

Housing, Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy 2023-2028

*Three Rivers
'tackling
homelessness'*



HOMELESSNESS



**AFFORDABLE
HOUSING**

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Introduction



This strategy supports the council's vision

Our Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2023-2028, developed through consultation with partners, stakeholders and residents, presents the key objectives relating to the delivery of housing and housing-related services in the district over the next five years.

This strategy links to the Council's Corporate Framework 2023-2026, which sets out the council's vision to make Three Rivers **"a great place to live, work and visit"**.

This strategy supports the council's vision by ensuring that Three Rivers is a district where people have access to good quality housing and where our most vulnerable residents are supported.

The development of this strategy has been considered in conjunction with the context and priorities expressed through other key strategies. This includes the relationship to the Community Strategy, Strategic Plan, Local Development Framework (LDF), Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA), the Council's Local Investment Plan, and other key housing documents such as the Tenancy Strategy and Housing Allocations Policy.

As a non-stock holding authority, we deliver homes and housing services with the support of a range of partners. This strategy provides a framework for everyone involved in Three Rivers housing; registered providers, charities, private developers, investors, regulators, private landlords, neighbouring local authorities, and, of course, our residents and local councillors.

This strategy does not stand alone. Its aims and objectives are interrelated with a wide range of plans and strategies led by the council and its external partners. Delivery of the strategy's objectives will require contributions from a range of agencies and organisations. To make the best use of resources and to learn from best practice we will continually build on and develop relationships with our partners.

Foreword



Housing plays an important part in wellbeing

As the Lead Member for Housing, I understand the importance that housing plays in the wellbeing of our residents. Ensuring there is a range of housing types is important for individuals and families across the district, from supported housing and affordable rentals to starter homes and larger family homes. It also builds strong neighbourhoods and inclusive communities and supports the economic prosperity of the district.

This strategy has been developed in partnership with our key stakeholders including registered providers, landlords, local residents, as well as our elected councillors. It follows the theme of the Council's Corporate Framework in which the vision for the council is that the district should be a great place to live, work and visit.

During the last few years, we have seen more households struggling during the Covid-19 Pandemic and following on from this, the increase in the cost-of-living crisis with rising food prices and high energy bills. We have seen house prices and rents rise, leaving more households needing help to access housing and, sadly, increasing numbers of homeless people including families suffering from the effects of war in Ukraine.

The strategy articulates the priorities for tackling the challenges we have identified in the years ahead and demonstrates our collective approach to housing across the district with the council as the lead, working in partnership with registered providers, developers, private landlords and residents.

Whilst we face challenges ahead, I am confident that we can build on our excellent partnerships and work with stakeholders to utilise their experience and achieve better housing choices and outcomes for our residents.

*Councillor Andrew Scarth
Lead Member for Housing,
Public Health & Wellbeing*

About Three Rivers

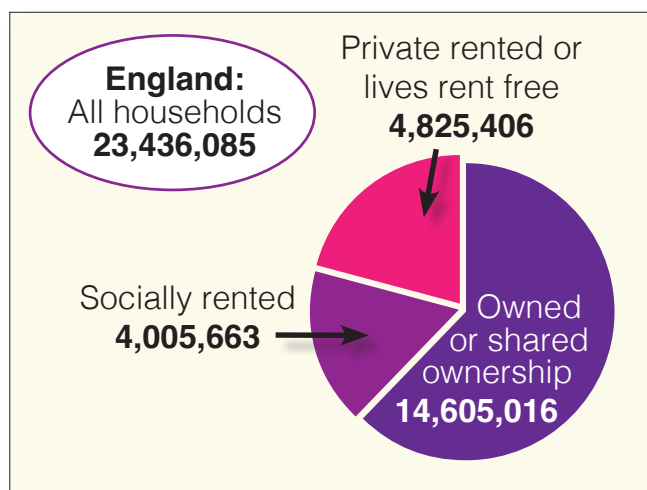
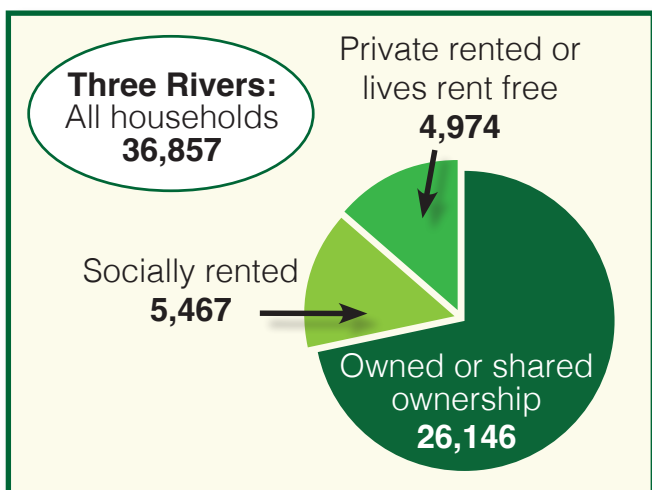
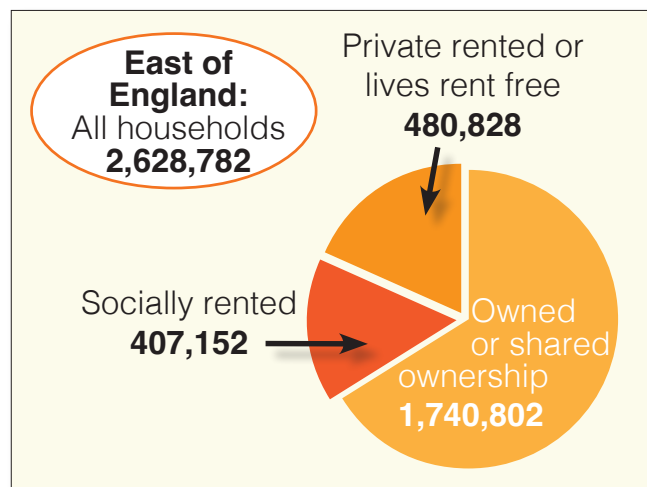


Local population within the country

The population of Three Rivers in 2011 was 87,300 and has increased by 7.4% to 93,800 in 2021. This is higher than the overall increase for England (6.6%).

According to the 2021 Census, the tenure split of the district compared to the East of England and England as a whole, can be seen in the graphics provided on this page.

Levels of home ownership in the district are slightly higher than the regional and national rates, whilst private renting is lower than both the regional and national rates. This is likely to be a result of the district being generally quite affluent and may reflect the high price of rental costs, forcing those on a lower income to look beyond Three Rivers to source affordable housing.

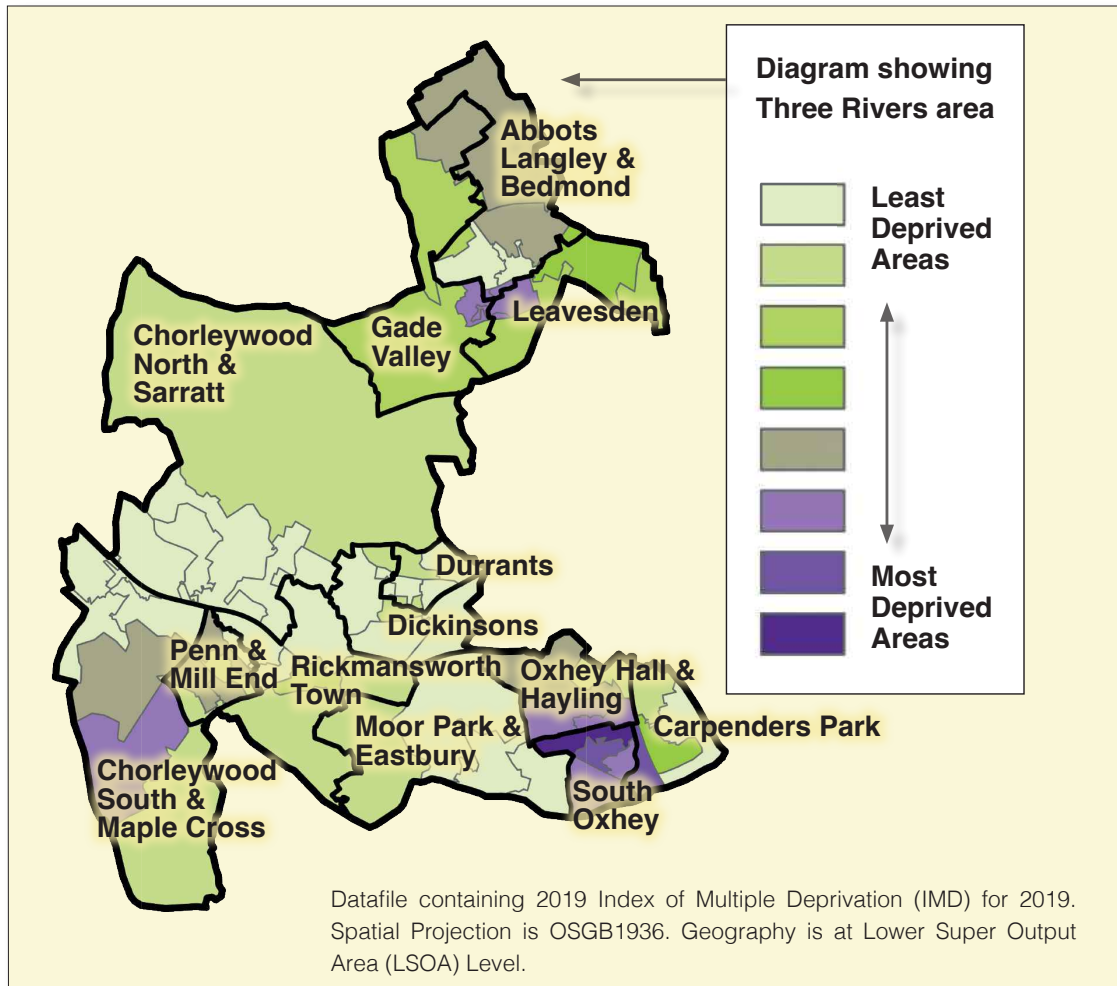


About Three Rivers



Local demographic of Three Rivers.

The 2019 Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) scores within Three Rivers are extremely polarising, reflecting an overall affluent district with some significant pockets of deprivation as shown in the image below.



About Three Rivers



Local demographic of Three Rivers

Residents in the most deprived areas of the district are more likely to be renting, this includes those tenants in social housing provided by our registered providers.

As expected, residents in the least deprived areas of the district are far more likely to be property owners.

Data indicates that residents in South Oxhey are likely to have fewer education and employment opportunities, experience greater barriers to accessing services and have lower household incomes than in other parts of the district.
























With private rented sector market rents significantly higher than Local Housing Allowance (LHA) and private landlords and estate agents increasingly reluctant to let properties to those residents who are benefit dependant or low-income households, residents in South Oxhey are more likely to require housing advice and assistance from the council, if threatened with homelessness from their current property.

About Three Rivers



Local Housing Allowance shortfalls

in different areas of the district and the district as a whole.

Local Housing Allowance shortfall	£502	£653	£904	£1,612
South Oxhey¹				
Average rent	£1,300	£1,650	£2,200	£2,995
Local Housing Allowance shortfall	£552	£653	£1,154	£1,765
WD3 Postcode¹				
Average rent	£1,350	£1,650	£2,450	£3,148
Local Housing Allowance shortfall	£502	£503	£704	
WD5 Postcode¹				
Average rent	£1,300	£1,500	£2,000	
Local Housing Allowance shortfall	£402	£553	£854	£1,515
WD19 Postcode¹				
Average rent	£1,200	£1,550	£2,150	£2,898
Local Housing Allowance shortfall	£402	£478	£904	£1,017
Kings Langley¹				
Average rent	£1,200	£1,475	£2,200	£2,400
Local Housing Allowance shortfall	£252	£303	£354	£892
Three Rivers²				
Average rent	£1,050	£1,300	£1,650	£2,275

¹ Median rent charges taken from Home.co.uk as at 26 September 2023

² ONS median monthly rents recorded between 1 April 2022 – 31 March 2023

The image above provides the average rent and Local Housing Allowance (LHA) shortfalls.

Access to housing is a fundamental part of achieving a good quality of life in which stable

relationships, good health and education, and rewarding work can be achieved.

House and rental prices across the district are high and there is a growing and ageing population which presents further housing challenges.

Homelessness in Three Rivers



Review of homelessness

2017 - 2022

The background to this strategy is the Review of Homelessness 2017-2022 carried out in mid-2023. This review and its findings can be found in Appendix A.

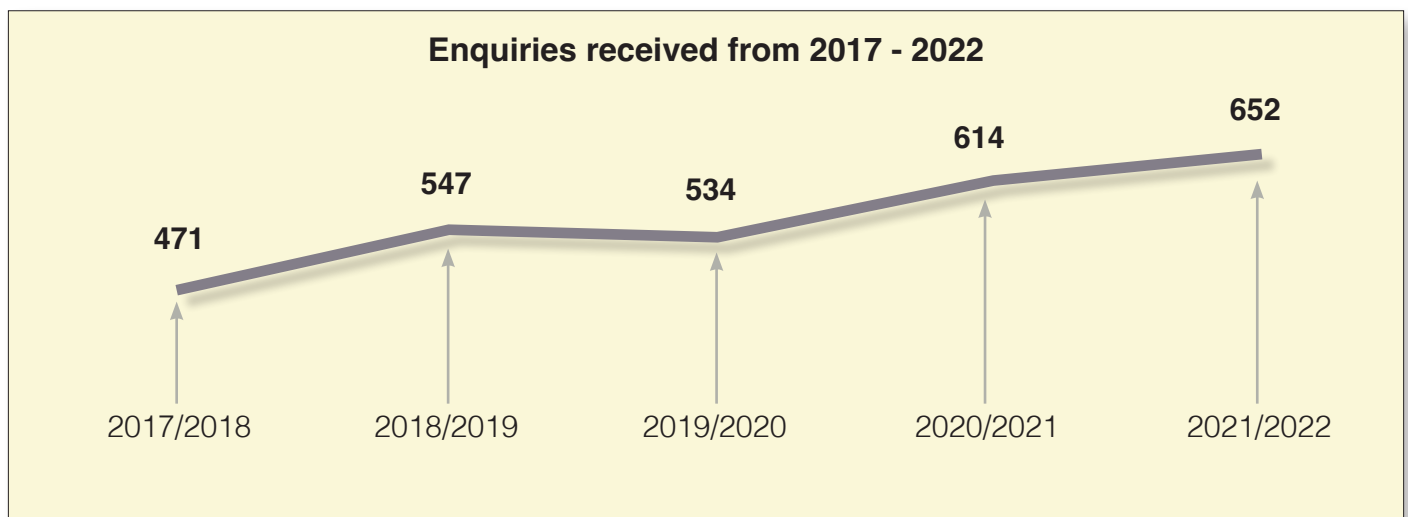
As per the graph below, overall demand on the Housing Service has increased by 50% since 2017.

Following the government's intervention during the Covid-19 pandemic and the council's response to these interventions, a significant increase in enquiries can be seen post 2019/20.

This increase has continued into the post pandemic period, which can likely be attributed to the pressure these interventions placed on families living in crowded households and the economic circumstances that have faced the country following the Covid-19 pandemic.

Although there is not a documented rough sleeping problem within the district, during the 'Everyone In' directive by central government, an underlying problem with those who are at risk of rough sleeping was identified within the district. These individuals are often only prevented from rough sleeping by 'sofa surfing' with friends and family members who are willing to accommodate them for short periods.

We acknowledge this underlying problem and have placed actions within our action plan to minimise the extent of this problem and support these individuals into long-term accommodation.



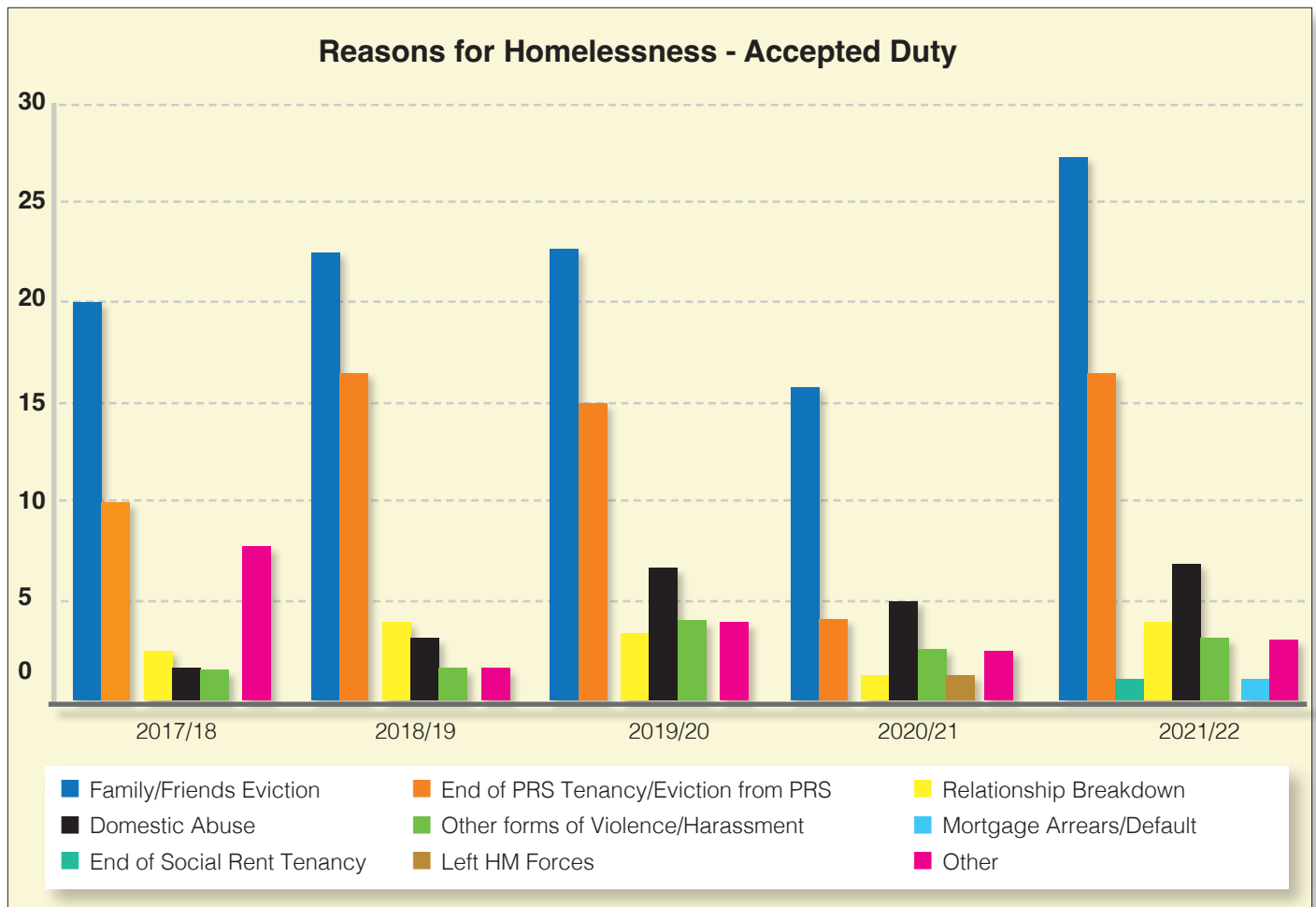
Homelessness in Three Rivers



Review of homelessness

2017 - 2022

Due to the worsening of the cost-of-living crisis during the intervening months between the completion of our review and the publishing of this document, we have seen a continuation of the rising number of homeless applicants approaching the council for housing advice and assistance.



Homelessness in Three Rivers



Review of homelessness

2017 - 2022

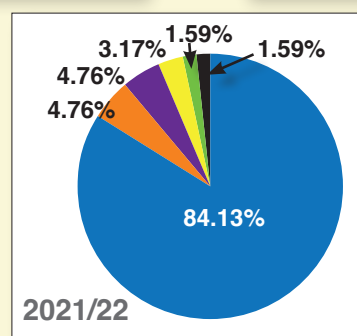
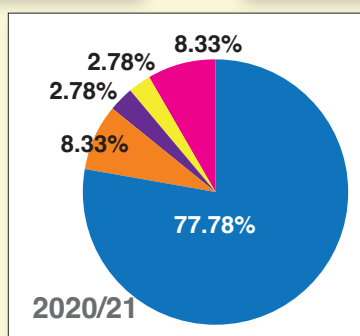
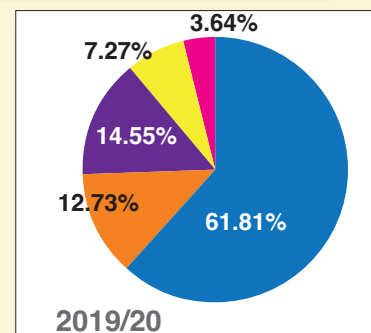
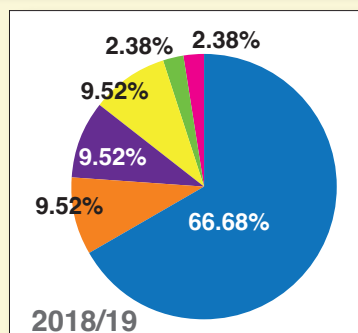
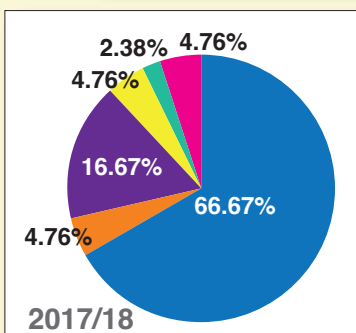
Data indicates that the primary reason for the council to accept the homelessness duty towards a household is due to an eviction by a family member (parents/extended family) or friend. This is followed closely by the eviction of a household from a property in the private rented sector.

In 2021/22, 41% of circumstances in which the council accepted a homelessness duty

towards a household, has been following an eviction from the parental (or family) home. We acknowledge that this represents a substantial majority of all acceptances in this period and, therefore, recognise that significant work to minimise this figure needs to be prioritised by the council.

Reasons for Priority need

- Dependent Children
- Mental Disability/Mental Health
- 16/17 year olds
- Domestic Abuse
- Pregnant
- Physical Disability
- Emergency
- Other



Homelessness in Three Rivers



Review of homelessness

2017 - 2022

We aim to focus on early prevention work with these customers that are being evicted from parental accommodation and have included this within the action plan.

In 2021/22, 27% of circumstances in which the council accepted a homelessness duty towards a household, has been following an eviction from a privately rented property. Despite this already being the second highest reason for the acceptance of a homelessness duty towards a household, due to the ongoing cost-of-living crisis and the increasing rental costs in the district, the council expect this figure to increase considerably.

We recognise that increasing the access to the private rented sector within the district for our customers and residents remains a significant priority and have included this within our action plan.

During the last five years, the percentage of accepted cases that fall into the above categories has remained relatively steady, although years 2019/20 and 2021/22 saw a notable increase from 2019/20 of accepted cases granted a priority need due to the household containing dependent children.

The council accept that those households who have made a homelessness application that are subsequently determined to have a priority need and offered interim accommodation due to the household containing dependent children, is largely out of our control.

However, we are confident that the focus on increased prevention work within the Housing Service will reduce our need for these customers to be provided temporary accommodation in the first instance.

External trends indicate that the council should prepare for homelessness approaches from households that are likely to have a priority need due to other factors, which is highly likely to increase.

Whilst changing the legal definition of a victim of domestic abuse, the introduction of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 has ensured that any victim of domestic abuse is granted an automatic priority need for interim accommodation, following a homelessness application to any local authority. Therefore, the council expect this number to rise substantially and has placed actions within this plan to provide ongoing support to these vulnerable individuals.

Homelessness in Three Rivers



Review of homelessness

2017 - 2022

The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and the interventions taken by central government have had a lasting impact on the mental health of the general population. Therefore, the council need to be prepared to deal with an increase of customers engaging with our Housing Service that are significantly vulnerable due to the deterioration of their mental health. This will be further impacted by the ongoing difficulty for many people to access mental health support.

Ukrainian guests who arrived in our district as part of the Homes for Ukraine Scheme, will be seeking more permanent and long-term accommodation and the closure of the hotels that have been accommodating Afghan refugees will ensure that the council will have increasing contact with vulnerable refugees. The council will continue to work with their partners, including Hertfordshire County Council and the Refugee Council, to ensure these customers receive the required level of support.

Our Vision



Three Rivers:

A district where residents feel supported.

We want Three Rivers to be a district . . .



. . . where people have access to good quality housing.

. . . where the most vulnerable residents, including those who are victims of domestic abuse, are supported.



. . . where people who are homeless, or at risk of homelessness, can access permanent and suitable accommodation.

. . . where rough sleeping, or the risk of rough sleeping, is eliminated.



Our Objectives



To realise our vision, this strategy has **three** key objectives.

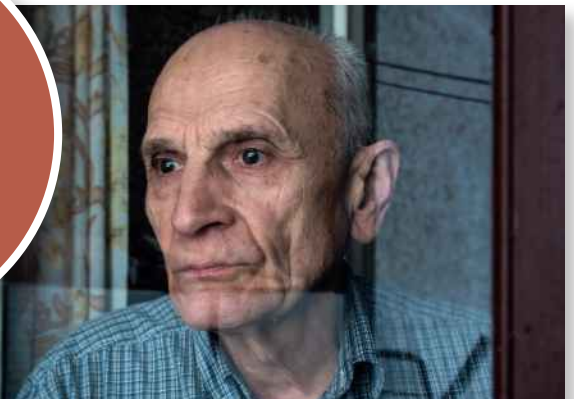


To prevent and relieve homelessness.

our
three key
objectives



Improve the standard of housing across the district.



Support our most vulnerable customers into permanent, suitable and sustainable accommodation.

To prevent and relieve homelessness



Working towards identifying further prevention opportunities

It is widely recognised that homelessness is not just a lack of housing. It never occurs in isolation and, almost without exception, is closely related to poor physical or mental health, unemployment, or poverty. It affects the most vulnerable within our communities and impacts public services beyond the council's housing team.

Since the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, we have achieved positive results for our customers and increased the prevention of homelessness significantly, as represented in the figures provided in this strategy. However, the council is aware that this essential work undertaken by officers needs to be built upon and that further prevention opportunities are required to be identified.

Although Three Rivers is a largely affluent district, our customers are not immune to the current cost-of-living crisis affecting the country and it is predicted that due to this cost-of-living crisis, approaches to the council for housing advice and assistance will increase.

We will continue to make the best use of the Homelessness Prevention Grant, provided by central government, and to ensure that Three Rivers District Council are preventing

homelessness of their customers in the first instance. However, if that is not successful, we will ensure that we work with their customers to enable them to access affordable, suitable and sustainable accommodation to relieve their homelessness.

What we aim to do



Implement a cost-of-living homelessness prevention project in partnership with our registered providers and private landlords in the district



Housing Options Officers to visit every household that is at risk of eviction from family/friend's at an early stage to identify any prevention opportunities



Ensure the council is prepared for the introduction of the Renters (Reform) Bill

Support the most vulnerable

Support our most vulnerable customers into permanent, suitable and sustainable accommodation.

There are several reasons why the council may refer to a customer as especially vulnerable, these may include customers who are suffering a mental health illness or physical illness, customers who are victims of domestic abuse or customers who have fled war and persecution in foreign countries that have been granted asylum in the United Kingdom. This also may include customers who have experienced one or more of the above, and who are now suffering from alcohol or substance addiction, as a result of their experiences.

The lasting impact of the Covid-19 pandemic cannot be ignored. The measures taken throughout that period, the effect these have had on the mental health of the population and the now considerable waiting times for people to receive mental health treatment, are likely to have a significant impact on all services over the coming years.

The Centre for Mental Health estimates that 10 million people in the United Kingdom (8.5

million adults and 1.5 million children) will require mental health support as a direct impact of the pandemic, during the next three to five years.

The council also anticipate increasing engagement with vulnerable refugees who have fled their home country in recent times, including those who have travelled to the United Kingdom as part of the Homes for Ukraine Scheme, or those who have fled Afghanistan.

On occasion, due to the support needs they require, some vulnerable customers are not suitable for housing within general needs properties, nor are they able to maintain a tenancy in the private sector without significant support. Therefore, the council must make the best use of the available stock that it has and ensure that it is suitable for these customers. At the same time, it should utilise their partners in the care and support sector, to provide ongoing wrap-around.



Support the most vulnerable



Support our most vulnerable customers into permanent, suitable, and sustainable accommodation.

Support for these individuals and support them into accommodation that is permanent, suitable, and sustainable, eliminating the chances of repeat homelessness.

What we aim to do



Efficient use of the council's Next Steps (NSAP) and Rough Sleeper (RSAP) Accommodation Programme properties



Work in partnership with Hertfordshire County Council to establish the single homeless complex needs pathway



Maximise any potential funding opportunities available for this cohort



Oversee the integration of a Domestic Abuse Caseworker within the Housing Service, aiming to support victims of domestic abuse and ensure they are aware of all support available to them



Ensure vulnerable customers who are placed by the council in temporary accommodation are provided with support

Improve the standard of housing

We aim to improve the standard of housing across the district.

We aim to improve the standard of existing homes in the district and tackle issues around access to private renting for their residents and customers. This will include encouraging the Registered Providers and developers to build net zero homes that promote sustainable living in the district. Also, to support landlords in the private rented sector, ensuring they are aware of the opportunities available to them to take advantage of the government funding available to bring their properties up to a safe, livable standard.

We are not a stock holding authority and have a low level of social housing available within the district; therefore, often rely on the private rented sector to provide safe and suitable accommodation for residents and those engaging with the Council's Housing Service.

This forced reliance in the private rented sector can be problematic, as the gap between the cost of rent locally compared to the Local Housing Allowance available to residents is significant.

Furthermore, economic pressure in the United Kingdom which has led to an extraordinary increase in mortgage rates for landlords has had a knock-on effect on rental prices in the district, with several landlords raising the rent to reflect the rise in their interest rate, or in some cases, exiting the sector completely, reducing the amount of privately rented properties available.

We aim to develop stronger partnerships with private landlords within the district to increase

access to properties for customers and to encourage landlords to ensure that any property for rent is of a safe and suitable standard. Our objective aims to ensure that the standard of housing, in all tenures, is improved across the district.



What we aim to do



Encourage registered providers and developers to build net zero homes, promote sustainable living and make space for nature within any development in the district



Draft and implement a new Housing Enforcement Policy



Revamp the Council Rent Deposit Guarantee Scheme to provide increased access to PRS properties for customers engaging with the Council's Housing Service

How will we deliver these objectives



The strategy has been developed to ensure the delivery of our objectives.

An action plan (contained in Appendix B) that is aligned with this strategy has been developed to ensure the delivery of the three current objectives.

Housing is a dynamic environment; therefore, we anticipate new challenges and issues to arise during the five years of this strategy. This may include legislative reform or a significant shift in priority for the country, as witnessed in 2022 with the launch of the Homes for Ukraine Scheme or the closure of hotels that were accommodating Afghan refugees.

To enable us to react quickly to any changing priorities or important legislative reform, this action plan will be a live document that officers will monitor over the period of the strategy to ensure that the objectives are being met in the appropriate timelines. The action plan will be flexible and enable us to change our objectives at any time, should it be required.

We will, however, continue to review our action plan annually and make any changes to our approach or policies in response to the changing environment over a long-term period.

An effective approach to homelessness and its prevention involves a partnership approach between the council and all other local statutory and voluntary agencies operating in this field. We intend to continue to utilise these partnerships to improve the housing opportunities of our customers, aim to grow these partnerships throughout the term of this strategy and foster new partnerships that will benefit our customers when the opportunity presents.

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homelessness'*

