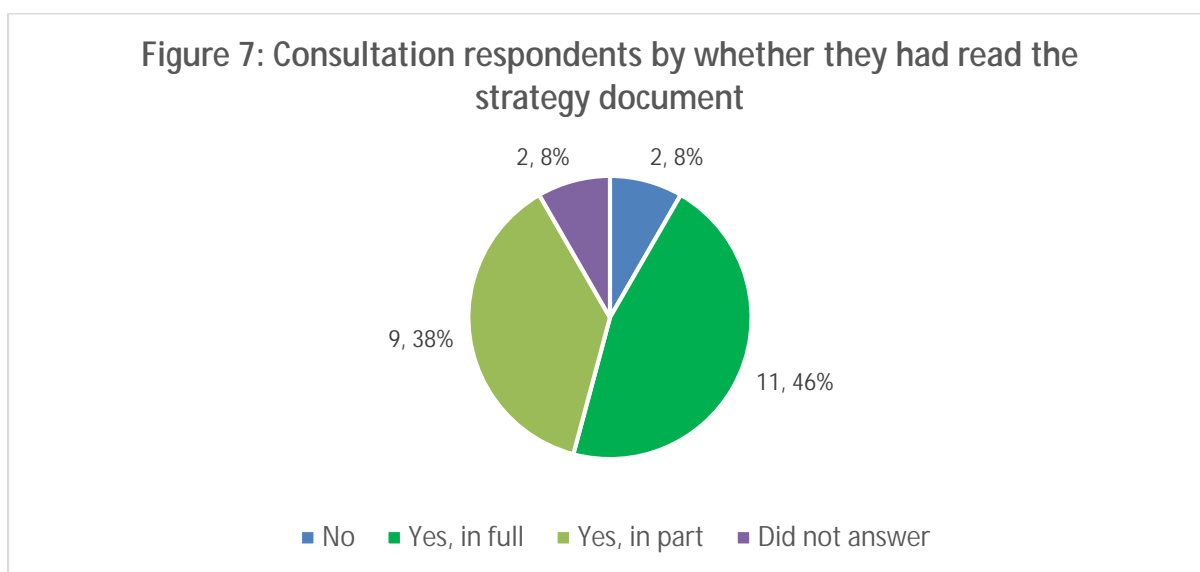
**Map 1 Approximate locations of survey respondents**



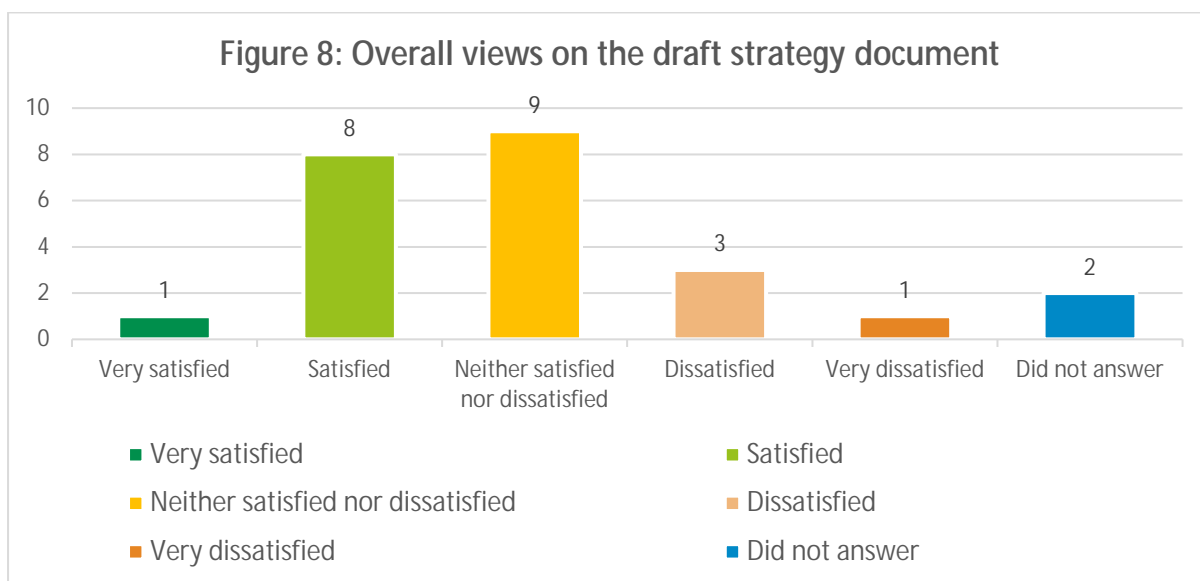
The next section of the report considers the feedback provided by the 24 consultation respondents related to the content of the draft Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy.

### 3 Overall survey results and feedback

The 24 survey respondents were asked if they had read the draft strategy. This was designed to check understanding and access to the draft from Shropshire Council's 'Get Involved' webpages. The results, shown in **Figure 7** below illustrate that 11 of the survey respondents had read the draft strategy in full and 9 in part, only 2 had not had the time or opportunity to read through the draft before answering the survey. This suggests that most respondents have a very good understanding of the content and approach set out.



Consultation respondents were asked how satisfied they felt, overall, with the draft strategy and the feedback is shown in **Figure 8**. **9 survey respondents felt very satisfied or satisfied (38%) and 9 felt neutrally about the draft strategy (28%) compared to 4 respondents who were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied (17%). 2 did not answer the question.**

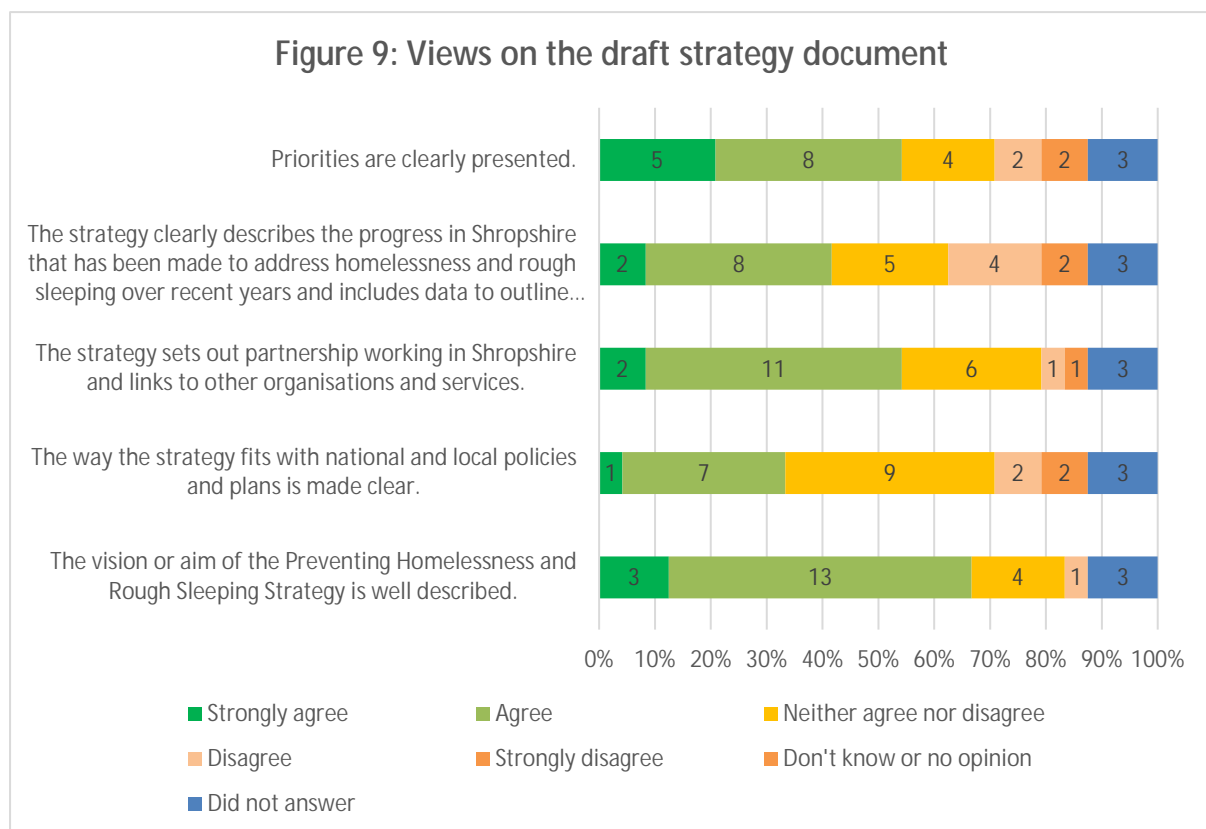




To understand the overall feedback to a greater degree, all survey respondents were asked for their views on 6 statements about the strategy:

- The vision or aim of the Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy is well described.
- The way the strategy fits with national and local policies and plans is made clear.
- The strategy sets out partnership working in Shropshire and links to other organisations and services.
- The strategy clearly describes the progress in Shropshire that has been made to address homelessness and rough sleeping over recent years and includes data to outline the current position.
- Priorities are clearly presented.

The results are presented in **Figure 9**. As the chart shows, the feedback was predominantly very positive. On average 12 of the 24 respondents agreed with each of the statements. The feedback was most positive about the vision or aim of the strategy. There was also positive feedback for the partnership focus within the strategy and the way the priorities were presented clearly within the draft document.



The survey asked for comments to understand the feedback in more depth. Survey respondents were asked what they liked and disliked about the draft and whether they had identified any gaps or issues not covered within the draft.

The first question within the set read 'Is there anything you don't like about the draft strategy? Please add comments if you are dissatisfied with the draft strategy'

document overall, or if you selected disagree/strongly disagree for any of the points listed above.' There were 8 comments, and all are shown below:

- *"We need to look at how much more successful supporting the homeless was over covid lockdowns used empty buildings to give them a home and stability and a sense of community and giving them opportunities for purpose to help turn their lives around."*
- *"This strategy has identified domestic abuse as one of the top 3 reasons for homelessness but does not include domestic abuse throughout the recommendations. It does not talk about how it is going to be tackled, it does not mention our DAHA accreditation which the council has committed to undertaking, which is a way to tackle domestic abuse appropriately. The strategy talks about the housing first model, but housing first is not temporary accommodation. If we are offering housing first then we need to offer our clients a secure tenancy with a robust support package which can follow them wherever they may go within Shropshire. When vulnerable groups are mentioned in the strategy, victims and perpetrators of domestic abuse are not mentioned specifically which they should be. ASB is talked about but we know that often DA is mislabelled as ASB which shows we need to understand ASB and DA more. From the action plan "Make effective use of clients with lived experience to shape our services." has been recorded as year 2 - why is this not an ongoing, starting immediately action? The information from lived experience needs to be built up in order to affect change, the longer we wait the less information we will get. It talks about settled, supported and temporary accommodation but very little mention of safe accommodation which we have a statutory duty to provide."*
- *"I do not understand why town and parish councils are not included in the list of partnerships. They have the most structured understanding of the situation in their communities. There ought to be more council owned social housing and hostels/multiple occupancy accommodation to provide appropriate supported homes for, particularly, young and those suffering with mental health issues. Legislation to stop private landlords increasing rents unduly and terminating lets and evicting tenants should be much stronger and actively enforced."*
- *"It doesn't go far enough, or consider the reasons for homelessness and rough sleeping. Doesn't present sustainable solutions and patronises the people it says it aims to help."*
- *"Way too much reading, I would have been reading it all day."*
- *"Whilst I have said "agree" with the statements above, I don't feel the statements themselves allow me to explain what I feel about the draft strategy. For example, "priorities are clearly presented" - yes they are, but do I feel they are the right priorities fully? Also do I agree the strategy "sets out partnership working and links.....", well yes it does but it's not showing me how it's doing or planning to do that as its not in the action plan?"*
- *"While the action points are all clearly laid out with timescales, none of the timescales extend past 2 years, is this achievable to get all actions completed within year 1 or 2?"*
- *"It sees everyone as a victim, and seemingly ignores those who choose, for whatever reason, not to comply with societal norms."*

Although some of the comments clearly communicate the concerns of survey respondents and suggestions for how improvements can be made, others express more general dissatisfaction without any clear comment to explain why the draft strategy is not considered satisfactory. This is a shame and means a few of the comments cannot be addressed through any changes to the draft, whilst it is possible to take some action to respond to others within the updated strategy for final approval.

To understand public feedback more, survey respondents were asked 'Is there anything you particularly like about the draft strategy?' There were 10 comments. 2 were neutral and 8 were positive. All are shown below:

#### Positive feedback

- *"Positive and hopeful."*
- *"Like the preventative approach and that homeless issues will start to be addressed at an earlier stage."*
- *"Partnership working is central to the strategy, and a clearly laid out action plan."*
- *"The joined up approach of involving multiple organisations with frontline experience of working with and helping the homeless."*
- *"It's good to see a change of practice to early intervention. Reducing the current significant wait. Looking at housing solutions and assessment centre."*
- *"Help the homeless."*
- *"I like the layout of it, it's clear and easy to read and it gives good links to other relevant strategies and legislation."*
- *"It builds on good progress that has already been made in recent years."*

#### Other feedback

- *"Where will the council be able to provide suitable housing from? There is an acute lack of provision across the county, yet there are many empty and unused buildings that should be repurposed."*
- *"Making it a criminal offence to be homeless is like going back to Victorian times."*

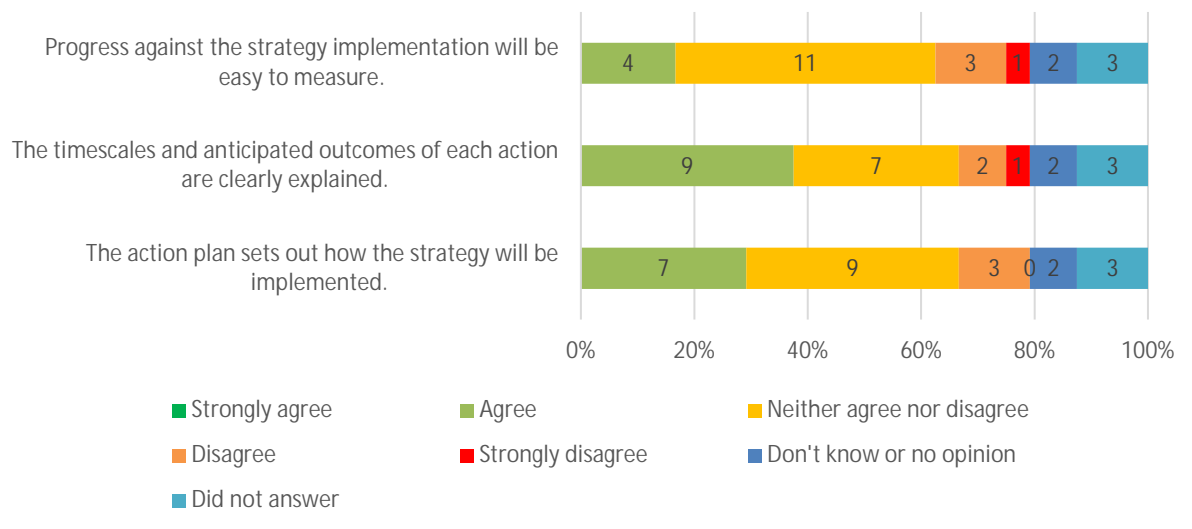
The feedback suggests that members of the public are pleased to see action being taken to address homelessness and rough sleeping. The partnership approach is mentioned within 2 comments as being important and a further 2 comments highlight the importance of prevention/early intervention to reduce homelessness.

Within many consultations on draft strategies a strong theme within feedback has been the importance of focusing on implementation and action planning. To obtain some feedback on this issue, respondents were asked their views on three statements:

- The action plan sets out how the strategy will be implemented.
- The timescales and anticipated outcomes of each action are clearly explained.
- Progress against the strategy implementation will be easy to measure.

**Figure 10** illustrates the feedback on these three statements and shows that most respondents had a neutral opinion (average of 9 per point) followed by those with a positive view (average of 6.7 per point). Very few survey respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed (3 on average). None of the respondents strongly agreed with any of the statements. 9 of the 24 survey respondents felt that the timescales and anticipated outcomes of each action are clearly explained within the draft. 4 survey respondents are concerned that progress against the implementation of the strategy may be difficult to measure. When considering those who did not answer the question and those with a neutral view, many were not sure, and this feedback suggests that future communications may be important to more clearly communicate progress on the implementation of the strategy once finalised and in place.

**Figure 10: Views on the draft strategy implementation**

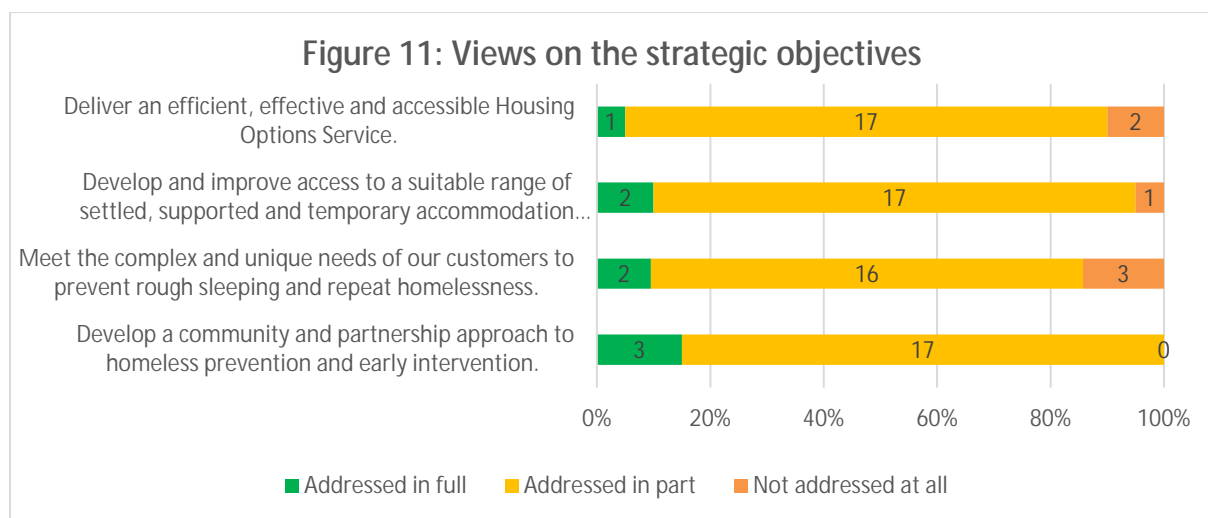


The draft strategy includes four main strategic objectives, listed below. Survey respondents were asked their views on how well each is addressed within the draft document. The feedback is shown in **Figure 11**.

- Develop a community and partnership approach to homeless prevention and early intervention.
- Meet the complex and unique needs of our customers to prevent rough sleeping and repeat homelessness.
- Develop and improve access to a suitable range of settled, supported and temporary accommodation solutions.
- Deliver an efficient, effective and accessible Housing Options Service.

Figure 11 highlights that most respondents feel the strategic objectives are all addressed in part, a few believe they are addressed in full. Three respondents have concerns that meeting the complex and unique needs of customers to prevent rough sleeping and homelessness is not addressed.

**Figure 11: Views on the strategic objectives**



The survey included a question focused on gaps to allow any survey respondents with concerns to highlight suggestions for how their concerns may be addressed. There were 10 comments in response to the question and all are shown below. A few comments suggest more general dissatisfaction with Shropshire Council rather than specific concerns about the draft Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy.

#### General comments

- *“Didn’t read it all, it’s too much.”*
- *“Too much spent on plans and talks and consulting and enough on the ground funds and action to actually make a difference.”*

#### Suggestions

- *“Section 8 should talk about hidden homelessness which includes DA and mention our duty to provide safe accommodation. The Action Plan should include the DAHA accreditation and working to achieve this. No mention of domestic abuse at all in the action plan - Sanctuary Scheme is a huge preventative measure but is not mentioned in the action plan.”*
- *“5.8 shows the top three reasons that people present and it says this has remained consistent for the past three years. There are sections focussed on how to work with families (7.9 and in the Action Plan for Year 1) to reduce breakdown, there are sections on how to work with private landlords to reduce tenancy's ending at short notice (9.10 9.11 9.12 9.13 and in the Action Plan for Year 2)- there is nothing specific about how to work with victims of domestic abuse (with one exception 7.14 where it mentions the sanctuary scheme which is already in place). There is a link to the Shropshire Safe Accommodation Strategy which has recommendations in it, none of which are reflected in here. The strategy talks about all staff being trauma informed but in section 8.3 it states rough sleeping is often linked to Mental Health and Substance Misuse - as opposed to recognising Trauma is more often than not the primary reason and the presenting issue is mental health/substance misuse. Section 8.7 "assessment centre" - I don't like the name, it reminds me of being tested for something and doesn't feel supportive, it feels like I could fail the assessment. Something like "Respite and Needs Assessment" maybe - support isn't what people always thing they want so looking at what they need might be better? 8.8 could be clearer that this is countywide - also in the action plan it has no specific plan and says "ongoing" which for this action leaves it at risk of not being a focus. The strategy discusses the need to train the workforce but there are no actions to do this.”*
- *“Care leavers not covered. Feel need more emphasis on the private sector. Needs more detail on the gaps in households with high and complex support needs.”*
- *“We feel that Tenancy Support and the vital work that they do is missing. A lot of focus is on people with complex needs but no focus on customer with lower level or short term or ADHOC support needs who need help to maintain their tenancy and act as an advocate to their landlord, therefore preventing homelessness.”*
- *“Local council involvement and county council owned homeless and ‘special needs’ temporary and longer term secure accommodation.”*
- *“More specific details - staffing, locations of offices, exactly how they will operate.”*
- *“How this will be achieved in areas with very little affordable social housing.”*
- *“How to put the aspirations into effect.”*

The comments suggest that there may be a need to add more content on the issues of domestic abuse and accommodation, private sector housing, people with complex needs (e.g. care leavers), and tenancy support.

A question was included within the consultation survey to understand whether there were any comments or concerns linked to the Equalities and Social Inclusion Health Impact Assessment (this was shared as part of the consultation). The question read 'Shropshire Council has carried out an Equalities, Social Inclusion and Health Impact Assessment for the draft strategy. This is to ensure that people of different protected characteristic groups are not adversely impacted by any changes delivered as a result of implementation. Issues of diversity and equality and health are important, and an increasing area of focus with costs of living increases. Please use the space below if you have any other comments to make about the strategy's impact on people who may face homelessness.' There were 10 comments and 8 of those are shown below. 2 comments were very general criticisms of Shropshire Council and its officers, and 1 included prejudiced views against a protected characteristic grouping. Since these did not relate to the question they are not included below.

- *"There is a lot around increasing information for clients via technology, however those who are rough sleeping, fleeing DA regularly do not have access to technology so you are excluding these individuals. No mention of becoming more trauma informed, focus on prevention involves looking at reasons for homelessness and rough sleeping and tackling those issues which is not addressed in this strategy."*
- *"The action plan is the key document in respect of the impact on people, we need those with lived experience at the table working with us now to create the action plan."*
- *"There should be no reason for people to be in this situation there should be solutions available."*
- *"How does the Ark fit into this plan? Are they involved in planning?"*
- *"I honestly can't see it making much difference. There needs to be massive changes; this is just tinkering round the edges. We need a big increase in social housing in the area and proper mental health services that you can add actually access before people are in crisis. More input is needed in preventing homelessness and this revolves around drug and alcohol abuse and mental health. More families will become homeless due to the rising cost of living; if you lose your job then you are at risk of losing your home. Young people, especially young people haven't a hope of leaving home and finding somewhere affordable to live so if their parents throw them out or circumstances change then they are at risk. Unless all these social problems are dealt with first then this will be ineffective."*
- *"As mentioned more focus needs to be on customers who are struggling to maintain a tenancy before they are facing homelessness to ensure that their tenancy is successful by putting the right support in early on rather than at the end."*
- *"We feel the strategy will have a positive impact on households facing homelessness. We are positive about the reference to a reviewed housing options service and the approach to educate other professionals about homelessness."*

The comments include concerns over the challenge of preventing homelessness and rough sleeping within the current social and economic climate. The comments also include some constructive comments highlighting a shared desire to address homelessness and support people in housing need.

The last question in the survey was an open comment box, allowing respondents to include any other comments. There were 3 comments and they repeat the concerns relating to available budgets for delivery.

- *"I should like to see much more investment in the support partners actually working with the homeless on their related/causal issues."*
- *"A lack of investment and decades of mismanagement has led to a total lack of suitable housing in the local area and thus compounded a problem."*
- *"Also access to mental health support is essential."*

## 4 Summary and Conclusion

The report outlines the public consultation on Shropshire's Draft Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2024 to 2029. The strategy aims to prevent homelessness and end rough sleeping in Shropshire by prioritizing early intervention and support.

The consultation was extended due to low participation to cover a period of just over 10 weeks period. The public communication about the opportunity to participate in the consultation resulted in 24 comprehensive responses. The response was disappointing considering the importance of the topic, but it is accepted that Shropshire Council was consulting on a wide range of service changes over the same time period and this may have influenced the lower response rate.

The survey respondents' feedback was generally positive, appreciating the strategy's vision, clarity of priorities, and partnership approach. However, some expressed concerns about the strategy's depth in addressing domestic abuse, the inclusion of town and parish councils, and the need for more of a focus on tenancy support.

The strategy's four main objectives include developing a community and partnership approach, meeting unique customer needs, improving access to accommodation solutions, and delivering an efficient Housing Options Service. The feedback suggests that these objectives are addressed to some extent, but there are concerns about meeting complex needs to prevent rough sleeping and repeat homelessness. Many concerns link to social and economic circumstances and a lack of public sector budgets and housing investment. The feedback suggests the following recommendations for consideration prior to finalising the strategy:

- Consider addressing the concerns raised about domestic abuse by integrating it throughout the recommendations and/or action plan.
- Build on the positive feedback concerning partnership working and consider if there are further opportunities to engage town and parish councils, an issue highlighted within a few of the comments.
- In line with the suggestions made, explore opportunities for more council-owned social housing and hostels and how the council may influence additional support for vulnerable groups.
- Address concerns over strategy implementation and reporting success through regular communications highlighting progress.
- Encourage different forms of feedback opportunities in future, to acknowledge the lack of engagement within the consultation stage and the concerns that feedback from people who are more vulnerable or have more complex housing needs must also need to be considered as work progresses.

In conclusion, the draft strategy has been well-received, with stakeholders recognising the importance of a preventative approach and partnership working. The consultation has provided valuable feedback. There is now an opportunity to use the feedback to consider any amendments before the final draft is submitted to Shropshire Council's Cabinet for final approval in October 2024.

**July 2024**

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