



St. Helens  
Council

# Homelessness Strategy

2018 - 2023



# St Helens Council

St Helens Borough Council, a metropolitan district, was founded in 1974. The Council is led by a Mayor and Leader. The Council is currently administered by the Labour group, with opposition from Conservative, Liberal Democrat and independent groups. The Council is a member of the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority, Merseyside Fire & Rescue Authority, and Merseyside Police & Crime Panel. Elections are held every four years using a multiple member first-past-the-post voting system.

## Neil Morland Housing Consultant Ltd

Established in 2011, NMHC provides specialist advice on homelessness and housing allocation to public authorities, voluntary organisations, and others, throughout Great Britain. Our ethos is to provide efficient and quality services that are value for money. Our ambition is to reduce housing inequalities by improving social policies and practices.

### Acknowledgement

This strategy was commissioned and funded by St Helens Metropolitan Borough Council. Our thanks go to Stephen Tracey from the local authority who provided invaluable assistance. We are grateful to everyone who generously inputted into to this report. We wish to acknowledge the important contributions made by Kate Gascoigne, and Liz Griffiths.

Disclaimer: All views and any errors contained in this report are the responsibility of the author. The views expressed should not be assumed to be those of St Helens Metropolitan Borough Council or any of the persons who contributed to this review.

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## **Foreword**

Homelessness covers a wide range of circumstances, from sleeping on the streets, to families living in bed and breakfast hotels, or someone being without a home of their own. The vast majority of homeless people are actually families or single people who aren't without a roof but are living with friends or relatives or are in temporary or inappropriate accommodation.

The causes of homelessness are complex and varied and cannot be tackled by the Council alone. We know that some people are at more risk of homelessness due to poverty and deprivation, poor physical and mental ill-health or the lack of affordable housing. We also know that nationally homelessness is increasing and disproportionately affects some of the most vulnerable people in our communities.

Tackling homelessness and the harms associated with it is one of the most profound challenges facing the Council and its partners and that is why I am pleased to introduce the St Helens Homelessness Strategy 2018-23 which sets out in clear terms our approach to supporting people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

We know that the best way of tackling homelessness is to prevent it happening in the first place. Over the last 5 years the Council has worked with its partners in improving homelessness prevention and, for those who become homeless, in providing good quality accommodation and support. The role of our partners has been critical and we recognise all their work in providing accommodation, supporting residents and sustaining tenancies. These outcomes are all the more outstanding when set against a background of increasing demands on services and reducing budgets. We want to build on this success and enjoy the wider statutory and voluntary sector to address the support needs that otherwise may contribute to homelessness.

This Strategy reinforces our commitment to preventing homelessness rather than responding to households at the point of crisis. It sets out the challenges we face and describes how we intend to meet these. The Strategy also recognises that while the risk of homelessness can affect any household, for some of our most vulnerable residents escaping the risk of homelessness has become increasingly difficult. That is why we have to explore and develop different approaches and the Strategy identifies how we intend to do this.

As well as preventing homelessness wherever we can, we also want to provide help and opportunities for people to identify and build on their strengths and personal capacities and gain access to training opportunities and employment and therefore contribute to the communities in which they live.

Many partners have been involved in the development of this Strategy. I believe that with their continued commitment and support, this Strategy provides the Council and its partners with a clear plan for preventing and alleviating homelessness over the next five years.

### **Councillor Anthony Burns**

Caninet Member, Community Based and Focused Services

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The approach taken to formulating and developing this homelessness strategy, complies with the obligations set out in the Homelessness Act 2002.

This Strategy seeks to tackle all forms of homelessness, including those owed a statutory duty (typically families with dependent children, or vulnerable adults), but also people who are single, sleeping on the streets, or other in transient arrangements, for example, sleeping on a friends' sofa.

When preparing this Strategy, regard was had to the conclusions of the recently published St Helens Homelessness Review, which not only assessed the levels and patterns of homelessness, but also identified gaps in knowledge and current services.

While the Homelessness Review of St Helens provided an assessment on homelessness locally, the St Helens Homelessness Strategy sets out how the issues identified will be addressed and tackled.

In developing this Strategy, other local and national plans for addressing homelessness have been taken into account. As was the local Housing Allocations Policy and Tenancy Strategy, plus regional housing strategies.

The results of the Homelessness Review of St Helens, have been used to inform this Strategy. The Strategy has specific objectives for:

- Preventing homelessness;
- Securing suitable accommodation for those who are, or may become homeless;
- Providing support to those who are, or used to be homeless or at risk of becoming so, to prevent them from becoming homeless again.

An Action Plan has been developed, which identifies a range of actions for St Helens Council, along with other organisations involved with tackling homelessness. Specific actions have been included to target people who are more at risk of homelessness. The actions contained in this Strategy take into consideration of how St Helens discharges its homelessness functions. Also taken into account are the functions exercised by St Helens Council's children and adult social care services, who also have a statutory duty to deliver this Strategy. The Strategy promotes working across organisations and policy boundaries, to ensure social inclusion and equality of access to services.

Prior to finalising this Strategy, a broad range of organisations have been consulted, including people who have experienced homelessness.

## 2. NATIONAL AND REGIONAL HOMELESSNESS CONTEXT

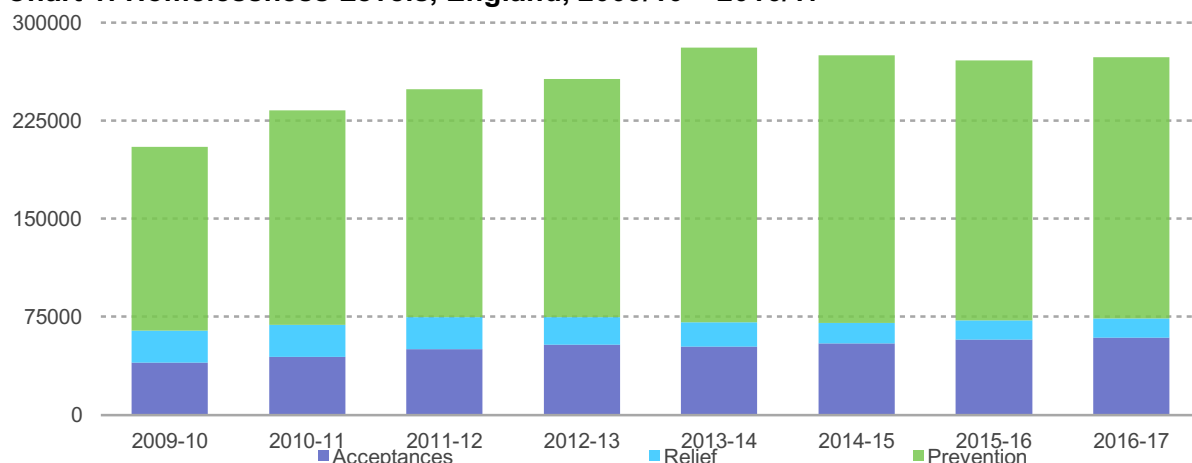
Decisions about homelessness law for England is the responsibility of the UK Government. The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government is charged with leading on policy formulation and implementation.

### 2.1 Statistics

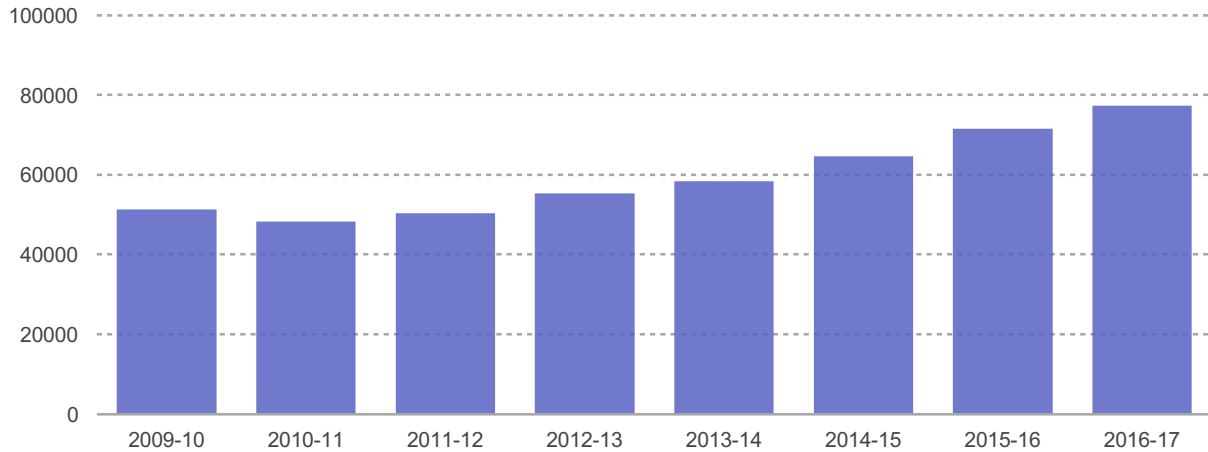
The UK Government published strategies for preventing homelessness and ending rough sleeping in 2011, 2012 and 2018. Nevertheless, statistics collected by all English local housing authorities show that homelessness has increased. Between 2009/10 to 2016/17, there was:

- 25% increase in the overall number of people assisted by local authorities;
- 30% increase in the number of people whose homelessness was prevented;
- 39% reduction in the number of people whose homelessness was relieved;
- 33% increase in the number of people owed the main housing (homelessness) duty of assistance (s.193(2), part 7, Housing Act 1996);
- 65% increase in the number of households living in local authority temporary accommodation;
- 58% increase in the number of people sleeping rough.

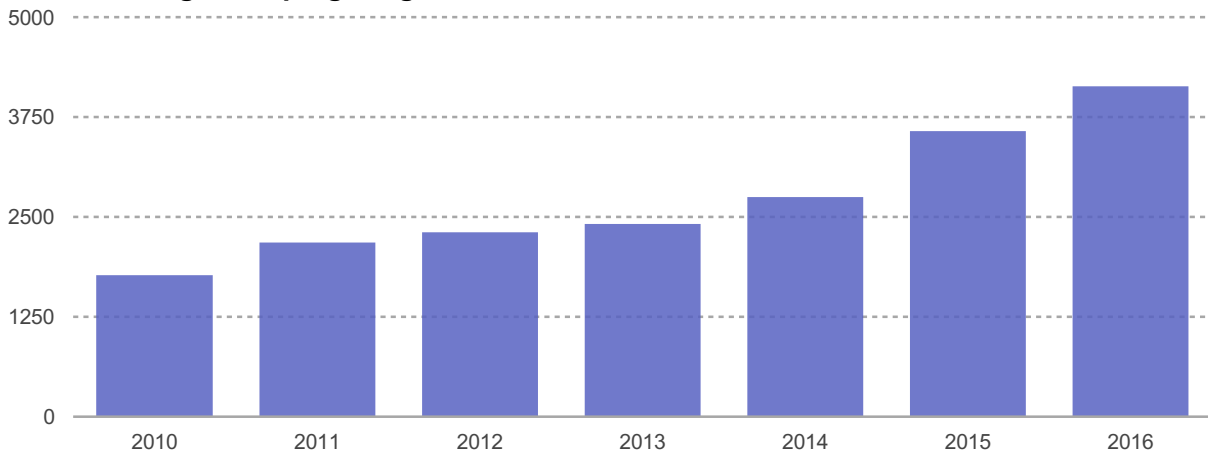
**Chart 1: Homelessness Levels, England, 2009/10 – 2016/17**



**Chart 2: Temporary Accommodation, England, 2009/10 – 2016/17**



**Chart 3: Rough Sleeping, England, 2010 – 2016**



These statistics show that while more people are approaching local authorities for assistance, the method in which they are being assisted has changed. The success of homelessness prevention activity continues to increase. However, fewer people are having their homelessness relieved. At the same time, more people are benefiting from the statutory safety net, applicable to those who have a priority need for accommodation and are not intentionally homeless. This has driven-up the number of people being provided with temporary accommodation. Meanwhile, the levels of people experiencing street homelessness has gone up to a new high since records began. In 2015, the clarity of homelessness statistics published by the UK Government was criticised by the UK Statistics Authority. Subsequently, the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government has made significant changes as to how homelessness is monitored from April 2018.

## **2.2 Homelessness Reduction Act 2017**

As a consequence of the increase in homelessness, the Communities and Local Government Select Committee launched an enquiry into homelessness in December 2015. The Committee concluded that the cost and availability of housing had pushed the problem of homelessness to such a level that a renewed Government-wide strategy was needed.

A Homelessness Reduction Bill was produced following the inquiry into homelessness, which subsequently became the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. From April 2018 a number of new duties were introduced, including:

- Assessment all eligible applicants' cases and agreement of a plan to meet housing and support needs;
- To relieve homelessness for anyone who is homeless as defined by law;
- To help to secure accommodation for people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness;
- For public authorities to refer cases of homelessness to a local housing authority.

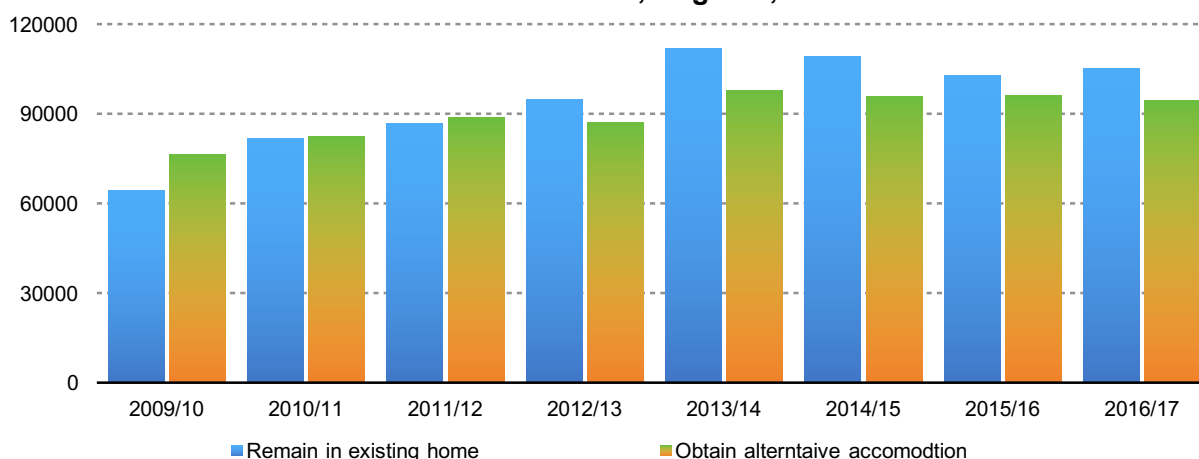
### 2.3 Homelessness Prevention and Relief

Local authorities have voluntarily carried-out activities to prevent and relieve homelessness since 2003 onwards. A range of discretionary initiatives have been used to assist people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness. Any casework action that has been taken, is done so outside any legal obligation to do so. The UK Government recognises three forms of homelessness prevention:

- Early Prevention - Making accommodation and support available before crisis point;
- Pre-Crisis Prevention - Advice and proactive intervention to allow time to move to alternative accommodation;
- Preventing Reoccurring Homelessness - Support to ensure tenancy sustainment, avoid repeat homelessness.

When records began (2009/10), 55% of people were helped to obtain alternative accommodation, and 45% were assisted to remain in their existing home. Latest statistics show 53% of people being helped to remain in their existing home, compared 47% being helped to obtain alternative accommodation.

**Chart 4: Homelessness Prevention Outcomes, England, 2009/10 – 2016/17**

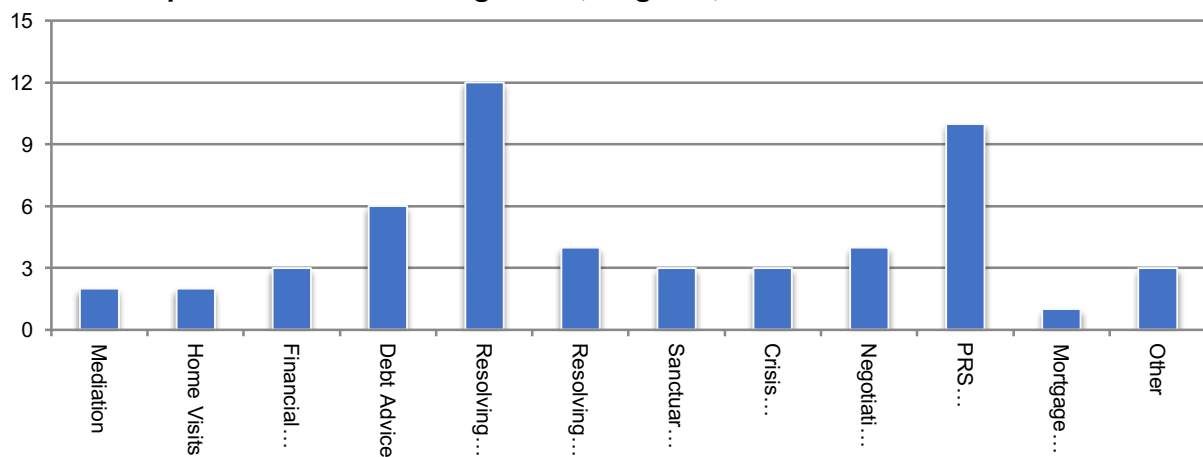




The most common casework action taken to prevent homelessness, by helping people to remain in their existing accommodation, include:

- 12% - resolving housing benefit problems;
- 10% - assistance to remain in private rented sector accommodation;
- 6% - debt advice.

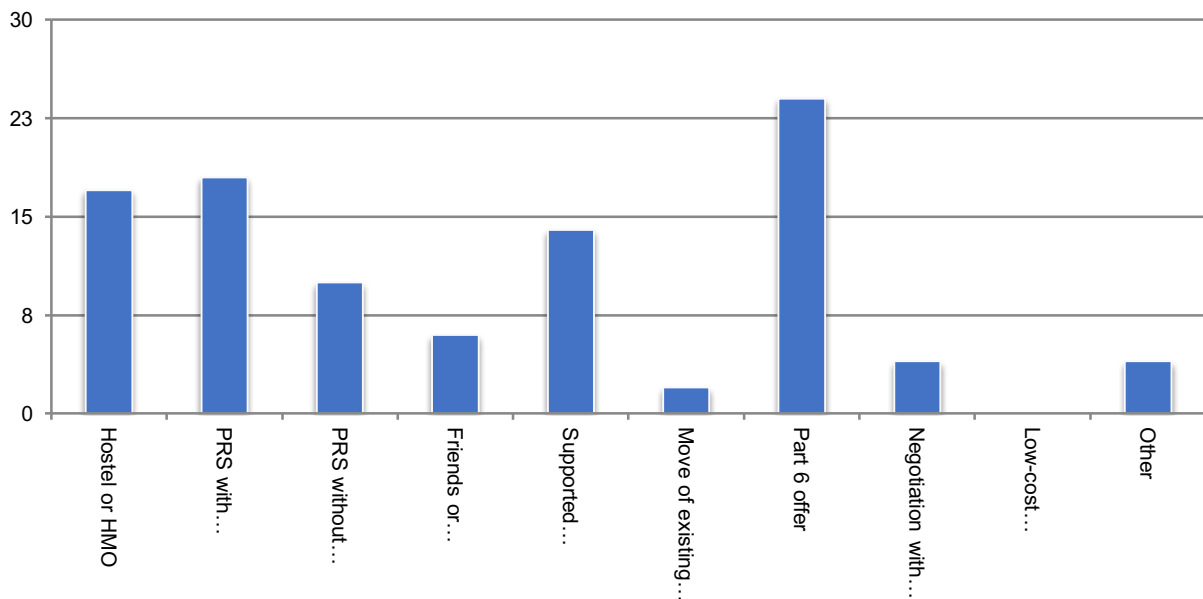
**Chart 5: Help to Remain in Existing Home, England, 2016/17**



The most common casework action taken to prevent or relieve homelessness, by assisting people to obtain alternative accommodation, include:

- 28% - private rented sector (with or without use of landlord incentive);
- 24% - allocation of social housing;
- 17% - hostel or house of multiple occupation.

**Chart 6: Help to Obtain Alternative Accommodation, England, 2016/17**



Casework action associated with housing benefit problems has doubled since 2009/10. During the same period the number of people whose reason for loss of their last settled home is due to the end of assured shorthold tenancy has increased to become the main reason for homelessness, accounting for 31% of cases in 2016/17. The National Audit Office reported in 2017 that a succession of reforms to welfare benefits entitlements, implemented by the UK Government, are not coincidental. The report criticised the lack of a joined-up Government strategy for tackling homelessness.

## **2.4 UK Government Priorities**

The UK Government has received criticism about rising levels of homelessness and the lack of a coherent Strategy for tackling the problems from the UK Statistics Authority in 2015, the Communities & Local Government Select Committee in 2016, the National Audit Office, the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman, and the Commons Public Account Committee all in 2017.

Subsequently, the UK Government made a commitment to halve rough sleeping by 2022 and end it by 2027. A taskforce has been assembled, whose membership includes figures from public authorities and voluntary organisations, to provide advice on the formulation of a national strategy. Piloting of the Housing First approach to help people stop sleeping rough has been announced. A new Strategy for ending rough sleeping in England was published by the UK Government in August, focusing on the themes of prevention, intervention and recovery. A Rough Sleeping Initiative was launched at the end of March, involving a cross-disciplinary team of experts from the homelessness sector.

The UK Government has allocated a substantial sum of funding to help tackle homelessness. During the present spending period 2016/17 – 2019/20, £1.2bn will be awarded to local authorities and voluntary organisations.

The UK Government has also established a Homelessness Advice and Support Team, offering support to local authorities. A new statutory Code of Guidance and secondary legislation has been published. The National Homelessness Advice Service has delivered training to frontline staff. Specified public bodies will have a new duty to refer cases of homelessness to local authorities from October 2018.

## **2.5 Liverpool City Region Combined Authority**

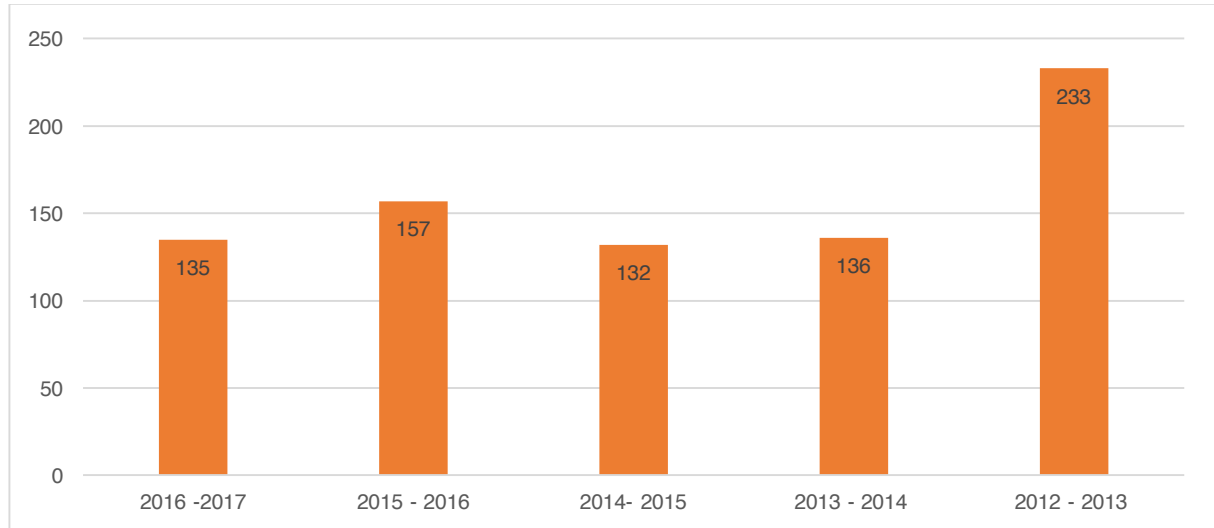
The Combined Authority, which covers the Merseyside Metropolitan County, plus Halton, has no devolved responsibility for homelessness policy and this remains a matter for national and local governments. Nevertheless, Steve Rotheram, the Elected Mayor of the Liverpool City Region has made a manifesto pledge to tackle homelessness and street sleeping. An advisor was appointed shortly after his election and more recently a strategic lead for homelessness has been recruited to the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority. The Combined Authority has already backed a report published by Crisis, calling for adoption of the Housing First approach across the City Region. Subsequently £.7.7m has been awarded by the UK Government to the Combined Authority to carry out a Housing First Pilot.

### 3. LOCAL HOMELESSNESS CONTEXT

#### 3.1 Levels of Homelessness

The number of decisions over the five-year period 2012/13 – 2016/17, has remained consistent, with the exception of 2015/16 when there was a slight increase.

**Chart 1: P1E – E1 total decisions (over 5 years), St Helens, 2012/13-2016/17**



The majority (66%) of decisions taken over the last five years relate to households that are eligible, unintentionally homeless and in priority need. Over the five-year period the ethnic origin of applicant households that a decision was taken on was predominately white, at rate of 94%. The age profile of those accepted as eligible, unintentionally homeless and in priority need were those aged 25-44. The main household type was female lone parent households with dependent children, making up 42% of households found to be eligible, unintentionally homeless and in priority need.

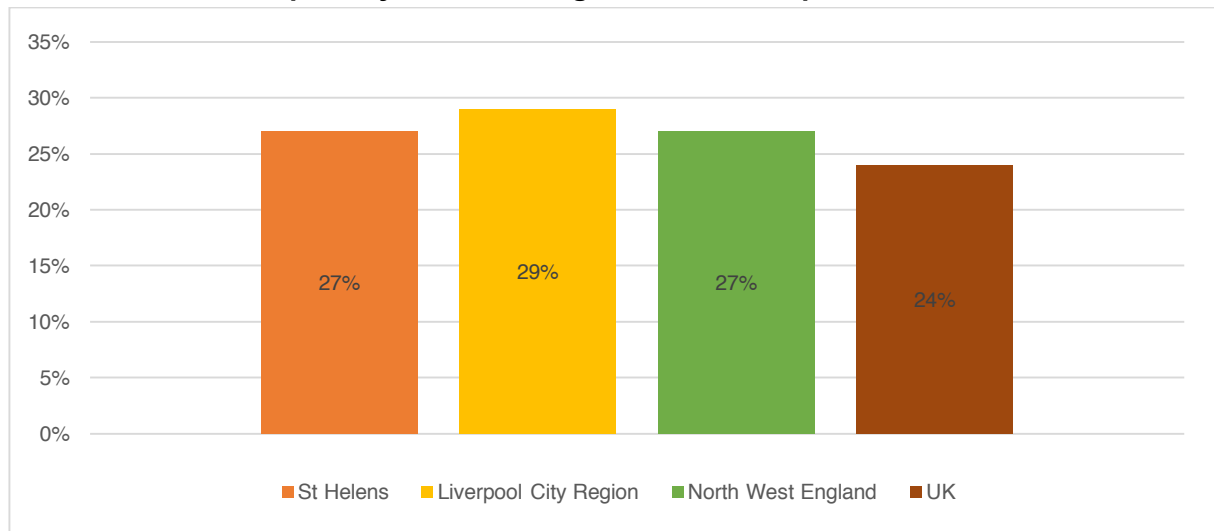
St Helens has been benchmarked alongside the Liverpool City Region, the North West, and England. The number of applicants accepted as having a priority need and not intentionally homelessness reduced in St Helens by 46%. Elsewhere there were increases. Previously St Helens had the second highest rate of acceptances but now has a lower rate than all of the comparator areas. The number of households placed in temporary accommodation by the Council has reduced by 32%. Elsewhere levels of temporary accommodation usage increased.

The level of rough sleeping in St Helens has remained consistently low. Elsewhere in the Liverpool City Region levels of rough sleeping have increased. Additional cold weather provision had been used by 40 individuals over the course of this winter (2017/18). Data on rough sleeping collected by the Hope Centre, shows a steady increase in the number of people who use the service who are experiencing street homelessness.

National Policy research identifies that the primary cause of homelessness is childhood poverty, followed by labour and housing market factors. Statistics about these issues can be used to forecast future levels of homelessness.

Child poverty rates in St Helens are lower than those of the Liverpool City Region, equal to those of North West England, but higher than those of the UK.

**Chart 2: Children in poverty after housing costs, UK comparison, 2017**



The number of children in poverty in St Helens (after housing costs) is the second lowest in the Liverpool City Region. At a local level, before housing costs a total of 6,553 (17.21%) children living in St Helens were identified as being in poverty. This number increases to 10,357 (27.2%) when housing costs are included.

82,500 (73.3%) of 16-64-year olds living in St Helens are recorded as economically active. Gross weekly pay is on average 3% lower compared to North West England and 11% lower than the Liverpool City Region and the UK. ESA and Incapacity benefits make up 58% of all benefit claims with 9.4% of the local resident population aged 16-64 claiming. This is higher than comparator areas. 16.1% of the local resident population aged 16-64 is in receipt of benefits, the same level as the Liverpool City Region and higher than North West England and the UK.

Median house prices in St Helens are 2% higher compared to Liverpool and 16% lower compared to North West England and 10% lower than England. Median gross annual earnings in St Helens are 12% lower compared to Liverpool and 7.5% lower compared to the North West region and 12% lower than England. A ratio of 5.21 times median gross annual earnings is 6% lower than the sub-region and region, and 42% lower than nationally.

### 3.2 Preventing Homelessness

Homelessness prevention activities for adults leaving secure estates are inconsistent, with no formalised joint pathway between prisons and St Helens Council. There is no statistical monitoring specific to St Helens, about the number of people leaving prison or young offender institutes who become homeless. The Council commissions specific supported housing provision for people who are offenders or ex-offenders.

**Table 1: Offender supported housing commissioned by St Helens Council, headline performance monitoring for quarter two 2017/18**

Provider	Service Name	Contracted capacity & Service utilisation	Throughput & Clients left during quarter	Contracted staffing & staffing delivery	Clients achieving independence	Departures & Evictions and abandonments
Adullam	Probation Support Service	11 83%	100% 3	35 hours 100%	66%	3 -

There is a pathway for all children under 18 and young people aged 18 leaving secure estate who are involved with the Youth Justice Service. There is always a supervising officer allocated for the child from the Youth Justice Service who will liaise and attend meetings with the relevant establishment, liaise with children's social care (if they are involved), the child's family and housing providers to ensure the relevant services are being provided or in place on release and this includes suitable accommodation. The Youth Justice Service also hold a multi-agency Resettlement Panel 3 months prior to release (or sooner if it is a short sentence) to ensure that a robust resettlement plan is in place for the child's release back into the community and focuses on 7 areas (case management; accommodation; education; training and employment; health; substance use; families; finance, benefits and debts).; where there are high level concerns about the risk the child presents to others and/or their safety and well-being, a multi-agency risk management meeting will also be held around 3-4 weeks prior to their release which will include ensuring actions from the Resettlement Plan are being progressed. The Youth Justice Service will escalate issues with lack of any service provision for the children they are involved with

There is a range of homelessness prevention activities for people leaving care. No specific statistics are collected about the number of care leavers who become homeless, although this information is available on a case-by-case basis. The local authority does monitor post-care housing sustainment, until people reach the age of 21 and current performance that more than 90% of those leaving can sustain a tenancy.

Since 2009, St Helens Children Services have deployed one full-time employee to be based with the St Helens Housing Advice Service. The remit of this post is to prevent 16 and 17-year-old children from becoming homelessness and needing to be looked-after. An integrated approach is taken to performing duties under children and homelessness legislation, by carryout a single assessment of needs.

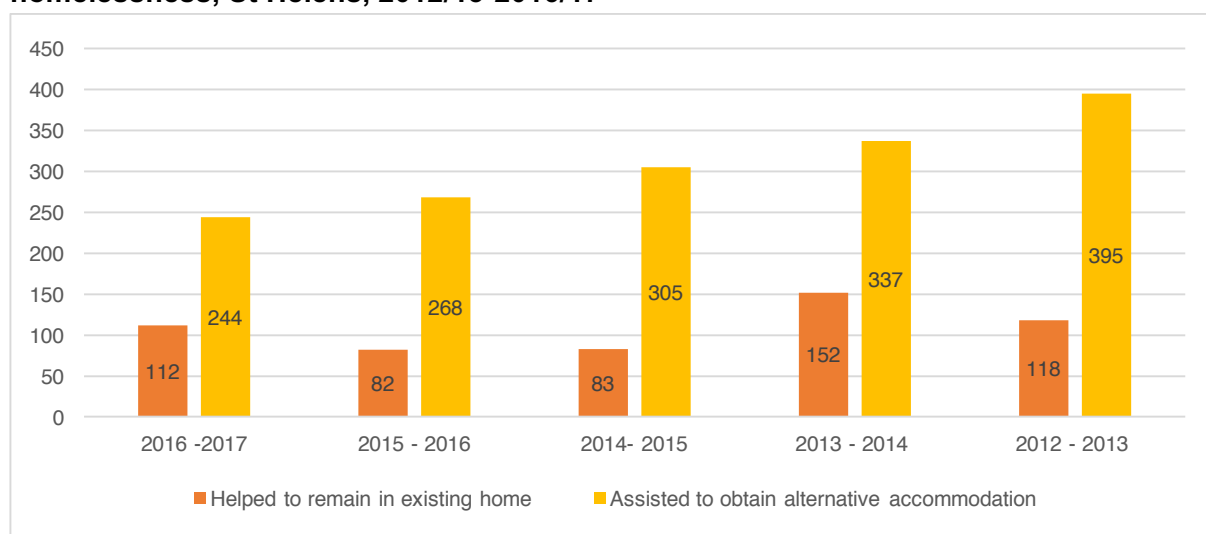
Homelessness prevention activities for former members of the regular armed forces are unknown. There is a comprehensive range of specialist domestic abuse provision in St Helens, assisting both victims and perpetrators of domestic abuse. The impact of homelessness prevention activities for victims of domestic abuse is uncertain. There are no specific homelessness prevention activities for people leaving hospital. As a result outcomes for homeless people are unknown, but expected to be unsatisfactory. The Council commissions a range of care and support from a mixture of providers for vulnerable adults with a wide array of characteristics. There is no specific information and advice for vulnerable adults who are more likely to become homeless, nor are there any integrated

partnership working agreements. The extent and prevalence of homelessness prevention activities for other persons likely to become homeless is unclear.

Some work is taking place in schools to promote awareness of homelessness, in an effort to prevent homelessness in the long-term.

Between 2012/13 to 2016-17, the Council prevented homelessness by assisting a greater number of households to obtain alternative accommodation, than they did to remain in existing accommodation.

**Chart 3: P1E – E10 all cases where positive action succeeded in preventing homelessness, St Helens, 2012/13-2016/17**

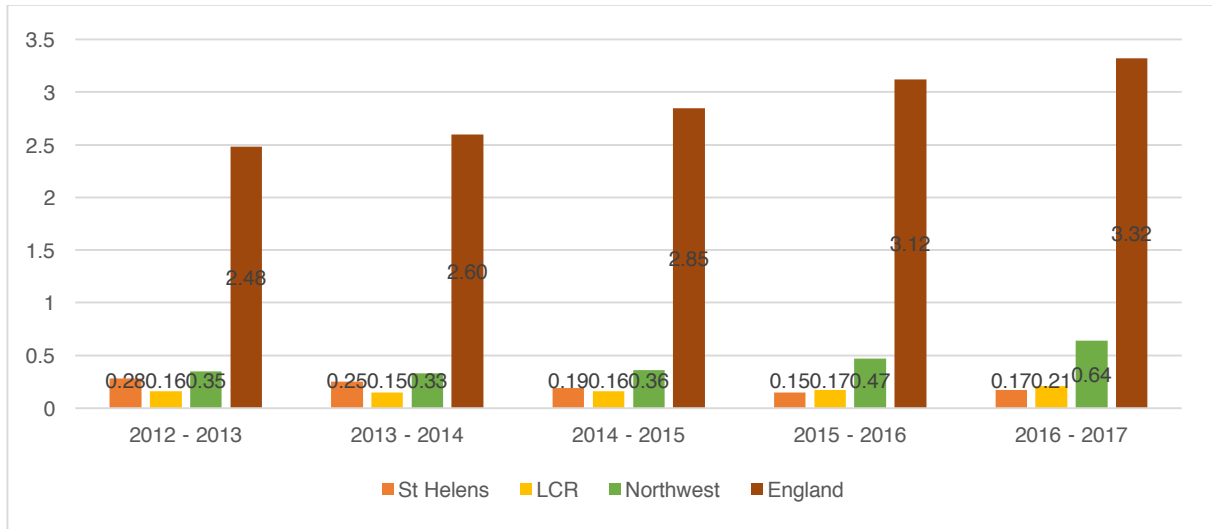


Overall, during the past five years, 35% of households were helped to remain in their existing accommodation, compared to 65% of people who were assisted to obtain alternative accommodation. The most common method used to ensure households remained in their existing home focused around those classified as ‘providing other assistance to remain in private rented sector accommodation’, with 87.5% of casework interventions recorded under this heading. These interventions are primarily carried-out by the Council’s private rented sector team, who operate a number of innovative and successful schemes. In particular a Landlord Liaison Officer intervenes when issues of anti-social behaviour escalate. Local action taken to assist households in finding alternative accommodation focused around securing social housing through an offer of social housing from the housing register. The percentage of people helped locally (49%) to obtain social rented housing is twice what it is nationally. The rate of homelessness prevention casework is lower in St Helens than the Liverpool City Region, the North West and England. Elsewhere rates have increased during the past five years, whereas rates in St Helens have reduced.

### 3.3 Securing accommodation

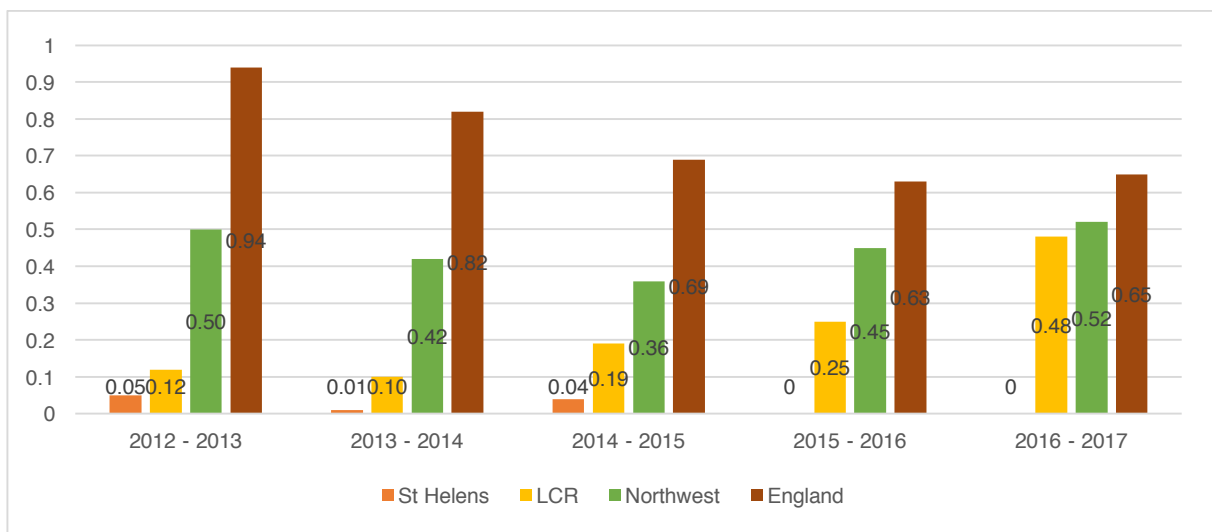
During the past five years, temporary accommodation usage has increased across England, the North West, the Liverpool City Region, but reduced in St Helens.

**Chart 4: Total in temporary accommodation, comparison per 1000 households**



Consistently throughout the past five years, more people have remained homeless at home than were provided with temporary accommodation. During the past five years across St Helens, the number of people who remained homeless at home has fallen by 42%, from 82 in 2012/13 down to 48 in 2016/17. The form of temporary accommodation used locally differs considerably from elsewhere. In St Helens there is a greater reliance on hostels and supported housing, whereas in other areas, there is an emphasis on procuring temporary accommodation from private and social landlords. Between 2012/13 – 2016/17, 54% of those accommodated were female lone parent households with dependent children. Over the five years 1% of households accommodated have been from a black or other minority ethnic origin. The number of households leaving temporary accommodation under 6 months equates to 90%.

St Helens Council has recorded no successful casework interventions to relieve homelessness in 2015/16 and 2016/17 as our focus has been on preventing homelessness rather than homelessness relief.





Throughout England, relief casework account for 6% of all activity carried-out by local authority homelessness services. Locally, there is no landlord accreditation scheme, which is typically used by local authorities to coordinate a range of incentives to encourage private landlords to offer accommodation for people who need their homelessness relieving. However, St Helens Council does offer a range of other measures that might help to relieve homelessness.

St Helens Council has an Empty Homes Strategy updated in 2017. In the local authority area there are 935 long-term vacant properties (e.g. empty for more than six months). 150% Council Tax premium is set for these properties. The Council works pro-actively with the landlords of empty homes to bring them back into use, to be used for someone who needs help to relieve them from being homeless.

During the past five years, the number of households on the Councils' Housing Register, fell to 1,496, the lowest level since current records began in 1997. This was a reduction of 73% compared to the record high of 5,378 in 2010. In the past two years, levels have increased again by 39% to 3,753 in 2017. Persons who are not intentionally homeless and have a priority need are awarded Band A status in the local housing allocation scheme.

### 3.4 Providing Support

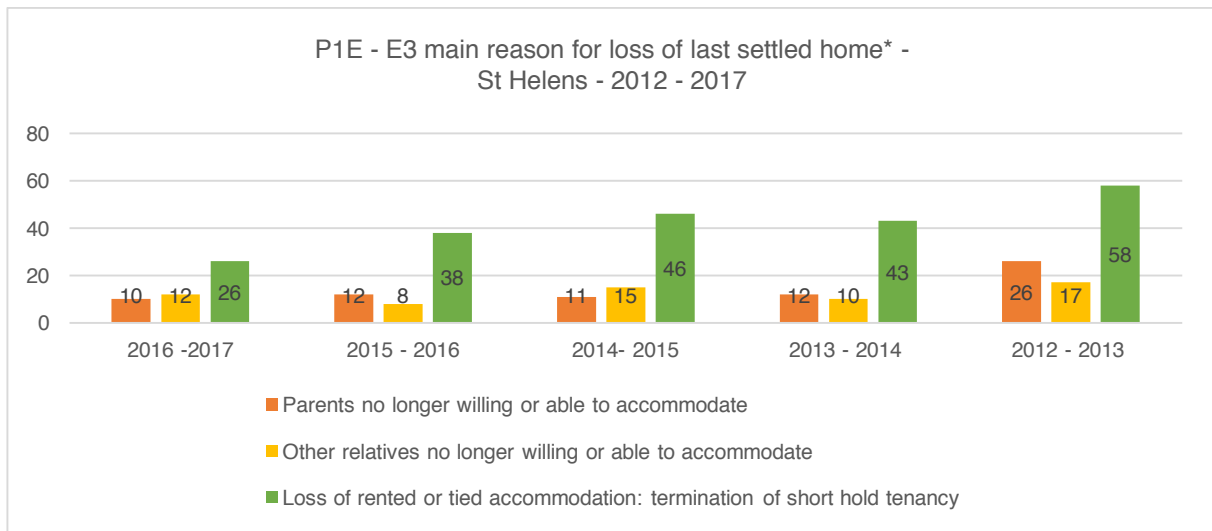
An analysis of homelessness data shows that applicant households found to be eligible for assistance, unintentionally homeless and in priority need were predominately those with one or more dependent children. Homeless families can get housing-related support from Pennington Lodge, operated by Your Housing Group.

**Table 2: Homeless families supported housing commissioned by St Helens Council, headline performance monitoring for quarter two 2017/18**

Provider	Service Name	Contracted capacity & Service utilisation	Throughput & Clients left during quarter	Contracted staffing & staffing delivery	Clients achieving independence	Departures & Evictions and abandonments
Your Housing Group	Pennington Lodge	20 77%	165% 17	180 99%	88%	17 1

The main reason for loss of last settled home is the termination of assured short-hold tenancy, this has consistently been the case during the past five years, even though levels have fallen by 56% in this time.

**Chart 6: P1E – E3 main reason for loss of last settled home, St Helens, 2012/13-2016/17**



Locally, the loss of last settled home is the termination of assured short-hold tenancy, this accounts for just over 40% of cases over the last five years. People whose parents or other relatives or friends who are no longer willing to accommodate can benefit from a number of services provided by St Helens Council. UK nationals currently residing in the UK has consistently been the main type nationality of person to whom the local authority has accepted a duty of assistance. There is no specific provision of homelessness services in St Helens for black and minority ethnic communities in the local area.

The Council commissions a range of organisations to provide housing related support for single people experiencing homelessness. This provision is hostel accommodation. A summary of headline outputs is shown in the table below.

**Table 3: Single homeless supported housing commissioned by St Helens Council, headline performance monitoring for quarter two 2017/18**

Provider	Service Name	Contracted capacity & Service utilisation	Throughput & Clients left during quarter	Contracted staffing & staffing delivery	Clients achieving independence	Departures & Evictions and abandonments
Great Places	Bluebell Court	20 100%	120% 4	288 hours 100%	100%	4 -
Salvation Army	Sailsbury House	50 93%	132% 18	464 100%	76%	17 4
YMCA St Helens	Hostel	46 93%	180% 40	- 99%	65%	27 13

Applications for support are showing an increase in young people applying and also persons aged over 55 years. In 2012, a two-tier system was agreed between the Salvation Army and YMCA St Helens. Service providers reported difficulty with finding accommodation for

people to move-on. Charges for Salvation Army’s Salsbury House provide a useful snapshot of typical costs for staying in supported housing:

- Half-Board £267.60;
- Self-Catering £200.20

Data from YMCA St Helens provides a useful snapshot on typical demand and utilisation of housing support services.

**Table 4: Service utilisation for YMCA St Helens, 2013/14-2016/17**

Year	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
Central Court	88.6%	91.4%	94.5%	94.2%
Hostel	89.7%	84.8%	97.4%	97%

Teardrops is a local voluntary organization that also provides support to single homeless people. They help them to sustain their accommodation, assisting with practical matters such as to improve health and budgeting skills, plus tackle social isolation.

In 2017, Crisis UK published a feasibility study into setting-up a Housing First project across the Liverpool City Region (LCR) Combined Authority area. This research concluded that current services don’t work well enough for people with multiple and complex needs. Adopting the Housing First approach was supported by providers and service users. The report concluded that the Housing First approach could achieve better outcomes and makes savings compared to current commissioning arrangements.

In 2014, The Liverpool Public Health Observatory published a health needs assessment of single people experiencing homelessness in the Liverpool City Region. A section specific to St Helens showed:

- 9% had physical health needs;
- 31% had mental health needs;
- 34% had substance misuse issues.

People experiencing street homelessness are able to get help from the local authority, as well as voluntary organisations. Monthly counts of people sleeping rough are carried-out, identifying up to 20 people bedded down. Begging is commonplace in the town centre. The local authority public health officials commission Change Grow Live to provide a substance misuse service. Emergency provision for people verified as sleeping rough is available at the Salvation Army and YMCA. Teardrops and Street Pastors are also providing support to people sleeping rough. Hope House provide day services to people who are experiencing street homelessness.

Hope House is one of the few services that have a specific offer to support people experiencing hidden homelessness.

### 3.5 Resources

St Helens Council previously had circa £11m annual ring-fenced budget for commissioned housing support services. Spending locally has fallen to circa £6m annual budget as a result of Central Government funding reductions. Government funding cutbacks since 2010 has also meant the number of officers employed to administer the supported housing revenue grant programme has been significantly reduced.

From 2012/13 – 2015/16, the UK Government awarded £431k to St Helens Council to tackle homelessness. A further £1.3m was awarded for initiatives benefiting the entire Liverpool City Region.

**Table 5: UK Government homelessness funding, St Helens 2012/13 – 2016/17**

<b>Budget</b>	<b>St Helens Allocation</b>
Homelessness Prevention Grant	£196,000
Domestic Abuse	£90,000
Homelessness Change Programme	£145,000 (Awarded to Salvation Army)

Compared to the previous four years, the money allocated by the Government to St Helens Council for 2016/17 – 2019/20 has increased by 13%:

Homelessness Prevention Grant	£198,008
Flexible Homelessness Support Grant	£170,298
Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 New Burdens Grant	£123,550
<b>Total</b>	<b>£491,856</b>

St Helens Council has received a Homelessness Prevention Grant since 2003. The purpose of this is to aid the delivery of activities set-out in the Council's Homelessness Strategy. The Flexible Homelessness Support Grant allocated by the Department for Communities & Local Government, replaced the Temporary Accommodation Subsidy regime previously administered by the Department for Work & Pensions, for more than a decade until March 2017. The local authority is a net beneficiary under the new grant funding rules. The Government has made the new burdens grant available to help meet the requirement of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. In 2018/19, the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority will be allocated a share of £28m (along with the Combined Authorities for Greater Manchester and the West Midlands), to pilot the Housing First approach across Merseyside and Halton.

### 3.6 Consultation

Service users believed that the levels of homelessness would increase in the next five years. Social housing was identified as the preferred housing option for when someone is homeless. Providing help to sustain accommodation was considered the most important activity when someone was homeless. Finding accommodation was viewed a more important activity than preventing homelessness.

The majority of stakeholders also thought homelessness levels would rise over the next five years. Housing-led options, such as social housing and community-based support housing were preferred housing options of stakeholders. Tackling poverty was viewed as the most important thing people need to support with when they're homeless. Prevention of homelessness was viewed as more important activity than securing accommodation and providing support.

### **3.7 Findings**

More could be done with data held by national and local public authorities to identify people likely to be at risk of any form of homelessness. Levels of statutory homelessness in St Helens has remained unchanged during the past five years, whereas increases have been recorded across the Liverpool City Region, the North West and England. Taking into account the current levels of homelessness, alongside a range of predictive factors, we forecast future levels of homelessness to increase.

The extension of duties owed to persons who are threatened with homelessness from April 2018, means that the Council now must ensure there are a comprehensive range of activities in place to prevent homelessness. Efforts to improve homelessness prevention activities for people leaving secure estates should be encouraged. Practices and protocols could be improved for people leaving care of St Helens Council to prevent homelessness. A better understanding is needed of what could be done better to prevent homelessness for armed forces personnel. Preventing homelessness prior to discharge from hospital should comply with practices promoted by the Department of Health. Activities to tackle homelessness due to domestic abuse are excellent, however there is little read-across from the new local Domestic Abuse Strategy and duties to prevent homelessness. Activities to prevent vulnerable adults from becoming homeless need to be developed. Activities to prevent other persons more likely to become homeless, all need to be developed, with primary responsibility being taken by Public Health. The Council is reliant on a small number of initiatives to carryout pre-crisis homelessness prevention activity.

The fact that locally, usage of temporary accommodation has reduced during the past five years, whereas it has increased nationally, regionally and sub-regionally, reflects the reduction in homelessness acceptances by the Council. The reason for a high prevalence of households remaining homeless at home needs is unclear. The Council must rapidly develop a comprehensive range of initiatives to carry homelessness relief casework. The Council has a hard-working private rented sector team. The team undertake a number of interventions that help to ensure people can live safely in their accommodation. The Council needs to update its Housing Allocations Policy, to reflect changes to the law that have occurred since the policy was last published.

Pennington Lodge offers homeless families a safe and supportive environment where they can work towards a more sustainable way of life. St Helens Council also commissions a significant amount of hostel and supported accommodation for single homeless people. The service providers offer creative support, which helps people to feel empowered to make changes to their lives. Nevertheless, the majority of the schemes that are current

commissioned are unable to be truly personalised, due to being institutional in design, and therefore fail to foster integration with the wider community. There a number of outreach and day services available for people who are street homeless, being provided by a combination of public authorities and voluntary organisations. Some of this provision is unnecessarily duplicated. St Helens benefits from having provision that specifically targets people who are experiencing hidden homelessness, from the Hope Centre.

Assurance of funding arrangements from April 2020 is essential. With homelessness levels forecast to increase during the next five years, current funding levels will need to be at least maintained, and ideally increased. Current staffing levels are unlikely to be adequate, with future levels of homelessness forecast to increase. The updated IT software system will prove to be invaluable, creating time efficiencies for the staff, as well as controlling the consistency and quality of work of the team.

Views of both service users and stakeholder aligned in a strong belief that homelessness levels will increase in the future, and that social rented housing is a preferred housing option. Service users and stakeholders have differing opinions about priorities for support and how resources should be prioritised.

## **4. DELIVERING THIS HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY**

### **4.1 General Principles**

The delivery of this Strategy requires close working between housing services, adult social care services and children services. These sections of the Council are required in law to take responsibility for tackling homelessness.

Social landlords have regulatory responsibilities to assist local authorities with their homelessness functions. Therefore, these organisations are also expected to play an active role in the delivery of the strategy.

Throughout the lifetime of this Strategy, the Council will seek to build stronger relationships between departments and agencies, to foster a multi-agency commitment to deliver the strategy. The Council is especially keen to ensure involvement from the voluntary organisations, along with co-operation with wide-range of other public authorities (e.g. Prisons, NHS Trusts). St Helens Council will frequently confer with people who have experience of being homeless, to get their views about what works, any barriers to service and any suggestions for improvements.

### **4.2 Corporate Commitment**

Progress towards tackling homelessness and achieving the objectives of this Strategy will be reported to the Council's Cabinet. Annual corporate plans will have clear responsibilities for tackling homelessness, linked to chief officers, and progress will be discussed at meetings of the corporate management team. An elected councillor will be selected to champion the issue of homelessness across all the functions of the Council.

A committee of elected councillors will scrutinise the delivery of the homelessness strategy once every 12 months. The chairpersons of the Homelessness Strategy Steering Group and the Homelessness Forum, will jointly provide a report on (i) levels of homelessness, (ii) activities on preventing homelessness, securing accommodation and providing support, (iii) resources for tackling homelessness.

### **4.3 Homelessness Strategy Steering Group**

A Homelessness Strategy Steering Group will be formed to oversee the delivery of the St Helens Homelessness Strategy Action Plan. The Group will meet every three months to (i) review the levels of homelessness, (ii) consider the activities for preventing homelessness, securing accommodation and providing support, and (iii) coordinate the resources for tackling homelessness. The Group will be responsible for annually updating the Plan, to ensure it remains relevant. The Group will be chaired by the Chief Officer with responsibility for local housing authority functions. Chief or principle officers responsible for public law functions and/or funding of services that affect homelessness will make-up the membership of the Group, from the following business areas:

- Social Services Authority;

- Children Services;
- Director of Public Health ;
- Housing Benefit administration;
- Police and Crime Commissioner;
- A representative of private registered providers of social housing.

One voluntary organisation will be invited attend meetings of the Homelessness Strategy Steering Group. This will be in the capacity of observer only, with no decision-making responsibilities or rights.

Homelessness Strategy Task & Finish Groups will be established as and when needed, to accomplish specific tasks from the St Helens Homelessness Strategy Action Plan. Any group formed will be chaired by a member of the St Helens Homelessness Strategy Steering Group, with outputs being reported back to the Steering Group. Membership will consist of any relevant public authority, voluntary organisation or other person that attends the Homelessness Forum. These groups will be for a fixed term of no more than 12 months. Specific action plans will be formulated to control the work of any such group.

#### **4.4 Homelessness Forum**

A Homelessness Forum will be formed to have an overview of progress being made to deliver the St Helens Homelessness Strategy Action Plan. The Forum will meet every six months to receive updates on:

- (i) the levels of homelessness;
- (ii) activities being carried out to prevent homelessness, secure accommodation and provided support; and
- (iii) how resources are being used to tackle homelessness.

The Forum will also be the vehicle to recruit interested parties to participate in Homelessness Strategy Task & Finish Groups. The Forum will be chaired by the elected councillor champion for homelessness. Membership of the Forum will include all agencies represented at the Homelessness Strategy Steering Group, plus:

- Any other public authority;
- Voluntary organisations;
- Any other interested persons (including those with experience of being homeless).

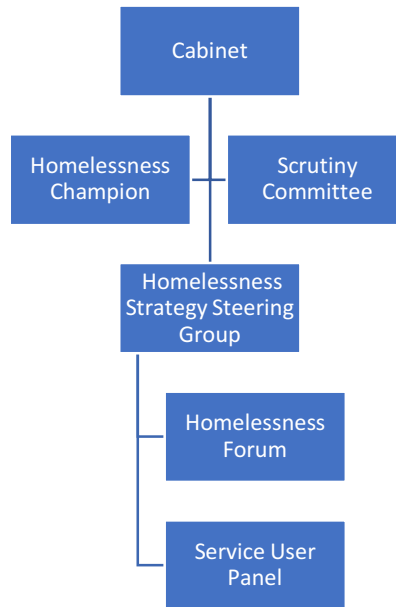
#### **4.5 Service User Involvement**

A panel of service users will be assembled annually to review the progress of delivering the St Helens Homelessness Strategy Action Plan and be consulted about the priorities for the year ahead. Their feedback and knowledge will be used to ensure the activities carried out will have a relevant impact on the lives of those who it is intended to benefit.



Additionally, an annual service users survey will be carried-out, to seek views of what's working well and what could be improved in respect of the advice and assistance they receive to prevent or relieve homelessness.

**Diagram 1: St Helens Homelessness Strategy Governance Structure**



## 5. ACTION PLAN

### Objective 1 – Monitor the current and future levels of homelessness

<b>No</b>	<b>What</b>	<b>How</b>	<b>Who</b>	<b>When</b>
1.1	Publish an annual report explaining the current levels of homelessness, to aid elected councillor and chief officer decision making	Carry out an in-depth analysis of data collected by the Homelessness Case Level Information Classification monitoring system	Local Housing Authority	September 2019
1.2	Commission an external audit of the Council's Homelessness Service to ensure it represents best value, is efficient in the administration of statutory duties and offers quality advice and assistance.	Arrange for inspection against the following themes: 1) Accessibility 2) Diversity 3) Homelessness prevention, housing advice and options 4) Homelessness applications 5) Temporary accommodation 6) Resources	Local Housing Authority	September 2020
1.3	Introduce a homelessness impact assessment for any policy adopted by public authorities in St Helens	Ensure all local plans activity contribute to the reduction of homelessness, by way of tackling poverty, labour market problems and housing market factors	Local Authority Public authorities	September 2021
1.4	Improve system of evidencing the outcomes and results from homelessness prevention activities	Introduce a system to capture prevention outcomes accomplished by public authorities and voluntary organisations	Local Housing Authority Public authorities Voluntary organisations	September 2022

## Objective 2 – Prevent Homelessness

<b>No.</b>	<b>What</b>	<b>How</b>	<b>Who</b>	<b>When</b>
2.1	Ensure suitable arrangements are in place to receive referrals in cases of homelessness from public authorities.	Introduce a standard mechanism to receive referrals of homelessness cases from public authorities	Local Housing Authority Public authorities Private registered providers of social housing	December 2018
2.2	Increase the range of early homelessness prevention activities	<p>Agree a joint pathway with criminal justice agencies to prevent offenders becoming homeless following release from secure estates</p> <p>Review existing protocols for people leaving care against those suggested by Barnardos</p> <p>Review the Armed Forces Covenant to ensure the prevention of homelessness is suitably reflected in the document</p> <p>Review the existing arrangements to prevent patients</p>	<p>Local Housing Authority Governors/Directors of a prison, youth offenders institute, secure training centre Principal of a secure college Youth justice service Probation services</p> <p>Local Housing Authority Children Services Voluntary organisations</p> <p>Local Housing Authority Public authorities Voluntary organisations</p> <p>Local Housing Authority Social Services Authority</p>	<p>March 2019</p> <p>June 2019</p> <p>September 2019</p> <p>December 2019</p>

<b>No.</b>	<b>What</b>	<b>How</b>	<b>Who</b>	<b>When</b>
		<p>from becoming homeless when leaving hospital, against guidance promoted by Department of Health</p> <p>Publicise the outcomes being achieved with victims of domestic abuse and how this helping to prevent homelessness</p> <p>Agree a range of collaborative activities that can both prevent social care needs arising and homelessness occurring</p> <p>Develop a range of activities to prevent homelessness for people who have poor health outcomes, especially people who misuse alcohol and/or drugs and have mental ill health</p>	<p>NHS Trusts Private registered providers of social housing</p> <p>Local Housing Authority Police and Crime Commissioner Private registered providers of social housing</p> <p>Local Housing Authority Social Services Authority Private registered providers of social housing</p> <p>Local Housing Authority Social Services Authority Director of Public Health NHS Trusts Private registered providers of social housing</p>	<p>March 2020</p> <p>June 2020</p> <p>September 2020</p>
2.3	Improve the range of pre-crisis homelessness prevention activities	Introduce initiatives, plus improve existing ones, that help people to remain in existing accommodation	Local Housing Authority Social Services Authority Children services Jobcentre Plus Housing Benefit administrators Voluntary organisations Private registered providers of social housing	December 2019

<b>No.</b>	<b>What</b>	<b>How</b>	<b>Who</b>	<b>When</b>
		Update housing advice information on homelessness prevention, securing accommodation when homeless, rights when homeless, help available when homelessness, and how to access it	Local Housing Authority	March 2019
2.4	Carry out case file audit of homelessness cases to learn what more could be done to prevent homelessness and ensure decisions are made rationally and lawfully	Check rationality, legality and adherence to public law procedural requirements	Local Housing Authority	December 2020

**Objective 3 – Secure Accommodation for People Who Are Homeless or Threatened with Homelessness**

<b>No.</b>	<b>What</b>	<b>How</b>	<b>Who</b>	<b>When</b>
3.1	Undertake a strategic review of temporary accommodation to ensure the provision is suitable	<p>Carry out an options appraisal into future TA arrangements that ensures temporary accommodation is dispersed across the local authority area in a suitable mixture of locations, with suitable property types, and suitable numbers of bedroom, that take in to account charges and rules for claiming help with housing costs</p> <p>Update policy for how temporary accommodation will be procured and allocated</p>	<p>Local Housing Authority Housing Benefit administrators Jobcentre Plus Voluntary organisations Private registered providers of social housing</p> <p>Local Housing Authority</p>	<p>June 2019</p> <p>September 2019</p>
3.2	Introduce new initiatives to relieve homelessness	Ensure there is a comprehensive range of initiatives help people who are homeless to obtain accommodation	Local Housing Authority Social Services Authority Jobcentre Plus Voluntary organisations Private registered providers of social housing	March 2020
3.3	Increase access to suitable private rented sector accommodation	Carry out an options appraisal for whether a social lettings agency and/or a private sector leasing scheme should be created	Local Housing Authority	March 2021
3.4	Review arrangements for administering public law duties to allocate housing accommodation	Commission an independent review of (i) the cost, (ii) efficiency, and (iii) legality of current arrangements for (a) the housing register (b) allocation policy (c) choice-based lettings	Local Housing Authority Private registered providers of social housing	March 2022

<b>No.</b>	<b>What</b>	<b>How</b>	<b>Who</b>	<b>When</b>
3.5	Better demonstrate the impact of social landlords on tackling homelessness	<p>Introduce a peer led benchmarking scheme for social landlords to evidence that activity against the following themes:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Board member commitment to tackling homelessness, and evidence of spend to tackle homelessness</li> <li>2) Prevention of evictions due to rent arrears</li> <li>3) Actions for tackling homelessness featuring in organisational strategy</li> <li>4) Involvement of tenants in activities to prevent homelessness</li> <li>5) Prioritisation of homeless applicants when letting homes</li> <li>6) Prevention of homelessness due to anti-social behaviour and neighbour nuisance</li> </ol>	Private registered providers of social housing	March 2023

#### Objective 4 – Support People Who Are, or Have Been, Homeless

<b>No.</b>	<b>What</b>	<b>How</b>	<b>Who</b>	<b>When</b>
4.1	Further align the work of early help services with that of homelessness services to support families who are, or might be homeless	Explore options for some homelessness officers to be involved with locality-based working alongside early help services	Local Housing Authority Social Services Authority Children services	June 2019
4.2	Recommission housing support services for single people who are homeless to be more housing-led.	<p>Merge funding for all housing support services into a single contract, incorporating accommodation-based support and floating support to be operated by a consortium of service providers. Recommission services to be more housing-led, ensuring people remain in temporary/emergency accommodation for the shortest time possible. Future provision should involve a suitable mixture of the Housing First approach, psychologically informed accommodation-based services, supported lodgings and floating support</p> <p>Introduce an inspection regime for supported housing, consulting with service users and stakeholders, against the following standards</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Access</li> <li>2) Physical condition</li> <li>3) Support services</li> <li>4) Evictions and</li> </ol>	<p>Local Housing Authority Social Services Authority Jobcentre Plus Housing Benefit administrators Voluntary organisations Private registered provides of social housing</p> <p>Local Housing Authority Voluntary organisations Private registered providers of social housing</p>	<p>June 2020</p> <p>September 2020</p>



No.	What	How	Who	When
		<p>exclusions</p> <p>5) Move-on</p>		
4.3	<p>Design and commission a multi-disciplinary outreach service to help people who are street homeless, which focuses on getting people off the streets.</p>	<p>Bring together a team of workers who have specialist knowledge or skills in homelessness law and housing advice, mental illness, substance dependency, offending behaviour and sexual health. Specify the team focus on</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Rapid assessment of needs</li> <li>2) Rapid rehousing</li> <li>3) Facilitation of an Individual Budget</li> <li>4) Access to peer mentoring</li> </ol> <p>Develop a local plan for combating anti-social 'street' behaviours</p>	<p>Local Housing Authority Social Services Authority Director of Public Health Probation services Voluntary Organisations</p> <p>Local Housing Authority Director of Public Health Police and Crime Commissioner</p>	<p>June 2020</p> <p>September 2020</p>
4.5	<p>Commission specific information, advice and assistance for people experiencing hidden homelessness</p>	<p>Develop a series of prevention, relief and support initiatives that will benefit people who otherwise would remain in unsupported temporary accommodation or 'sofa surfing'</p>	<p>Local Housing Authority Social Services Authority Children services Jobcentre Plus Housing Benefit administrators Voluntary organisations Private registered providers of social housing</p>	<p>June 2022</p>

### Objective 5 – Resource Activities to Tackle Homelessness

<b>No.</b>	<b>What</b>	<b>How</b>	<b>Who</b>	<b>When</b>
5.1	Make best use of national and local government funding for tackling homelessness, to drive-up quality, value and effectiveness of outcomes in tackling homelessness	Establish a joint commissioning arrangement for funding for activities to tackle homelessness by pooling commissioning budgets, merge contracts, and align tendering of service provision, and jointly appraise service delivery	Local Housing Authority Social Services Authority Children services Director of Public Health Police and Crime Commissioner	June 2019
		Funding from the Council's General Fund to be increased in-line with local rates of homelessness	Local Housing Authority	June 2019
		Guarantee all funding currently awarded by UK Government to tackle homelessness will be continued beyond current spending period by the local authority	Local Housing Authority	June 2020
5.2	Ensure adequate staffing levels to administer statutory homelessness duties	Maintain current number of employees contracted to administer homelessness duties and ensure management supervision of homelessness officers are retained by the local housing authority once officers are deployed to work in localities	Local Housing Authority	December 2018
		Establish an additional post to co-ordinate overseeing the homelessness strategy, and all	Local Housing Authority	March 2019

<b>No.</b>	<b>What</b>	<b>How</b>	<b>Who</b>	<b>When</b>
		associated funding, which can also incorporate responsibilities for having oversight of the housing allocations policy and tenancy strategy		
5.3	Update IT hardware to allow more agile working	Provide homelessness officers with tablets devices so that the homelessness service can be taken to key locations where other public authorities or voluntary organisations provide services to those who are likely to be at risk of homelessness	Local Housing Authority	June 2019
5.4	Carry an annual consultation exercise with people who have experienced homelessness to ensure their knowledge helps to shape policy and practice	Hold an annual 'speak-out' event, at which users of homelessness services are invited to put questions to key decisions makers about what works well and what could work better	Local Housing Authority Social Services Authority Children services Director of Public Health Police and Crime Commissioner Voluntary organisations Private registered providers of social housing	September 2019
		Involve people with experience of homelessness, in the design, commissioning and contract management of homelessness services	Local Housing Authority	December 2019
5.5	Harness stakeholder	Establish a	Local Housing	December 2018

<b>No.</b>	<b>What</b>	<b>How</b>	<b>Who</b>	<b>When</b>
	enthusiasm and resources for tackling homelessness	<p>Homelessness Strategy Steering Group to have deliver the Homelessness Strategy Action Plan</p> <p>Establish a Homelessness Forum to have share good practice and have oversight of progressing being made on delivering the Homelessness Strategy Action Plan</p>	<p>Authority Social Services Authority Children services Director of Public Health Police and Crime Commissioner Private registered providers of social housing representative Voluntary organisations representative</p> <p>Local Housing Authority Social Services Authority Children services Governors/Directors of a prison, youth offenders institute, secure training centre Principal of a secure college Youth offending team Probation services Police and Crime Commissioner Jobcentre Plus Housing benefit administrators NHS Trusts Director of Public Health Private registered providers of social housing Voluntary organisations Others</p>	March 2019



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