

# Evidence base for preventing homelessness and rough sleeping strategy

Buckinghamshire Council

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# 1 Introduction

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This evidence base has been prepared by HQN for Buckinghamshire Council, following DLUHC guidance. The Council is required by law to have a homelessness strategy which should be reviewed at least every five years. As a new council, Buckinghamshire is required to adopt a new strategy by April 2022.

The evidence base sets out the current position. It begins with some basic information about Buckinghamshire and its population, and a summary of key strategies and plans that the homelessness strategy should reflect. It then looks briefly at the overall housing market, supply and affordability. The section on homelessness sets out the legislative background, the national picture, some information on the impact of the pandemic, and the latest figures for Buckinghamshire. The evidence base concludes with emerging themes and challenges which will need to be taken forward into the new strategy.

## 2 Buckinghamshire and its population

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Buckinghamshire is a new unitary authority, bringing together services previously run by the four district councils (South Buckinghamshire, Aylesbury Vale, Wycombe, Chilterns) and Buckinghamshire County Council. The authority covers an area stretching from Greater London and Berkshire to the south, Oxfordshire to the West, Northamptonshire, Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire to the north and east. The area has a number of market towns, including Aylesbury, Buckingham and High Wycombe. Over a quarter of the area falls within the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and a further third is covered by the Metropolitan Green Belt.

The area has low unemployment and higher than average incomes, with strong links to London and the Oxford to Cambridge arc. This also results in higher than average house prices and rents.

According to the 2014 mid-year estimates, Buckinghamshire had a slightly higher than average proportion of 5 – 19 year olds when compared to England; 18.8% compared to 17.7%. There is a lower proportion of adults aged 20 – 39, 23.2% compared to 27%. This will include those who go away for higher education and may also include younger people moving to larger urban areas/cities for work. The Corporate Plan 2020 – 2023 (see below) states that 50% of young people go to university, 95% of these outside the area, many of whom do not return. There is also a higher proportion of adults aged 40 – 59, 28.9% compared to 26.7%, suggesting either that some of those who have moved away return or others in this age group are attracted to Buckinghamshire because of the lifestyle it offers. The number of older people living in Buckinghamshire is expected to increase in line with averages for England as a whole: a 23% increase in those aged 65+ and a 42% increase in those aged 85+.

On the whole, these differences are not significant from a homelessness perspective. In theory the slightly lower proportion of the population in the 20 – 39 age group could result in a lower number of homelessness approaches, but this is balanced out by the high cost of housing in the area relative to wages/salaries. Although the number and proportion of older

people is expected to increase, very few homelessness approaches come from this age group (both in Buckinghamshire and in England as a whole).

### 3 Corporate Plan 2020/23

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The Corporate Plan puts some emphasis on partnership working, both across public sector bodies and with wider stakeholders. The Buckinghamshire Growth Board will work with the Local Enterprise Partnership and other public sector bodies to deliver innovative, sustainable and appropriate growth. This includes 50,000 new homes by 2036.

The key priorities are:

- Strengthening our communities, including delivery of new homes
- Protecting the vulnerable, including work to reduce homelessness, tackle drug and alcohol addiction etc
- Improving the environment, including work to tackle climate change
- Increasing prosperity – range of actions from skills development to innovation to promoting tourism.

£21m is spent on communities, which includes work to prevent homelessness.

### 4 Local Plan

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The Council will be drawing up a new Local Plan for Buckinghamshire, reflecting recent changes in planning law and proposals in the recent White Paper: Planning for the Future. The proposed plan for Chiltern and South Bucks was formally withdrawn to allow time for further work. The Wycombe District Local Plan was adopted in 2019; it identifies a need for 13,200 new homes up to 2033, or around 550 new homes a year. These will mainly be built in Wycombe, Princes Risborough and Bourne End. Around half will be on brownfield sites. This includes provision of affordable housing and housing to meet the needs of older people. The Vale of Aylesbury Local Plan was adopted in 2021. This identifies a need for 22,475 new homes to be delivered up to 2033, or 1,405 new homes each year. These numbers meet the objectively assessed need for the previous Vale of Aylesbury district and also provide additional homes to meet need arising in other districts of what is now the Buckinghamshire Council area.

The lack of affordable housing is a key driver of homelessness; being able to meet objectively assessed need with the delivery of new homes is a key part of preventing homelessness. Much will depend on the agreed numbers and tenure mix of the affordable housing element, as well as the potential for new properties available to let at market rents.

## 5 Health and wellbeing

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The health and wellbeing board for Buckinghamshire carried out a Joint Strategic Needs Assessment in 2016. This highlighted a number of areas relevant to homelessness, including:

- Alcohol abuse
- Drug abuse
- Mental health and wellbeing
- Physical and sensory disability
- Older people.

## 6 Domestic violence and abuse

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The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 aims to raise awareness and understanding of domestic violence and abuse (DVA), improve the effectiveness of the justice system and strengthen support for victims of abuse. Local authorities are required to have a strategy for preventing and tackling DVA.

From a homelessness perspective, eligible victims of domestic abuse are automatically considered a priority under homelessness legislation, and where a new tenancy is offered to someone moving as a result of domestic abuse, a lifetime tenancy should be offered if one was held previously.

Buckinghamshire Council has a strong Local Partnership Board working to prevent and tackle DVA. The 2021 Annual Report from the Director of Public Health highlights awareness raising, education and training and the provision of good quality support and advocacy services. The case studies include work with perpetrators to tackle their behaviours. The report prioritises a number of areas moving forwards:

- County-wide participation in the national campaign to raise awareness of DVA
- Bystander training to tackle harmful attitudes, language and behaviour
- Increasing diversity within the DVA champions scheme
- High-quality shared training for key stakeholders and front-line staff
- The development of a DVA referral pathway
- Evidence-based commissioning of services to tackle perpetrators.

Buckinghamshire Council has recently adopted a new strategy to tackle DVA (Domestic Abuse Strategy 2021 – 2024, agreed by Cabinet on 7 December 2021). The Homelessness Strategy should support the aims of the DA strategy; implementing the DA strategy should help to reduce the number of people who become homeless as a result of DVA.

The priorities in the DA strategy are:

- Early intervention and prevention
- Effective services that meet the needs of victims and their families
- Tackling perpetrators to reduce reoffending
- Supporting professionals to make a difference.

A number of actions are laid out under each priority. Almost all the actions are relevant to the homelessness strategy, a few of the key ones include:

- A ‘tell us once’ referral pathway and a safeguarding information sharing agreement
- Understanding the uniqueness and potential complexities of LGBTQ+ communities, male victims, minority ethnic groups and other minoritized communities
- Ensure a wide range of safe accommodation options are available to victims, survivors and their children. This may include refuges, sanctuary schemes and specialist accommodation as required
- Conduct a comprehensive needs analysis of housing
- Ensure victims of DVA are treated as high priority need for housing .

## 7 Housing market areas

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A report commissioned by the previous Councils from ORS and Atkins, published in 2015, looked at the Housing Market Areas and Functional Economic Market Areas for what is now the new County, and neighbouring authorities. The report identified four distinct housing markets: Aylesbury Town, High Wycombe/Amersham, Milton Keynes and Slough/Maidenhead. These areas also correlate to the *broad market rental areas* as defined by ONS. However, only Milton Keynes met the threshold for *travel to work* to be identified as a *strategic housing market area*, the others should be considered as local housing market areas or sub-markets. Strong links were identified between what was then the South Bucks area and the Reading and Slough housing market area.

From a homelessness perspective, it is sufficient to note that there are different housing markets in the area. In practical terms, long-term homelessness is best prevented if households can remain within areas where they have support from family or friends, and where children can remain within the same school and friendship group. This has to be balanced with the shortage of accommodation overall. The question of affordability is also complex: some areas may have slightly lower rents but if this reduces access to public transport and local facilities, the overall cost of living may be similar or even higher.

## 8 Affordable housing supply

Like many councils, Buckinghamshire is reliant upon its housing association partners (Registered Providers or RPs) to deliver new affordable homes. These will include homes purchased under S106 agreements with developers, those funded through the National Affordable Housing Programme through Homes England and those funded by the RPs themselves.

The figures below show the supply of new social housing delivered in 2020/21, broken down by the previous local authority areas (Chilterns and South Bucks amalgamated).

*Table 1 – supply of new affordable homes*

	C&SB	WYC	AV	BC Total
Social Rent	0	25	23	48
Affordable Rent	12	20	262	294
Intermediate	14	17	129	160
Total	26	62	414	502

*Source: Bucks Council*

NB: These figures include both new builds and acquisitions/purchases. The 14 intermediate properties shown under C&SB were built by South Bucks Council and sold to a private company. They are managed by an RP.



## 9 Affordability

The following tables give the local housing allowance rates for the two largest BMRA (Broad Market Rental Areas) in Buckinghamshire – Aylesbury BMRA and Chiltern BMRA. Overall, there are 8 BMRA's covering parts of Buckinghamshire. The figures are provided for the Aylesbury and Chiltern areas below to illustrate that affordability issues that exist generally with local housing allowance rates in Buckinghamshire.

*Table 2 – local housing allowance rates for benefit calculations*

	<b>Aylesbury Weekly figure</b>	<b>Aylesbury Monthly equivalent</b>	<b>Chilterns Weekly figure</b>	<b>Chilterns Monthly equivalent</b>
Single room rate	78.59	340.56	89.75	388.92
1 bed	155.34	673.14	172.60	747.93
2 bed	184.11	797.81	224.38	972.31
3 bed	241.64	1,047.11	287.67	1,246.57
4+ bed	322.19	1,396.16	379.73	1,645.50

Source: Gov.uk website, rates for 2021/22

*Table 3 – private sector rents*

	<b>Mean</b>	<b>LQ</b>	<b>Median</b>	<b>UQ</b>
Single room	580	550	575	600
1 bed	769	695	750	825
2 bed	975	850	900	1,075
3 bed	1,294	1,100	1,250	1,425
4+ bed	2,084	1,475	1,850	2,400

Source: ONS private rental market statistics to April 21



It is clear from the figures above that even the cheapest single room is unaffordable for anyone on benefits, including working households on low incomes. A 1 bed flat is potentially more affordable: the lower quartile market rent is above the LHA rate for Aylesbury Vale but below that for Chilterns. The LHA rate for Chilterns is also below the median market rent. It should be noted however that the LHA rate is higher for Chilterns precisely because rents are higher and it may not be possible to secure any property at the lower quartile or median rates. The figure should also be treated with some caution as the ONS figures are to April 2021 and rents may have risen since then.

There is a similar pattern for 2 and 3 beds. The LHA rate for 2 and 3 beds in Aylesbury is below even the lower quartile market rent, meaning this would be unaffordable. The Chilterns LHA rate for 2 beds is above both the lower quartile and the median rate, so in theory is more affordable, with similar caveats to above. For 3 beds the Chilterns LHA rate is above the lower quartile market rent but below the median, meaning affordability is worsening. For four beds, nothing is affordable in Aylesbury, but a lower quartile market rent is below LHA rates in Chilterns, if a property can be found at the lower quartile rate.

This pattern is not unusual across southern England. The government policy of freezing LHA rates between 2016 and 2020 saw an increasing gap between LHA rates and market rents. Although LHA rates have increased in 2021, this does little to address the underlying gap.

## 10 Choice based lettings

The current Buckinghamshire choice based lettings (CBL) policy has been in place since 2019, although the four local authorities have been operating a common allocations policy and process for some time. As with most CBL schemes, only those with an evidenced housing need may join the housing register. Local connection criteria also apply, and there are exclusions for those with a history of arrears or anti-social behaviour. Those with higher incomes or who have significant assets are also excluded. Restrictions do not apply to those for whom a statutory homelessness duty has been accepted.

Applicants for whom a main duty has been accepted under homelessness legislation (ie it has not been possible to prevent or relieve homelessness, they are homeless, not intentionally so and in priority need) are placed in Band D. Applicants for whom a prevention or relief duty applies are placed in Band E. This banding was changed last year to try and secure better outcomes for those for whom a statutory homelessness duty was accepted. Procedures have been put into place to guard against perverse outcomes eg households not complying with activities to relieve homelessness in the hope that they will be placed in Band D.

Outcomes should be closely monitored but at this stage it is not recommended to amend the banding again.

The figures below are for 2020/21. The low number of lettings in Band A reflects the relatively low numbers placed in this band, which is intended for more urgent cases. The high number of lettings in Band D indicates that a reasonable number of households for whom a statutory homelessness duty has been accepted are being allocated social housing (Band D is not

exclusively for homeless households but they do make up a significant proportion of this band).

Table 4 – CBL lettings by band

A	118
B	572
C	138
D	397
E	97

Lettings by bed size obviously reflect stock availability, which is a combination of stock profile and turnover rates, rather than demand.

Table 5 – CBL lettings by bed size

<b>Studio</b>	<b>12</b>
1 Bed	499
2 Bed	553
3 Bed	225
4 Bed	32
5 Bed	1

## 11 Tenancy strategy

The four local authorities produced a joint tenancy strategy in 2013. Work was carried out to update this in 2018 but any revisions to the strategy were held pending the formation of the new Council.

The current strategy expects Registered Providers to use fixed term tenancies with a minimum tenancy period of five years, following a one-year introductory tenancy. Tenancies should be renewed if there have been no major changes in the household or breaches of the tenancy conditions. Where the tenancy is not being renewed, the RP is expected to work with the tenant to find an appropriate housing solution; both the tenant and the Council should be given at least six months' notice, to prevent the tenant becoming homeless. The tenancy strategy does not state the grounds on which a tenancy could be ended, leaving this up to RPs to determine. The strategy also states that life-time tenancies should be considered where appropriate.

When reviewing the tenancy strategy, Bucks should ensure that all appropriate steps are taken to prevent a tenant becoming homeless when a tenancy is not renewed. Bucks will also want to be reassured that wherever practical, steps are taken to move tenants on from property which no longer meets their needs eg an adapted property where no-one in the household requires those adaptations, or a property which is being under-occupied.

## 12 Homelessness – legislative background

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The Homelessness Reduction Act (HRA) 2017 introduced significant legislative changes into how local authorities responded to homelessness. Whilst the legislation reflected the way working practices were evolving to emphasise the prevention of homelessness, the new duties brought significant additional work and financial pressures. Prior to the HRA, a statutory duty to a homelessness household only crystallised where they were shown to be at risk of becoming homeless in the next 28 days, priority need (either because there were children in the household or because of a significant need that would make finding accommodation more difficult) and not intentionally homeless. Although the statutory duty was to procure accommodation, the majority of households where a statutory duty was accepted went into social rented housing.

Since the HRA, the duty to initially prevent homelessness where possible applies to all households, regardless of intentionality or priority need. The prevention duty focuses on keeping people in their existing homes or facilitating a planned move where this is not possible. If homelessness cannot be prevented, there is a duty to relieve homelessness by supporting the household to find alternative accommodation. A significant number of homeless households now go into the private rented sector, although social rented housing and in particular supported housing also play key roles.

The HRA also introduced a 'duty to refer' for specified public sector bodies to refer clients who are at risk of becoming homeless. The specified bodies include prisons, probation, job centres, social services and hospitals.

## 13 National homelessness trends before the pandemic

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Statutory homelessness began to rise in 2010/11; prior to that there had been consistent reductions since 2003/4 when work to prevent homelessness was first introduced. The rise in homelessness was attributed to a number of things, chiefly the reduction in the amount of social housing available and benefit restrictions which made accessing the private rented sector more difficult for those on low incomes. The rise in the number of statutory homeless households led to a greater number of these going into temporary accommodation (TA); often bed and breakfast, sometimes remaining there for a number of years (particularly in London). The number of households in temporary accommodation in England almost doubled between 1998 and 2002. Numbers continued to rise until mid-2004 when they stabilised and began to fall slowly. By 2011 they were almost back to 1998 levels but beginning to rise again. They have continued to rise – by mid-2021 there were 96,600 households in TA in England.

The number of rough sleepers also grew significantly from 2010, gradually levelling off by 2019. A number of core cities saw significant increases though, and there were concerns about EU migrants with no recourse to public funds. MHCLG responded with targeted funding and programmes to tackle rough sleeping. Housing First schemes were developed which prioritised giving someone a stable home alongside tackling the problems that had led them to sleep rough.

Welfare benefit changes have also impacted on homelessness over the past three to four years. From 2018, those aged under 35 were only eligible for the shared room rate of the local housing allowance (used to calculate housing benefit); previously the restriction had applied to those under 25.

An ICF report for MHCLG on the initial implementation of the new HRA powers and their impact published in March 2020 highlighted that the majority of local authorities had commissioned new services from third parties in response to the legislation. This may in part reflect significant reductions in some services in the preceding years: a WPI report for St Mungo's and Homeless Link estimated that between 2008/9 and 2017/18 spending on single homelessness reduced by 50%, almost entirely due to changes in funding for Supporting People activities.

The ICF report also noted that the majority of local authorities felt that the lack of affordable housing was the biggest barrier to resolving homelessness.

Finally, in 2020 the Ministry of Justice established homelessness prevention task forces to find accommodation for those leaving prison to prevent them ending up rough sleeping. There is some early evidence that this is leading to significantly more homelessness approaches from those with an offending history.

Table 6 below shows the reason for loss of last settled accommodation for those households for whom a statutory duty was accepted by the local authority. Figures are shown for 2015, 2016 and 2017, prior to the introduction of the HRA. Because they show only households where the statutory duty applied, these will be mainly families with dependent children or households with a support need or other barrier to finding their own housing.

*Table 6 – reason for loss of last settled accommodation – statutory homelessness acceptances, England, shown as percentage of all acceptances*

	2015	2016	2017
Parents no longer willing to accommodate	15	15	14
Other family/friend no longer willing to accommodate	12	12	12
Violent relationship breakdown	12	11	12
Non-violent relationship breakdown	5	5	6
Mortgage arrears	1	1	1
Rent arrears	3	3	3
Loss of AST	30	32	28
Loss of other rented/tied	6	7	6

	2015	2016	2017
Other	16	16	18

Source: Gov.uk statistics

Around 30% of all acceptances were due to loss of an assured shorthold tenancy, generally a private sector tenancy. Parents, other family or friends no longer willing to accommodate was the reason for more than a quarter of homelessness acceptances. Violent relationship breakdown/domestic abuse was the next largest group. These reasons for loss of last settled accommodation had been consistent since 2010.

Table 7 below shows the reason households were awarded priority status in line with the legislation. Not surprisingly, the vast majority were households with dependent children; a smaller number were households where someone was pregnant. Mental health issues accounted for around 10% of applications, with physical disability slightly lower. The low number of households awarded priority status due to domestic violence/abuse reflects the fact that many of these applications will have included a family with children.

*Table 7 – reason for priority need where statutory duty accepted, England, shown as percentage of all acceptances*

	2015	2016	2017
Household with dependent children	68	68	66
Household member pregnant	7	6	7
Old Age	2	1	1
Physical disability	7	7	8
Mental health	9	9	10
Young person	2	2	2
Domestic violence	2	2	2
Other	4	3	3
Homeless in emergency	0	0	1

Source: Gov.uk statistics

These tables are included to paint a picture of the national trends prior to the HRA.

## 14 National picture 2020/21

During 20/21 the number of households owed a prevention duty dropped by 20% on the previous year. It is somewhat surprising that it didn't drop by a greater amount during the pandemic; however, there were significant rises in approaches from rough sleepers, from single households who are likely to have been 'sofa surfing' prior to the pandemic and from those suffering domestic abuse.

The number of households owed a prevention duty because of the ending of an AST dropped by over 50%, reflecting legislation which was put into place to prevent evictions in the short term. The number of households owed a relief duty went up slightly, by 6%, this may reflect difficulties in persuading friends and family to continue to offer accommodation in the short-term. The number of households with children at risk of becoming homeless because of domestic abuse rose by 14% , representing a fifth of all households with children at risk of becoming homeless.

The number of households assessed as rough sleeping went up by almost 40%, reflecting the drive to get people off the streets under the '*Everyone In*' initiative. The number of households owed a prevention or relief duty with a support need due to an offending history also increased, by 26%; this may also reflect the '*Everyone In*' campaign where people were accommodated to prevent them sleeping rough.

Households whose lead applicant is black were over-represented, making up almost 10% of total households owed a duty; it is estimated that these households comprise only 3.5% of the population. This may reflect the disproportionate impact that Covid is known to have had on BME households. The number of households where the lead applicant was unemployed also rose by 18%, again reflecting increased unemployment during the pandemic.

The majority of households with children where the prevention duty ended were able to secure a new tenancy for six months or more. A third of these were able to remain in their existing accommodation. The number of households in temporary accommodation increased by 14% when compared to the previous year; the number of single households in temporary accommodation increased by 46% (this figure includes those housed under '*Everyone In*').

A similar number of main homelessness duty decisions were made in 20/21 as in the previous year, with a slight drop in the number of main duty accepted decisions. This is likely to reflect the additional work that was done with households during the pandemic under the prevention and relief duties.

For households with children owed a prevention duty, the main reasons for loss of last settled accommodation were:

- Ending of AST
- Family and friends no longer willing to accommodate
- Domestic abuse.

It is noted that these were the main reasons for loss of last settled accommodation prior to the HRA and to the pandemic.

For households with children owed the relief duty it was:

- Domestic abuse
- Family and friends no longer willing to accommodate
- Other/not known.



For households with children owed a prevention duty, accommodation at time of application was:

- Private rented sector
- Living with family
- Social rented.

For households with children owed the relief duty, the top 3 were as above; there were also smaller but significant numbers living with friends and having no fixed abode.

For households with children the main reasons for support needs were:

- Domestic abuse
- Mental health
- Physical health/disability.

For households with children, the main accommodation outcomes were:

- Private rented sector
- Social housing
- Family/friends
- For the relief duty, a significant number not known.

Taken together, these figures suggest a number of things. Where domestic abuse was not a factor, more households were enabled to remain in their existing accommodation, allowing the prevention duty to be ended. It is not surprising that many of those unable to remain in their existing accommodation were those suffering domestic abuse and those where friends and family were no longer willing to accommodate. The shift towards greater use of the private rented sector reflects on-going trends prior to the pandemic; it may also reflect the increasing reduction in the number of social housing lettings year on year.

For single households, main reasons for homelessness are:

- Family/friends no longer able to accommodate
- Other/not known
- Ending of assured shorthold tenancy (generally private sector rent)
- Relationship breakdown (non-violent relationship breakdown accounts for a larger proportion of applications for single households than violent relationship breakdown).

The majority of single households were living with family/friends at time of application. Smaller numbers were in privately rented or social rented housing. For single households, the picture on support needs is quite different; the main support needs were:

- Mental health
- History of rough sleeping
- Physical health
- Drug and alcohol
- Offending.



The majority of households with children where there is a support need have only one support need, but up to a third of single households have two or three support needs.

2020/21 national figures also show a large increase in applications from households with a history of offending; as noted above this may be due to the work of the new Homelessness Prevention Task Forces established by the Ministry of Justice.

In terms of accommodation outcomes, single households are more likely to go into supported housing or a hostel.

In addition to the '*Everyone In*' campaign referred to above, legislative changes in response to the pandemic included restrictions on evictions from rented accommodation, lengthened notice periods for landlords, and restrictions on bailiff activities. Lenders were also required to offer mortgage holidays or reduced payments in appropriate cases.

## 15 Previous homelessness strategies

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Chiltern and South Bucks Councils developed a joint housing and homelessness strategy 2018 – 2021. This identified the cost of housing in the area as a key challenge, leading to higher numbers of people seeking help from the shared housing service. Limited land availability and high costs also restrict the number of affordable new homes bought forward. Amongst the key challenges identified was implementing the requirements of the Homelessness Reduction Act and developing more temporary accommodation options to reduce the use of B&B and also reduce the cost to the council. The strategy also noted the problem of other local authorities using accommodation in the area for 'out of area' placement of homeless households; because they are often making payments to landlords for accommodating a homeless client, this can increase the expectations of landlords when housing a homeless client from Bucks Council. The strategy also predicted a significant increase in demand for temporary accommodation (TA) as a result of the HRA. The strategy includes a TA framework, a clear and transparent process for securing and allocating TA.

Wycombe's previous homelessness strategy covered 2014/2019. Priorities include:

- Increased options to prevent homelessness
- Improvements to existing TA
- Disposal of less appropriate TA, proceeds to be invested in new TA
- Closer working with private landlords; integrating relevant services
- Actions to tackle rough sleeping
- Better quality self-serve housing advice
- Investigating the feasibility of a social lettings agency
- Targeting services for particular client groups where appropriate.

Aylesbury Vale housing and homelessness strategy runs 2019 – 2022. Key achievements from the previous strategy (2014 – 2017) include:

- Delivery of 1200 new affordable homes (to March 2018)
- Revised nomination agreements to improve nominations for vulnerable households
- A building resilience project to seek out those at risk of homelessness at earliest opportunity
- Funding awards to local partners to encourage innovation and support work on winter emergency provision/severe weather emergency provision
- Hosting workshops by the Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance to build new accreditation scheme
- Increased engagement with partners including a quarterly homelessness prevention forum.

The key objectives for the new strategy are:

- Prevent and reduce homelessness and rough sleeping
- Continue to facilitate and maximise the supply of affordable housing
- Respond to the on-going challenges of welfare reform
- Contribute to the improvement of health and wellbeing services for those at risk of becoming homeless.

Not surprisingly, the three strategies have a good deal in common, with some differences of emphasis, which reflect both the varied geography of the areas, and differing levels and types of need. They also reflect the different times when the strategies were developed, with different local and national priorities at the time.

Areas to be carried forward into the new strategy might include:

- Maximising supply of affordable housing
- Ensuring appropriate supply of TA to match need and ensure value for money
- Increased options to prevent homelessness
- Improved access to the private rented sector
- High-quality self-serve housing advice
- Investigating the feasibility of a local lettings agency
- Preventing rough sleeping
- Responding to legislative change on domestic abuse
- Continuing engagement with partners.

## **16 Buckinghamshire homelessness stats 2020/21**

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The information below is for the financial year 2020/21, the first year that Buckinghamshire operated as the new unitary authority. The total number of households who were assessed under the legislation was 1,918, and a duty was owed to the vast majority: 1,767 (92%).

For most cases, only the prevention duty applied: 1,038 cases (54%). Of these, only a very small number (24) approached because of the ending of an assured shorthold tenancy.

The relief duty applied to 729 households (38%). A further 151 households (8%) were found not to be threatened with homelessness.

## 16.1 Reason for approach

The tables below give the reasons for clients approaching the service, broken down by year. This shows the main reasons people become at risk of homelessness.

*Table 8 – reason for loss of last settled accommodation*

Reason	Prevention numbers	Prevention %age	Relief numbers	Relief %age
Other	348	20	225	
Family/friends no longer willing to accommodate	223	13	205	12
End of private rented tenancy – AST	170	7	25	1
Relationship with partner ended (non-violent breakdown)	90	5	59	1
End of social rented	66	4	7	1
Domestic abuse	64	4	103	6
End of private tenancy – not AST	25	1	18	1
Left institution with no accommodation available	23	1	41	1
Non-racially motivated/other motivated violence or harassment	21	1	20	1
Eviction from supported housing	8	1	26	1
Required to leave home office accommodation	-	-	-	-
<b>Total</b>				

*Source: MHCLG live tables*

These figures are largely in line with the national picture. Approaches due to domestic abuse is perhaps slightly lower than might be expected, and given the period covered, ending of an assured shorthold tenancy may be slightly higher. Similarly, ending of social rented tenancies is higher than would be expected for this particular year, though may reflect the trend towards an increasingly harder line being taken by Registered Providers towards rent arrears. These differences are not significant but should continue to be closely monitored.

## 16.2 Accommodation at time of application

Table 9 – accommodation at time of application for those for whom a duty is owed

	Prevention Nos	Prevention &age	Relief Nos	Relief %age
Private rented sector	358	20	43	2
Living with family	253	14	96	5
No fixed abode	-	-	192	11
Social rented	193	11	43	2
Living with friends	74	4	65	4
Homeless leaving an Institution	34	2	72	4
Rough sleeping	-	-	76	4
Owner occupier (including shared ownership)	16	1	3	-
Temporary accommodation	9	1	35	2
NASS	-	-	-	-
Refuge	7	1	29	2
Other/Not known	94	5	75	4

Source: MHCLG live tables

Again, this is largely in line with the national picture. The fact that the majority of households living in social rented housing have their homelessness prevented suggests that local authority interventions are effective.

## 16.3 Household type

Table 10 – type of household owed a duty

	Prevention duty	Relief duty
Single parent with dependent children (male)	22	2
Single parent with dependent children (female)	281	92
Single parent with dependent children (other/n/k)	1	0
Single adult (male)	308	424
Single adult (female)	214	153
Single adult (other/n/k)	4	1
Couple with dependent children	126	16
Couple/two adults no children	67	37
Three or more adults with dependent children	7	3
Three or more adults no children	8	1

Source: MHCLG live tables.

The most common household type owed both the prevention and relief duties is single men, followed by single women. This is likely to reflect the increased emphasis on tackling rough sleeping and the more limited opportunities for sofa surfing during the pandemic. Female single parents with dependent children are the next largest group, again this is in line with the national picture.

## 16.4 Employment status

Table 11 – employment status of main adult owed a duty (2018/19)

	Numbers	% age
Registered unemployed	589	33
Not working due to long term illness or disability	185	10
Working full-time	276	16
Working part-time	198	11
Not seeking work/at home	122	7
Not registered unemployed but seeking work	91	5
Retired	31	2
Student/training	22	1
Other	177	10
Not known	76	4

Source: MHCLG live tables

A third of all households owed a duty were headed by someone who was unemployed. Just under a third were headed by someone working full or part time.

## 16.5 Age

Table 12 – age of main adult owed a duty (2018/19)

Age	Numbers	% age
16/17	8	1
18 – 24	315	18
25 – 34	597	34
35 – 44	429	24
45 – 54	254	14
55 – 64	122	7
65 – 74	34	2
75+	8	1

Source: MHCLG live tables

The age profile is largely in line with the national picture – the majority of households owed a duty were headed by someone aged 25 – 34. The numbers who are aged 65+ are small.

## 16.6 Duty to refer

*Table 13 – households assessed as a result of referral, including ‘duty to refer’*

	Numbers	%age
Total households assessed as a result of a referral	333	100
Household referred under ‘duty to refer’	182	55
Adult secure estate (prison)	13	4
Youth secure estate	-	-
National probation service	44	13
Community rehabilitation company	13	4
Hospital A&E urgent treatment centre or in-patient care	16	5
Mental health in-patient care	12	4
Job Centre Plus	16	5
Adult social services	14	4
Children’s social services	16	5
Other/not known	38	11
Referrals from agencies not subject to ‘duty to refer’	151	45

*Source: MHCLG live tables*

The duty to refer is an important part of the HRA, enabling local authorities to begin work to prevent homelessness at the earliest possible stage. Table 13 looks both at the total number of households assessed as a result of a referral, and the source of those referrals. 17% of all households assessed were as a result of a referral. This is relatively high, which may be down to two factors. A significant number of referrals came from agencies not subject to the legislative duty, which is very encouraging – Buckinghamshire is clearly getting the message out to stakeholders that it is actively seeking referrals. It also suggests that referral mechanisms are working.

The sources of referral are widely spread, with the probation service accounting for 13% of referrals, and the remainder evenly spread across other stakeholders. The majority of referrals not subject to the duty are coming from voluntary sector agencies, including RPs.

## 16.7 Ethnicity

Table 14 – ethnicity of main applicants owed a prevention or relief duty

	Numbers	%age
White	1,259	71
Black/African/Caribbean/Black British	144	8
Asian/Asian British	194	11
Mixed/multiple ethnic groups	79	4
Other ethnic groups	29	2
Not known	62	3

Source: MHCLG live tables

This table again reflects the national picture, where black/African/Caribbean/black British households are over-represented. They make up 8% of households owed a duty, compared to 3.5% of the population (Census 2011 figures, I'll see if I can find something more up to date). While the percentage of Asian/Asian British households is higher at 11%, this is more in line with the population figure of 8% (same source, ditto).

## 16.8 Nationality

Table 15 – nationality of main applicants owed a prevention or relief duty

	Numbers	%age
UK	1,590	90
non-EEA	80	4
A8, A2 and Croatia	47	3
Other EEA	39	2
Ireland	750	

Source: MHCLG live tables

Unsurprisingly, the vast majority of households owed a duty were UK nationals.

## 16.9 Sexual identification

Table 16 – sexual identification of main applicants owed a duty

	Numbers	% age
Heterosexual	1,479	84
Homosexual (lesbian/gay)	20	1
Other	102	6
Prefer not to say	166	9

Source: MHCLG live tables



The number identifying as homosexual is low – around half of the UK-wide figure. It is likely that some lesbian/gay applicants may have chosen ‘other’ or ‘prefer not to say’; this is not particularly significant but the homelessness strategy must reflect the needs of all applicants, regardless of sexual orientation.

## 16.10 Support needs

*Table 17 – Support needs of applicants owed prevention or relief duty*

Support need	Numbers	%age
History of mental health problems	634	36
Physical health and disability	390	22
At risk of/experienced domestic abuse	356	20
Offending history	316	18
History of repeat homelessness	312	18
Drug dependency	156	9
History of rough sleeping	204	12
Alcohol dependency	119	7
Learning disability	215	12
18-25 requiring support to manage independently	75	4
Access to education employment or training	43	2
At risk of/experienced non-domestic abuse	87	5
At risk of/experienced sexual exploitation	105	6
Old age	22	1
Care leaver 21+	22	1
Care leaver 18 - 20	19	1
16/17 year olds	15	1
Young parent requiring support	7	1
Former asylum seeker	13	1
Served in HM forces	32	2

*Source: MHCLG live tables*

Again, these are largely in line with the national picture. The repeat homelessness figure is not untypical; in developing the strategy we will look at ways to reduce this. We will also examine support available to those with mental health needs; nationally we have seen increasing pressure on homelessness services arising from cuts to community mental health services and long waiting times to access treatment.

## 17 Temporary accommodation

The previous district councils had prioritised increasing the supply of temporary accommodation (TA) following the introduction of the HRA. This reflected both the additional households who may need access to TA and the longer length of time they may spend occupying it.

The table below shows the number of temporary accommodation schemes units which are mainly self-contained accommodation and are owned/managed by the Council or a Registered Provider partner. Placements are subject to availability and the needs of the household concerned. These figures do not include specialist TA for those who have been sleeping rough.

Accommodation Type	Number of units	Former Legacy District Council area	Provider
<b>Bedsits</b>	33	Wycombe	Bucks Council
	9	Chiltern	Paradigm Housing
	15	Aylesbury Vale	Bromford Housing
<b>1 Bedroom</b>	60	Aylesbury Vale	Bromford Housing
	3	South Bucks	Bucks Housing Association (leased from Bucks Council)
	2	South Bucks	Buck Housing Association
	11	Chiltern	Paradigm
<b>2 Bedroom</b>	1	Wycombe	Bucks Council
	1	Wycombe	Home Group
	9	South Bucks	Bucks Housing Association (leased from Bucks Council)
	1	South Bucks	Bucks Housing Association

Accommodation Type	Number of units	Former Legacy District Council area	Provider
<b>3 Bedroom</b>	1	Wycombe	Bucks Council
	2	South Bucks	Bucks Housing Association (leased from Bucks Council)
	2	Wycombe	Bucks Housing Association
<b>4 Bedroom</b>	1	Wycombe	Buckinghamshire Council
<b>Other</b>	46 (varying sizes)	Wycombe	Red Kite – Contractual agreement to use stock as TA
	Variable	Aylesbury Vale	Rent Connect – Securing private sector tenancies
	27 (varying sizes)	Chiltern/South Bucks	Paradigm – Private Sector Leasing Schemes

In addition to the above, the Council also has a number of third party private temporary accommodation providers who it will procure accommodation from on a case by case basis when required due to pressures on availability or the specific needs of the client. These are predominantly located in the Wycombe and Slough areas and include self-contained and stand-alone units (ie no shared facilities etc).

## 18 Rough sleeping

The legacy District Councils had a strong track record of tackling rough sleeping supported by the RSI (Rough Sleeper Initiative) and working in a multi-agency environment with stakeholders in the statutory and voluntary sector. The commencement of the new authority coincided with the onset of the Covid emergency and the Government's "*Everybody In*" instruction. The Council's successful implementation of "*Everybody In*" locally was underpinned by the existing rough sleeper working arrangements and stakeholder partnerships that were already in place in Bucks at that time. This included working with Public Health to pro-actively roll out vaccinations to clients and working with partners to

support clients within the accommodation on a day-to-day basis, including drug and alcohol services to support safe use within accommodation.

As a result, the Council was able to accommodate over 300 verified rough sleepers during the Covid emergency period, the vast majority of these in bed and breakfast units across Buckinghamshire, mainly in High Wycombe with some provision in Aylesbury. In Aylesbury, an agreement was also reached with a local hotel to provide rooms during the pandemic. Many of these households have moved on from emergency accommodation with the majority moving on to alternate accommodation, including supported housing and private rented accommodation. The Council is taking a measured approach to the end of '*Everybody In*', providing short-term emergency accommodation for those who are engaged with support and actively looking for somewhere to live. It is likely that a small number of people will return to sleeping rough, but the outreach programme will continue to work with these to support and encourage them to find a home.

The Council has successfully bid for funding from the Government's NSAP (Next Steps Accommodation Programme), RSAP (Rough Sleeper Accommodation Programme), RSI 4 (Rough Sleeper Initiative 4) and the Accommodation for Ex-Offenders Scheme in order to deliver new and additional accommodation. The Council will continue to deliver a comprehensive outreach and support service for rough sleepers in the post "*Everybody In*" environment. This includes:

- A range of measures to identify those at risk of sleeping rough at the earliest possible stage. Measures in place include landlord mediation; funding is also available to reduce benefit shortfalls, reduce rent arrears and support a planned move to alternative accommodation. The measures are supported by internal and external stakeholders including Connection Support, One Recovery Bucks, Oasis drug and alcohol outreach, P3 support, Wycombe Homeless Connection and Aylesbury Homeless Action
- The '*Blue Light*' project which draws on public health funding to target those with a history of problem drinking and substance misuse, providing support and recovery work. Again a range of internal and external stakeholders are involved including One Recovery Bucks, Buckinghamshire Council (Housing, Community Safety and Social Care), Public Health, Thames Valley Police, Probation, Mental Health Service, Ambulance Service
- A scheme for ex-offenders, funded through DLUHC and MOJ, which employs two support officers to help people find appropriate accommodation, with some financial assistance as required
- Tenancy sustainment measures for ex-rough sleepers to support them in their new accommodation; these include specialist mental health and drug and alcohol support workers. Partners include Connection Support, Bucks MIND
- 11 units of accommodation provided under the Rough sleeper accommodation programme, in partnership with Wycombe YMCA
- A programme to enable those housed in hotels and emergency accommodation to move on, with one-to-one support and access to funding as required. Partners include Connection Support, Aylesbury Homeless Action Group, Wycombe Homeless Connection etc.

- Measures to minimise the time people spend sleeping rough, including expansion of the outreach service, increased and flexible provision of emergency beds, a seven day accommodation offer for verified rough sleepers and expanded provision of specialist mental health and drug and alcohol support
- A skills and education hub will open in 2022 to provide bespoke practical education and training to support people into employment.

Accommodation options for ex-rough sleepers include:

- Supported housing schemes mainly in Aylesbury and High Wycombe; generally these are low support with some providing medium/higher support
- Non-supported housing: a small number of units provided for move-on by Harrow Churches and Vale of Aylesbury Housing Trust
- Social housing – although demand for one beds is high and there are long wait times
- Temporary Accommodation (under the Statutory Homelessness Duty, only for those with a priority need who are not intentionally homeless)
- Private rented sector – Wycombe Rent Deposit Guarantee Scheme is aimed at single people including ex-rough sleepers; Aylesbury Homeless Action Group support ex rough sleepers into PRS accommodation; council officers will also work with private landlords to secure accommodation for this group
- Support to EU/EEA Nationals not eligible for public funds: Connection Support have funding from central government to work with this group.

The move to the new Council has also supported the development of further joint working arrangements between the housing and social care services. This includes the introduction of dedicated complex case officers in the new housing service structure, cross-service complex case panels (to review and monitor challenging cases) and the ongoing work with children's services to support care leavers and other vulnerable young people and their families. These joint working arrangements support the early identification of potential rough sleepers or single person homelessness and help to ensure that appropriate preventative measures are put in place.

Winter provision – measures are in place across the Council area, working with RSI partners. There are slightly different conditions attached to placements; it would be helpful to align these if possible although the differences are not sufficiently material to give rise to any legal challenges. The report for the South area includes a risk assessment which could usefully be extended to the North. Provision in both areas is contingent upon people being sufficiently engaged with support services. Accommodation is being block booked ahead of time to ensure sufficient provision.

## 19 Mortgage repossession

Mortgage repossession has not been a significant factor in homelessness for more than a decade, largely due to historically low interest rates. During the pandemic temporary measures were put in place which further reduced the number of cases. This has started to rise again in 2021 although numbers are still very small.

### Mortgage repossession cases 2021 – first three quarters

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Total
Mortgage claims	4	17	28	49
Mortgage outright	-	4	3	7
Mortgage warrants	1	1	8	10

It is important to continue to monitor the figures and to continue work to prevent homelessness through repossession but it is unlikely to be a significant factor unless interest rates rise considerably.

## 20 Looking ahead

The evidence base captures current statistics and trends; it's also important to consider what is changing in the wider context and the impact this might have. This has been done at a detailed level, mainly as part of the consultation (more information below). It is tricky to do at a wider level, partly because the longer-term impacts of the pandemic remain uncertain. While it seems likely that more people will continue to work from home, at least some of the time, this is likely to be less the case for those in lower-paid and insecure employment. Some landlords are beginning to look at design and lettings criteria to facilitate home working but the intense pressure on social housing means that routine under-occupation (to allow for a bedroom to be used as a home office, for example) is less likely.

The pandemic has increased the pace of channel shift for customers, with more people accessing information on-line. This is reflected in the strategy, which prioritises reviewing and strengthening this information. During the life of the strategy, it is likely that artificial intelligence (AI) will begin to be used in homelessness, but it is unlikely that it will have been widely adopted. The role of AI is certainly something that will need to be considered when the post-2025 strategy is being drawn up.

## 21 Consultation

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DLUHC guidance on developing a homelessness strategy requires that they are developed with, and have the support of, other local authority departments, and relevant external partners. To ensure this engagement and to maximise commitment to delivering the new strategy, a number of consultation events were held. These are listed below, together with a brief summary of the outcomes.

Local authorities should also consider the best way to get the views of service users, who may have very different experiences and circumstances. In view of this and the difficulties of organising consultation events with Covid restrictions in place, the strategy has relied on the views put forward by third sector organisations supporting homeless households.

### 21.1 Stakeholder forums

There are two stakeholder forums for Buckinghamshire which meet regularly to discuss issues relating to homelessness and to monitor actions from previous actions plans. Attendees include those from third sector organisations and RPs. A consultation session was held with each forum. During the three-hour workshops, participants were asked to identify what was in place to support particular client groups or to address causes of homelessness, where there were gaps, and priorities for addressing these.

The strengths of current services include:

- Strong partnership working in many areas and for many different client groups, including protocols for sharing information
- Services which are able to develop and respond as needs change
- Strong focus on tackling financial exclusion with new partnerships being rolled out across the whole local authority area.

Key priorities which emerged from the sessions included:

- Earlier identification of those at risk of becoming homeless, ranging from survivors of domestic violence and abuse to those leaving prison
- More housing which is affordable and easier to access for those on low incomes; more options for people to retain tenancy where feasible
- More support services which are able to work with households for a longer period of time to ensure the tenancy is sustained
- Joined up services for those with multiple needs; navigators to support them to find appropriate services
- Training/awareness sessions around particular topics such as responding to people with mental health needs
- Reviewing thresholds for access to some services, so that people don't have to be in crisis before they can get help



- More focus on financial education/literacy, eg in schools
- Better monitoring of repeat homelessness
- A contact list for the housing and homelessness services to make it easier for external partners to contact the right person.

Organisations were also asked about what they would like to see in the new strategy, and how their organisation could contribute. These 'wants' and 'offers' are picked up in the strategy itself.

## 21.2 Internal stakeholder forum

This session was equally well-attended, with representation from most services, including adult care services, children's services, community safety, and housing benefit. Some of those attending had particular interests in certain client groups, such as those leaving the military, and gypsies, Romany gypsies, and travellers.

During the three-hour workshops, participants were asked to identify how their services contributed to preventing and tackling homelessness, any areas where services could be improved, and priorities for addressing these.

The strengths of current services include:

- Preventing and tackling homelessness is a key corporate priority
- Strong partnership working with a shared understanding of the causes of homelessness.

Key priorities which emerged from the session included:

- Developing a better understanding of 'intentional' homelessness where other factors, such as drug and alcohol abuse, are involved
- Greater emphasis on tenancy sustainment from all services
- More suitable accommodation options for various client groups.

There were specific references to those leaving prison, leaving the armed forces, and the gypsy, Romany and traveller communities.

## 21.3 Elected members

A workshop was held to give members the opportunity to input into the strategy at an early stage; members will obviously be responsible for signing off the draft strategy. Preventing and tackling homelessness has already been agreed as a corporate priority for the new council, and those who attended the workshop were keen to understand the ways in which the council could have real impact.

After a short presentation, there was an open discussion in smaller groups. Some of the priorities which emerged from this include:

- The need for more affordable housing, and easier access to the private rented sector
- Support to tackle some of the underlying causes of homelessness, such as debt, addiction, and mental health problems
- Support for some particular groups, such as those sleeping rough, survivors of domestic abuse, and those leaving the armed force.

Members were asked about priorities, but generally felt at this stage they had too little information to make informed decisions. They wanted the strategy to be deliverable, and to build on the many examples of good practice already in place. They also indicated that the strategy should meet a wide range of different needs and circumstances, focusing on actions that would make a real difference.

## 22 Key challenges to be addressed in the new strategy

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This evidence base has highlighted some key challenges to be taken forward and addressed in the new strategy. These include:

- The number of people, particularly young people, being asked to leave by family and friends. Many of these have never held a tenancy in their own right
- The number of households with debt and financial challenges affecting their ability to pay their current rent
- The number of households threatened with homelessness when their private sector tenancy is ended
- The number of people threatened with homelessness as a result of a relationship breakdown, many involving domestic abuse
- Encouraging those threatened with homelessness to make early contact with the service in order to resolve the situation and prevent homelessness
- Increasing the proportion of households where homelessness can be prevented either by retaining the existing tenancy or making a planned move
- Virtually eliminating rough sleeping
- Continuing to manage temporary accommodation tightly; minimise the use of B&B type accommodation; and ensure move-on from temporary accommodation at the earliest possible opportunity to affordable, sustainable, settled accommodation
- Ensuring appropriate support is available for vulnerable households, with a particular focus on mental health needs.

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