



Durham County Council Homelessness Strategy

2019 – 2022

Contents

1. Foreword
2. Background
3. Introducing the Homelessness Strategy
4. Key achievements over the last three years
5. Headline homelessness trends
6. Prevention of homelessness
7. Supply of accommodation
8. Provision of support
9. Monitoring and reviewing the strategy

Appendix 1 – Action plan

1. Foreword

Since our last homelessness strategy in 2013 we have achieved a great deal to prevent and tackle homelessness through a multi-agency approach. Our strategy for the last few years has been to prevent homelessness through early intervention and this has proved very successful.

We know there is still more to do particularly in light of the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. We want to provide the best service possible to our customers.

This strategy sets out our approach to preventing homelessness for the next three years. We recognise this will be delivered in partnership with a number of agencies.

We have reviewed and identified the issues we face and how we will address them. Our strategy covers three aims, around preventing homelessness, making sure there is sufficient supply of accommodation and that there is appropriate support for those who need it.

We want to enable positive outcomes for all our residents and the Council will continue to work with a range of partners to deliver this.

Councillor Kevin Shaw

Cabinet member for Housing



2. Background

Context

Under the Homelessness Act 2002 all housing authorities must have in place a homelessness strategy based on a review of all forms of homelessness in their area.

The Homelessness Act 2002 determines that the life of a strategy should be no more than five years and the action plan should be reviewed annually.

The introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act in April 2018 resulted in a revised Code of Guidance, this led to the Homelessness Review in 2018, the development of this revised strategy and how best to satisfy the new duties set out in the Act around service delivery.

The purpose of this strategy is to set out the strategic approach, key priorities and actions to work towards preventing homelessness across County Durham over the next three years.

Homelessness Review

The purpose of the review was to determine the extent to which the population in the County is homeless or at risk of becoming homeless, assess the likely extent in the future, identify what is currently being done and by whom to prevent and tackle homelessness and consider existing resources.

The Homelessness Review, which has informed this strategy considered trends over last three financial years, 2015/2016, 2016/2017 and 2017/2018 and involved a mixture of desktop research, staff surveys, partner events, consultations and benchmarking with other authorities. The review is available as a separate document and it is recommended to be read alongside the strategy.

3. Introducing the Homelessness Strategy

A strategy for County Durham

Durham is a large and diverse area, with localities within the County having distinctive characteristics and needs. This is true of Durham's housing sector as much as any part of the County's infrastructure.

The council's Strategic Housing Market Assessment 2016 (SHMA) provides an overview of the housing market context in County Durham. As context, County Durham has a total of 239,685 dwellings and a total of 226,322 households. Of this stock:

- 65.86% of properties are owner-occupied, 20.20% are in the social sector and 13.94% are private rented.
- 79.4% of properties are houses, 15.0% are bungalows, 5.0% are flats/maisonettes, and 0.4% are other property types (e.g. caravans);
- 6.0% have one bedroom/bedsit, 35.2% have two bedrooms, 43.8% have three bedrooms and 15.0 % have four or more bedrooms; and
- 18.2% of properties were built before 1919, a further 16.2% were built between 1919 and 1944, 21.4% between 1945 and 1964, 22.7% between 1965 and 1984, 15.1% between 1985 and 2004 and 6.3% have been built since 2005.

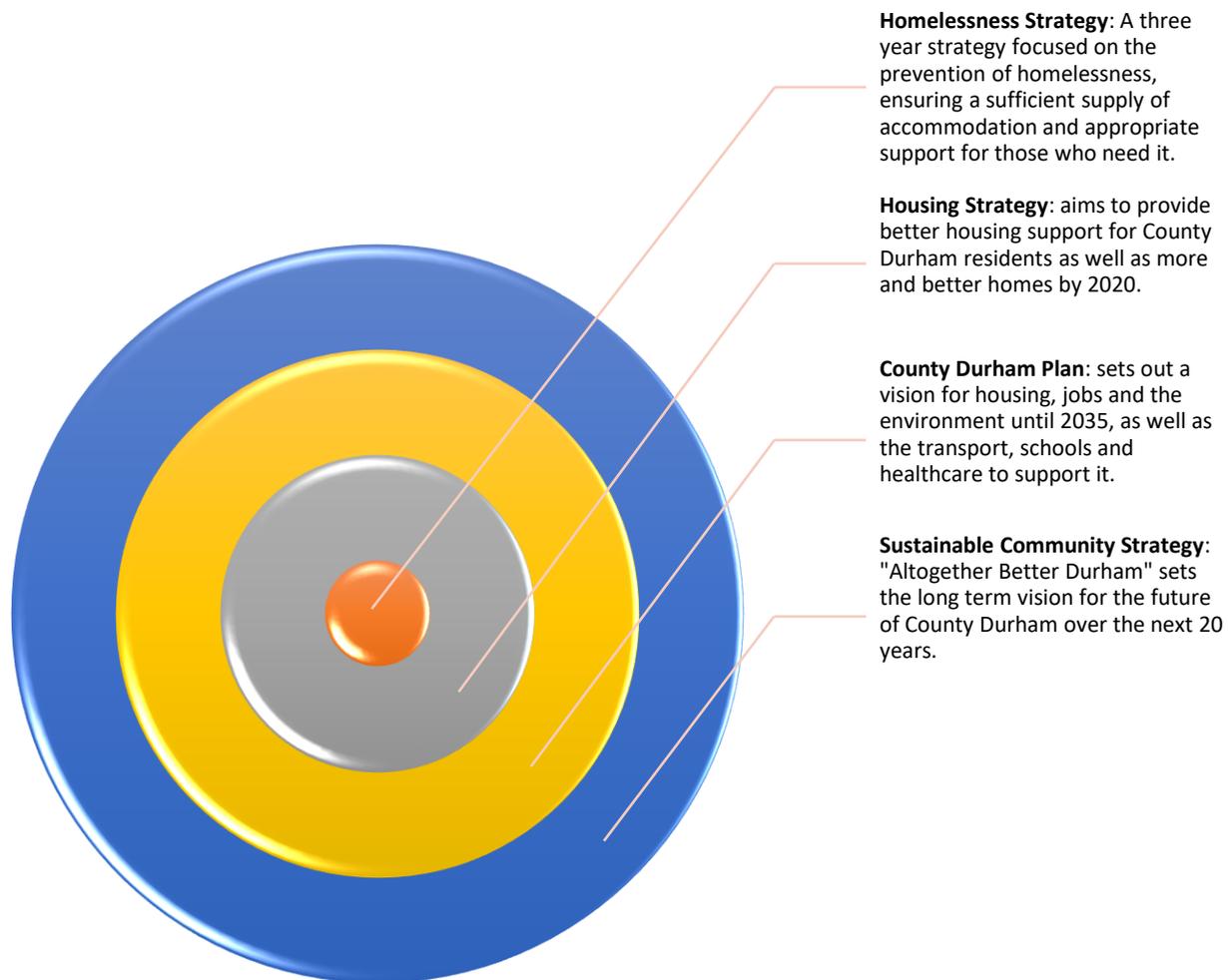
County Durham is associated with a range of property types and what can be described as a granular housing market with settlements associated with high value properties in close proximity to locations associated with lower house prices. In general terms, viability in County Durham can be more challenging than in other parts of the Country.

Links to other documents

The homelessness strategy is one of a number of documents which supports the delivery of the Housing Strategy and corporate plans. The Housing strategy is a five year strategy 2018 – 2023, it aims to provide better housing support for our residents as well as more homes in better condition.

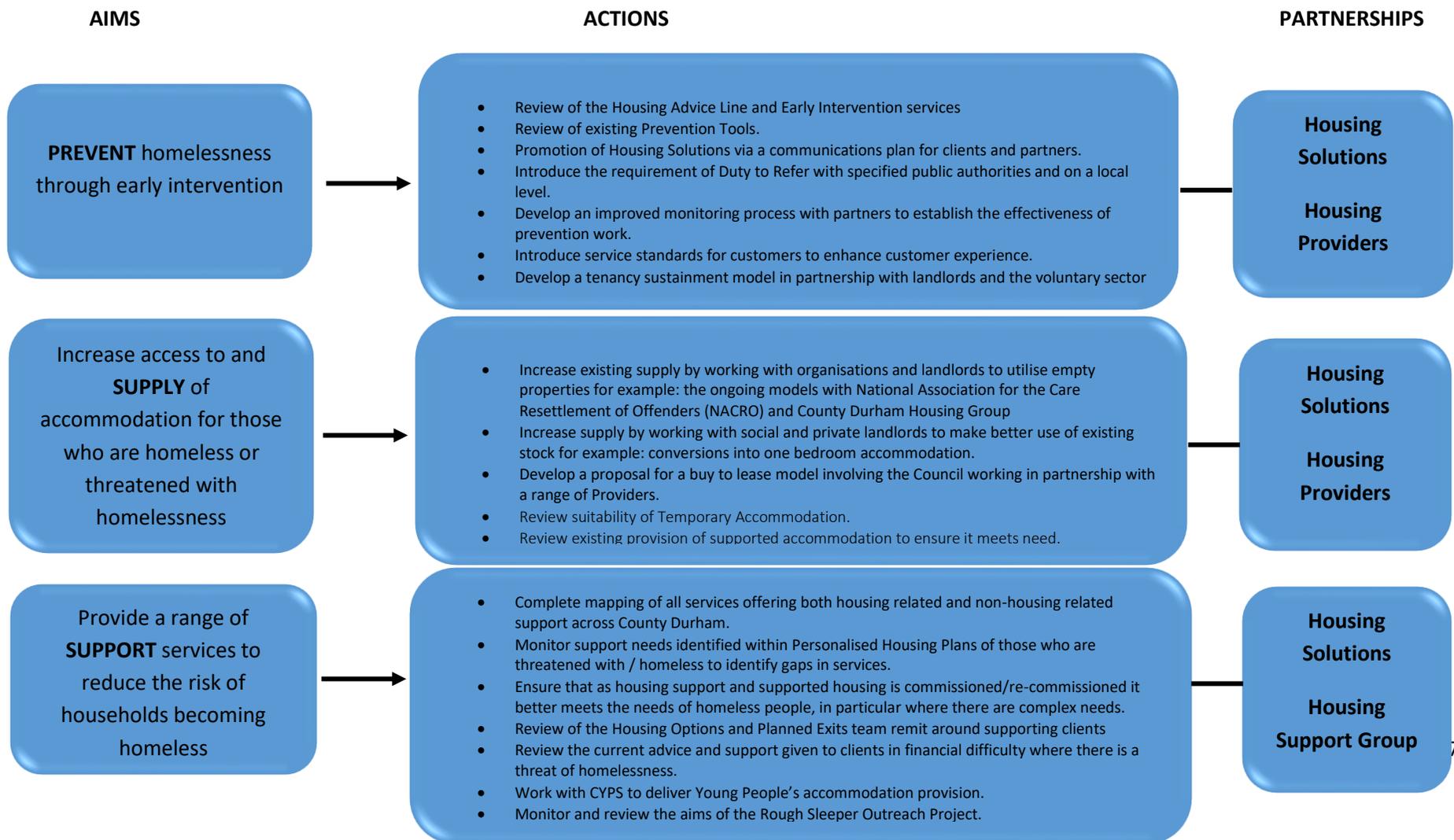
One of the main objectives is to provide housing advice, assistance and support for older and vulnerable people. The prevention of homelessness is one outcome linked to achieving this. Diagram XX highlights the key documents in relation to the Homelessness strategy.

Diagram 1 – Key corporate documents



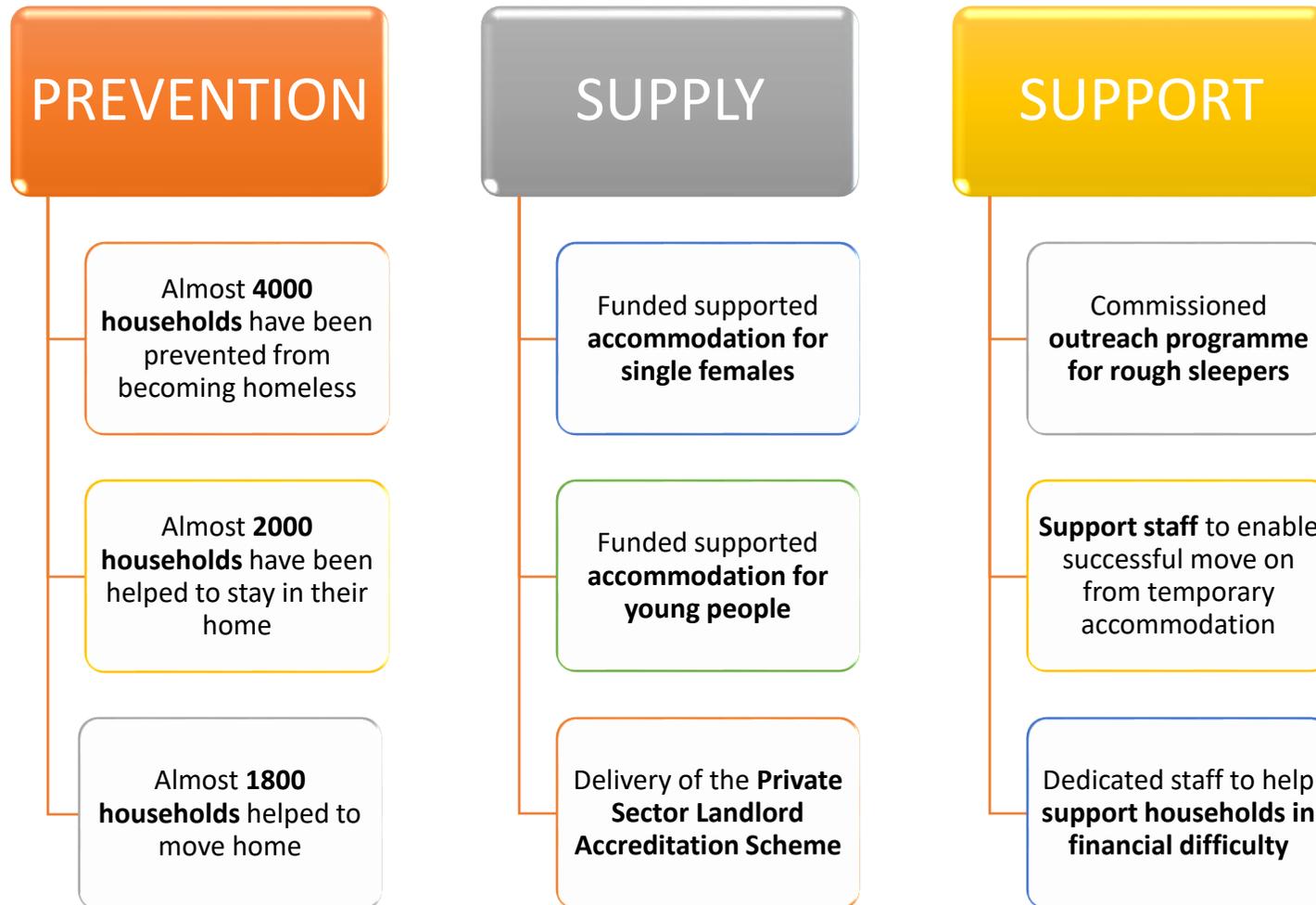
Strategy framework

The three aims of the strategy emerging from the Homelessness Review are: prevention; supply of accommodation and provision of support services. A number of actions have been identified to deliver the aims of the strategy, some examples are highlighted, the rationale for these actions is summarised in sections 6, 7 and 8 and further details are included in the review document. The strategy framework recognises that the homelessness strategy is for County Durham and actions will be delivered in partnership, the role of Housing Providers, Housing Support Group and Rough Sleeper Strategy Partnership are noted in this context.



4. Key achievements over the last three years

This section provides some of the key achievements in relation to homelessness over the last three years.



5. Headline homelessness trends

This section will provide a brief summary of the key findings from the Homelessness Review in County Durham carried out in 2018.

The statistics captured and used as part of the Homelessness Review are prior to the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. However monitoring systems and information is different from April 2018 in line with the requirements of the Act.

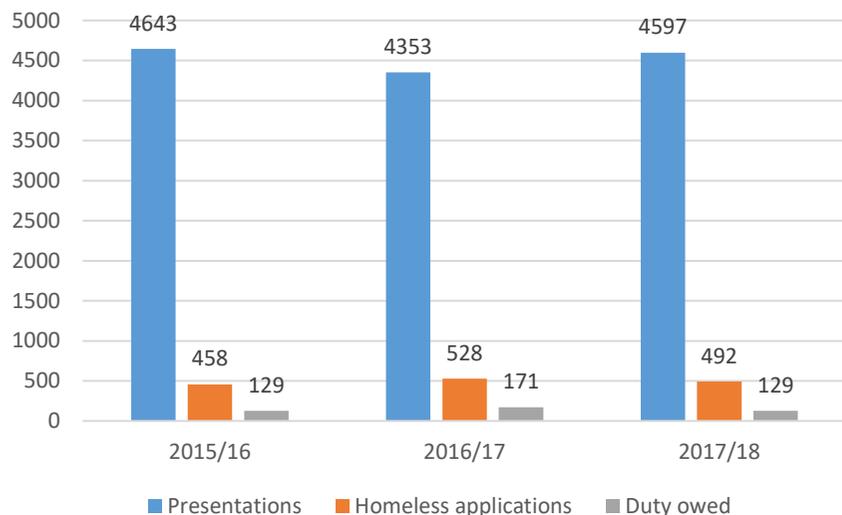
The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 is one of the biggest changes to homelessness in England for a number of years, the Act modifies and extends existing homelessness protection in five key ways:

- Improved advice and information
- Extension of period threatened with homelessness from 28 days to 56 days
- New duties to prevent and relieve homelessness
- Introduce assessments and personalised housing plans
- Encouraging public bodies to work together through a Duty to Refer

Graph 1 shows the overall numbers over the last three years of clients presenting to Housing Solutions who are homeless or threatened with homelessness, formal homeless applications and acceptances.

It is recognised that the numbers will be higher as applicants often present as homeless to the voluntary sector and other partners. This data is not captured.

Graph 1 – Contacts, applications and accepted homelessness.



The demand for **general advice** has remained consistent over the last three years between 4500 and 5000.

There was a reduction in the number of **homeless applications** completed in 2017/18 from the previous year and the main reduction occurred in a client’s loss of AST. This indicates improved working with landlords both private and social.

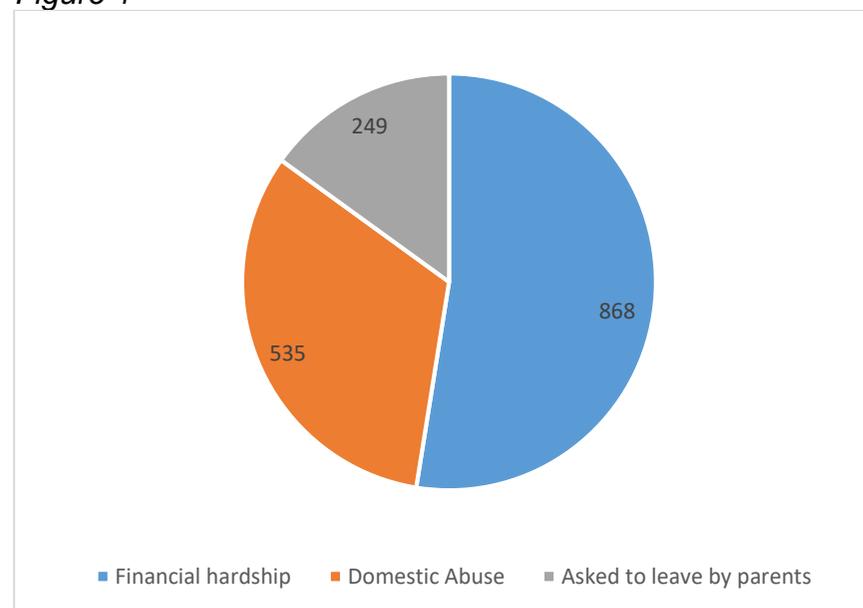
Just over 10% of clients requiring housing advice reached the homeless application stage and this indicates the prevention approach operated by Housing Solutions is working.

The number of **acceptances** where there was a duty to find accommodation has remained between 129 – 171 cases over the last three years.

Reasons for homelessness

Figure 1 shows the main reason why people contacted Housing Solutions in 2017/18 for housing advice.

Figure 1



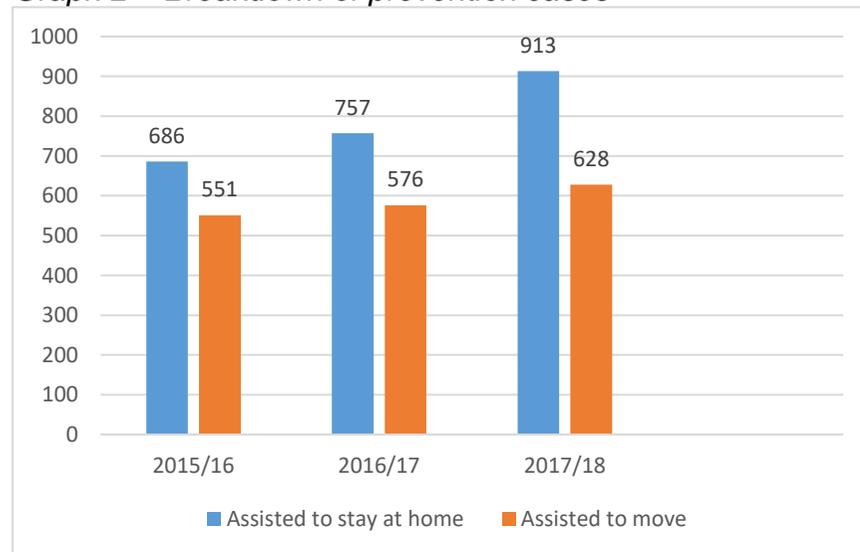
These reasons have remained consistent over the last three years. The research highlighted a slight decrease in clients presenting due to rent arrears, a slight increase in clients sleeping rough and an increase in clients contacting due to fuel poverty.

6. Prevention of homelessness

Summary of findings

Housing Solutions have adopted a preventative approach over the last five years and offer a range of prevention tools for clients. This means assisting clients to remain in their home where possible or help them to find alternative accommodation.

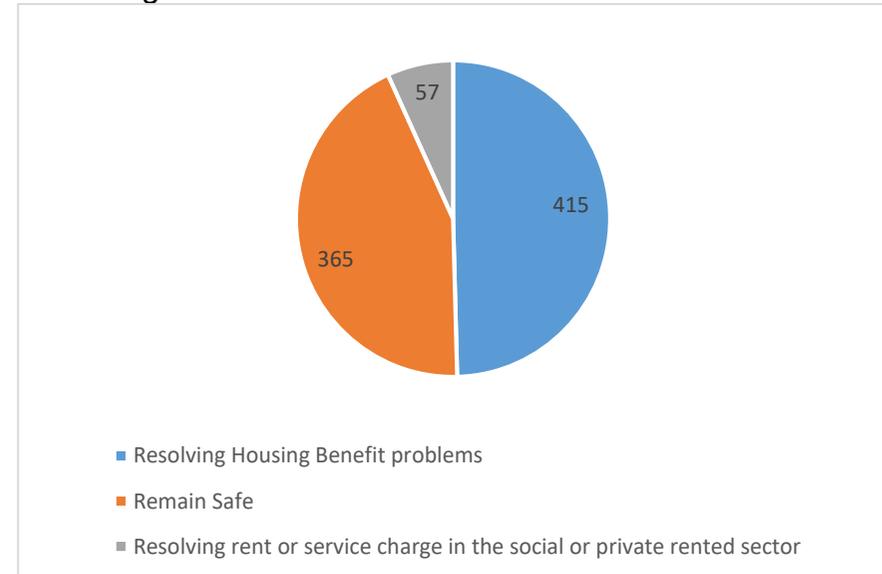
Graph 2 – Breakdown of prevention cases



The number of clients prevented from becoming homeless has increased year on year, in particular to over 900 in 2017/18. This is as a result of a continued focus on early

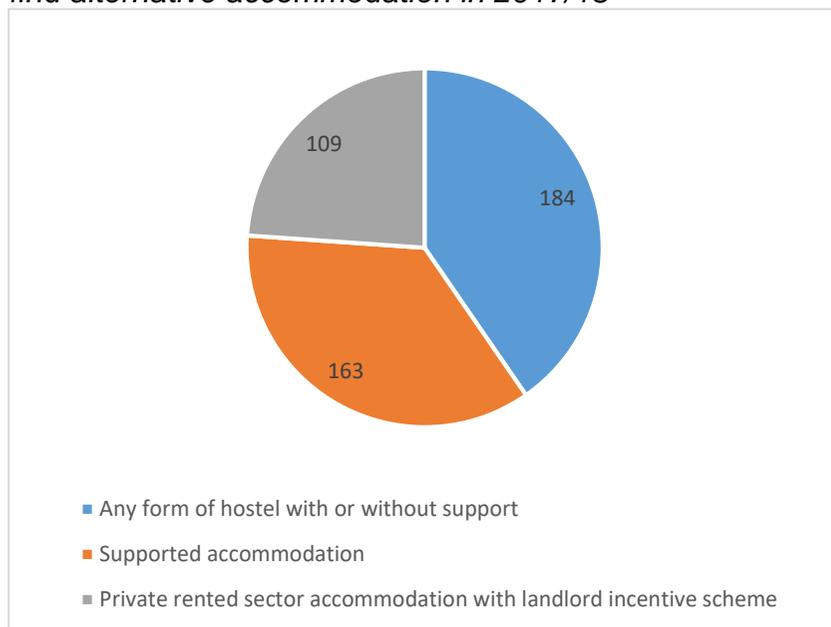
intervention as well the introduction of new services and improved recording.

Figure 2 – Preventing homelessness by helping clients to stay in existing home 2017/18



The main tools used to assist clients to remain at home have been consistent over the last three years: resolving housing benefit problems, supporting victims of domestic abuse and use of the Rent Deposit Guarantee Scheme.

Figure 3 – Preventing homelessness by assisting clients to find alternative accommodation in 2017/18



The main prevention outcomes show a continued increase in preventions into alternative accommodation. In particular assistance from private rented landlord incentive schemes.

Prevention issues and what will be delivered by the strategy

Preventing homelessness is a crucial element of this strategy as it is recognised that early intervention is extremely important. The council will have new prevention duties placed upon it as a result of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.

The review highlighted the need to further review the role of the Housing Advice Line and early intervention services. The various networking events highlighted the need for wider communication about the role of Housing Solutions both for partners and clients. Whilst the current prevention approach is proving successful the existing prevention tools need to be reviewed. The Remain Safe scheme will be prioritised due to the increase in domestic abuse cases.

Tenancy sustainment was a key issues mentioned on several occasions during the review therefore a tenancy sustainment model will be developed in response to this.

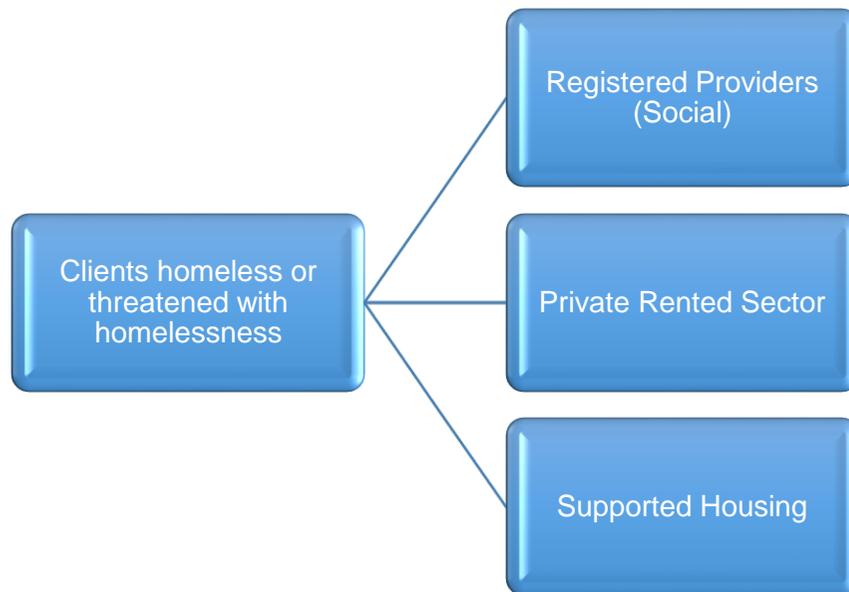
Actions:

- **Review of the Housing Advice Line and Early Intervention services**
- **Review of existing Prevention Tools.**
- **Promotion of Housing Solutions via a communications plan for clients and partners.**
- **Introduce the requirement of Duty to Refer with specified public authorities and on a local level.**
- **Develop an improved monitoring process with partners to establish the effectiveness of prevention work.**
- **Introduce service standards for customers to enhance customer experience.**
- **Develop a tenancy sustainment model in partnership with landlords and the voluntary sector.**

7. Supply of accommodation

Summary of findings

At present the supply of accommodation for those who are homeless or may become homeless can be divided into three routes:



In some cases an applicant may be placed in temporary accommodation.

Under S188 Interim accommodation duty within the Homeless Reduction Act 2017 it is a requirement of the Local Authority to secure that accommodation is available for an applicant

(and their household) if they have reason to believe that the applicant may:

- be homeless;
- be eligible for assistance; and,
- have a priority need.

Temporary accommodation could include Bed and Breakfast, Crash pads and direct access hostels in addition to existing supported accommodation services.

The Homelessness review includes more details around the existing supply of accommodation. It concludes that there is a lack of accommodation for one person households both in general needs stock and in supported accommodation particularly for those clients with complex needs.

Supply of accommodation issues and what will be delivered by the strategy

One of the major challenges in relation to supply is finding accommodation that households can afford, where landlords are willing to accept households who are homeless and where support is available if needed.

The review has considered the current supply of accommodation available in the social rented sector private

rented sector and supported accommodation. There is a lack of one bedroomed accommodation which is required to house the main client group (one person household) who approach Housing Solutions for housing advice.

There are a number of incentives in the social and private rented sector to help find suitable accommodation at an affordable rent but there is still a shortage of available accommodation.

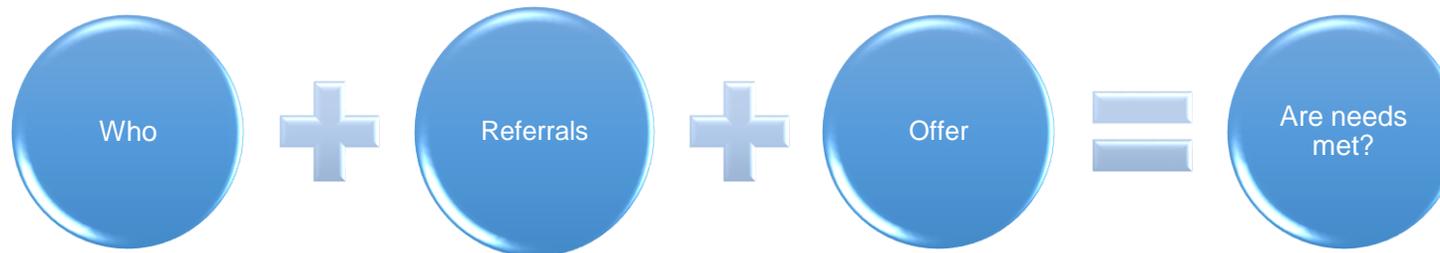
Actions:

- **Increase existing supply by working with organisations and landlords to utilise empty properties for example: the ongoing models with National Association for the Care Resettlement of Offenders (NACRO) and County Durham Housing Group**
- **Increase supply by working with social and private landlords to make better use of existing stock for example: conversions into one bedroom accommodation.**
- **Develop a proposal for a buy to lease model involving the Council working in partnership with a range of Providers.**
- **Review suitability of Temporary Accommodation.**
- **Review existing provision of supported accommodation to ensure it meets need.**

8. Provision of support services

There are a number of support services available across County Durham. The review has considered who needs support, what support is on offer and where referrals are currently being made however based on the current information it is unable to establish overall client needs and if they are being met as illustrated by Diagram 1.

Diagram 1



Provision of support issues and what will be delivered by the strategy

Whilst there are a number of support services available across County Durham it is unclear whether they are meeting the needs of homeless people. During consultation staff advised that many people who approach as being homeless have mental health needs as well as drug, alcohol or history of offending.

Often clients with chaotic and complex needs require access to immediate accommodation which is currently unavailable due to risk.

The review has considered who needs support, what support is on offer and where referrals are currently being made, unfortunately based on the current information it is unable to establish overall client needs and if they are being met.

In line with legislation, Housing Solutions work with Children's Services as part of the Joint Protocol to assist in housing people who are leaving and have left local authority care. A need has been identified to provide young people throughout County Durham who may be at risk of homelessness and leaving care with supported move on accommodation. Housing Solutions and Children and Young People's Services will work together and continue to deliver this project in order to provide young people with the skills and support to live independently.

One of the prominent identified areas requiring support has been for those rough sleeping within County Durham, in particular the city centre area. A Rough Sleeper strategy working group made up of a number of statutory and non-statutory services was established to agree effective measures to manage rough sleepers in the city centre area. A number of overall aims were identified within a detailed action plan resulting in a successful grant funded application for a dedicated staff member. The outreach worker supports rough sleepers into accommodation and other services to address health and wellbeing with the hope of reducing a return to the streets.

The aims of the Rough Sleeper Strategic Group Action Plan are to: prevent people from sleeping on the streets; rapid action when people arrive on the streets; reduce return to the streets.

Actions:

- **Complete mapping of all services offering both housing related and non-housing related support across County Durham.**
- **Monitor support needs identified within Personalised Housing Plans of those who are threatened with / homeless to identify gaps in services.**
- **Ensure that as housing support and supported housing is commissioned/re-commissioned it better meets the needs of homeless people, in particular where there are complex needs.**
- **Review of the Housing Options and Planned Exits team remit around supporting clients**
- **Review the current advice and support given to clients in financial difficulty where there is a threat of homelessness.**
- **Joint working with Children and Young People's Services to deliver Young People's accommodation provision.**
- **Deliver the Rough Sleeper Action Plan.**

9. Monitoring and reviewing the strategy

Monitoring of progress towards achieving the actions set out in the plan will be undertaken with partners via the Housing Support Group. On an annual basis the action plan will be updated and new actions may be identified to support the strategy. An annual homelessness report will be produced and made available to the cabinet member and various corporate groups.

A number of performance indicators are monitored on a regular basis and reported quarterly. These will be used to measure the effectiveness of the action plan:

- Number of households where homelessness has been prevented and client able to remain in existing home
- Number of households where homelessness has been prevented and client moved to alternative accommodation
- Number of households where homelessness has been relieved within 56 days and the client has been moved into alternative accommodation
- Number of households placed in Temporary Accommodation
- Number of referrals received under the Homelessness Reduction Act Duty to Refer (commencing October 2018)
- Number of early intervention cases assisting clients in financial difficulty

Appendix

1. Action Plan

Key

Short Term – 6 months

Medium term – up to 1 year

Long term – 18 months

Homelessness Strategy Action Plan 2019 – 2022 (to be reviewed annually)

Prevention of homelessness

Reference	What	Lead (or partners)	Timescale
P1	Review Housing Advice Line and Early Intervention services	Housing Solutions	Short term
P2	Introduce service standards for customers to enhance customer experience		Short term
P3	Review of existing Prevention Tools		Medium term
P4	Promotion of Housing Solutions via a communications plan for clients and partners – website / leaflets / social media / customer feedback.	Housing Solutions	Short term
P5	Introduce the requirement of Duty to Refer, protocols and partnerships – arrange a series homelessness networking events to improve links with relevant services to ensure effective data and information sharing.	Housing Providers Public authorities Voluntary sector	Short term
P6	Develop an improved monitoring process with partners to establish the		Medium term

	effectiveness of prevention work		
P7	Develop a tenancy sustainment model in partnership with landlords and the voluntary sector – with a particular focus on educating clients around the consequences of homelessness		Medium term
Supply of accommodation			
Reference	What	Lead (or partners)	Timescale
A1	Review suitability of temporary accommodation	Housing Solutions	Short term
A2	Review existing provision of supported accommodation to ensure it meets need		Medium term
A3	Increase existing supply by working with organisations and landlords to utilise empty properties for example: the ongoing models with NACRO and County Durham Housing Group	Housing Solutions Private Landlords	Medium/Long term
A4	Increase existing supply by working with social and private landlords to make better use of existing stock for example: conversions into one bedroom accommodation	Housing Providers	Medium/Long term

	Develop a proposal for a buy to lease model involving the Council working in partnership with a range of providers		Medium term
Provision of support			
Reference	What	Lead (or partners)	Timescale
S1	Review of the Housing Options and Planned Exits team remit around supporting clients	Housing Solutions	Short term
S2	Review the current advice and support given to clients in financial difficulty where there is a threat of homelessness		Short term
S3	Monitor support needs identified within Personalised Housing Plans to identify gaps in services		Short term
S4	Ensure that as housing support and supported housing is commissioned/re-commissioned it better meets the needs of homeless people, in particular where there are complex needs	Housing Solutions	Medium term
S5	Work jointly with Children and Young People's Services to	Housing Support Group	Medium term

	deliver Young People's accommodation provision.	Rough Sleeper Strategy Partnership	
S5	Deliver the Rough Sleeper Action Plan		Medium term
S6	Complete mapping of all services offering both housing related and non-housing related support across County Durham		Medium term