

# Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy 2024-2029

#### Introduction

#### What is Homelessness?

The legal definition of homelessness is 'a person is homeless if they have no accommodation in the UK or elsewhere which is available for their occupation and which that person has a legal right to occupy' or has accommodation but it is not reasonable for them to continue to occupy.

Homelessness can take many forms, and whilst people often associate homelessness with those sleeping on the streets, here in West Lancashire rough sleepers make up a very small minority of homeless households.

Most homeless people in West Lancashire find themselves homeless after their landlord follows legal procedures to evict them, because they are asked to leave by family or friends, or after being subjected to domestic abuse.

Delivering a high-quality service to those facing homelessness is our priority and we will make sure that all those who need our help are given the advice and support they require. We aim to develop and shape services to meet changing needs and demand and be innovative and seek out new funding opportunities and develop partnerships to prevent and tackle homelessness in West Lancashire.

#### What are our duties toward homeless people?

The main provisions for dealing with homelessness are contained in Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996, as amended by the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.

The Council has a duty to provide information and advice about homelessness and a duty to investigate where we have reason to believe that someone is, or is threatened, with homelessness. A person is threatened with homelessness if it is likely that they will become homeless within 56 days.

**Prevention duty** - A local authority must take reasonable steps to help the applicant stay in their accommodation, for example we may do this by negotiating with landlords.

**Relief Duty** – where an applicant is homeless and eligible, we must take reasonable steps to help them secure accommodation for at least 6 months. We will work with the applicant to develop a Personalised Housing Plan setting out the actions that both parties will take.

In cases where the applicant does not have a local connection to the area a referral can be made to an authority where they do have a connection.

**Interim Accommodation** – where the applicant is homeless, eligible and in priority need, the Council has a duty to provide interim accommodation. In West Lancashire we primarily use dispersed units of our own housing stock to discharge this duty.

**Main Duty** – following the relief duty if someone is still homeless, eligible, has a priority need and is not intentionally homeless the Council has a duty to find them suitable accommodation. We often discharge the main duty through an offer of accommodation with the Council, or a Registered Provider.

**Priority Need** - those considered to be in priority need include:

- Households with dependent children and pregnant women
- Victims of domestic abuse
- 16 &17 year olds
- Vulnerable people eg older or disabled, care leavers, veterans

The Council delivers its homelessness service through a team of specialist officers who form part a multi-functional team managing the Councils housing register and its housing stock. The team follow the code of guidance and refer to current caselaw to ensure duties, investigations and assessments are conducted in accordance with legislation.

#### Why do we need a strategy?

The Homelessness Act 2002 places a duty on local housing authorities, to develop a homelessness strategy at least every five years.

For the purposes of the 2002 Act, "homelessness strategy" means a strategy formulated by a local authority for:

- a) preventing homelessness in their district;
- b) securing that sufficient accommodation is and will be available for people in their district who are or may become homeless;
- securing the satisfactory provision of support for people in their district:
   i. who are or may become homeless; or
  - i. who have been homeless and need supp
  - ii. who have been homeless and need support to prevent them becoming homeless again.

The Homelessness Strategy for West Lancashire provides an opportunity for the Council to analyse recent homelessness trends and establish our objectives to prevent and tackle homelessness over the next five years. This is the first strategy developed since the introduction of the Homeless Reduction Act 2017, which fundamentally changed the way we work with residents experiencing homelessness.

# **National Context**

The number of homeless presentations nationally is increasing,

Year	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Total number of households assessed	292,690	305,680	284,330	294,620	311,990

More people are housed in temporary accommodation with 104,510 households in temporary accommodation at the end of March 2023 compared to 80,720 in March 2018.

There have been many changes since West Lancashire's last Homelessness Strategy, including changes to legislation, the impact of the Covid 19 Pandemic, and the cost-of-living crisis.

Recent changes in legislation have significantly changed the way that homelessness is assessed and responded to. These include:

#### Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 which created 2 new duties:

- **Duty to prevent homelessness** an enhanced prevention duty extending the period a household is threatened with homelessness from 28 days to 56 days, meaning that housing authorities are required to work with people to prevent homelessness at an earlier stage; and
- Duty to relieve homelessness a new duty for those who are already homeless so that housing authorities will support households for 56 days to relieve their homelessness by helping them to secure accommodation.

#### The Domestic Abuse Act 2021

The Domestic Abuse Act strengthens the support available to victims of domestic abuse. The Act extends priority need to all eligible victims of domestic abuse who are homeless because of being a victim of domestic abuse. The 2021 Act brought in a new definition of domestic abuse which housing authorities must follow to assess whether an applicant is homeless as a result of being a victim of domestic abuse.

#### **Rough Sleeping**

The government has pledged to end rough sleeping by the end of 2024, publishing a refreshed strategy Ending Rough Sleeping for Good in September 2022. There were 3,069 people estimated to be sleeping rough on a single night in autumn 2022 in England, this is an increase of 26% from 2021.

# **Local Context**

The number of homeless presentations in West Lancashire

Year	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Total number of households assessed	221	243	241	290	372

This strategy closely links to the Housing Strategy and reflects the Council's vision, **West Lancashire together; the place of choice to live, work, visit and invest.** 

Our corporate priorities:

Priority	Area of Focus
	Build resilience to climate change and reduce our carbon footprint
Create a clean and environmentally	Reduce waste production and increase reuse and recycling
sustainable borough	Enhance and improve a safe, built environment
	Preserve the natural environment, biodiversity and landscape
	Attract investment, support businesses and direct wealth into the local economy and support cooperatives
Generate prosperity in our borough	Provide opportunities for regeneration, housing and economic business growth
	Identify the housing needs of the borough and work with partners to address them
	Attract high quality job opportunities and support people into employment and training
	Reduce health and wellbeing inequalities
Foster inclusive and healthy communities	Design services around residents and communities
	Support our Armed Forces and vulnerable residents
	Provide safe, quality and affordable homes as a social landlord
	Maintain a balanced budget and transparent decision-making
Manage a resilient, financially strong	Continue to improve our services and deliver value for money
Council	Attract, retain and develop an engaged, skilled and motivated workforce including through an Employee Recognition Scheme

# **Progress since the Last Strategy**

#### We have:

- Embedded the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 into our services.
- Worked with other Registered Providers of Social Housing to develop affordable housing.
- Maximised the delivery of affordable housing through Section 106 agreements.
- Updated the Councils Allocations Policy to improve outcomes for homeless applicants and ensure an adequate turnover in units of Temporary Accommodation.
- Developed a Financial Inclusion Strategy which is in the process of being refreshed.
- Secured Homes England Investment Partner status, enabling the Council to directly benefit from Homes England grant which in turn supports the Council to build affordable housing
- Established Tawd Valley Development Company (TVD) which supports the development of Homes England grant funded units and other residential / commercial development opportunities in line with its Business Plan. TVD have delivered 84 units for affordable rent with more in the pipeline.
- In partnership with TVD the Council has delivered 13 homes on its new Rent to Buy tenure.
- As part of a Lancashire wide bid, assisted the Liberty Centre to secure £200k funding from the Ministry for Housing Communities and Local Government which enhanced Domestic Abuse service provision in the Borough.
- Supported Birchwood to deliver a complex needs service funded by Lancashire County Council
- Provided Council land and worked in partnership with Birchwood, Registered Provider (Calico Homes) and Homes England to enable the development of a 24 bed Foyer for young people.
- Utilised new burdens funding to fund a Domestic Abuse Co-Ordinator to assist the Council meet its obligations under the Domestic Abuse Act 2021
- Launched and later extended the Rough Sleepers Support Service to provide accommodation with support for up to 2 years, to those either rough sleeping or at risk of rough sleeping.
- We have recruited additional resources in the Homelessness team, including a Temporary Accommodation Officer to offer support to individuals whilst in interim accommodation and assist with finding a permanent home.

- Worked with Lancashire County Council's Refugee Integration Team to support refugees under the Syrian Resettlement Programme, Afghanistan Relocations & Assistance Policy, and the Homes for Ukraine scheme.
- Utilised Discretionary Housing Payments to prevent homelessness.

#### **Partnership working**

We appreciate that to provide better outcomes for those facing homelessness a partnership approach is essential, we therefore aim to build on and extend our collaborative working over the lifespan of this strategy.

The Homelessness Service is provided by specialist advisors based within a multidisciplinary team providing the Councils housing management services, including lettings, tenancy management and Anti-Social Behaviour; ensuring customers are provided with the support they need finding and moving into their new home.

We provide a Furnished Tenancy Scheme to support new and existing tenants to access essential items of furniture and white goods to help them move in and sustain their tenancy and following feedback from customers we have recently introduced new packages supplying just white goods and/or carpets.

The service works closely with Rent & Money Advisors who offer a range of advice to help people keep their home including, help with budgeting, assisting with benefit claims, debt advice food bank vouchers, and applications for funding for home essentials eg white goods.

To prevent Homelessness and create more positive futures the service links into the Councils More Positive Together project which engages with residents who may need help to improve their skills, wellbeing and employment prospects.

The service works closely with other statutory and voluntary agencies, to prevent and relieve homelessness and to ensure the best outcomes for those facing homelessness this includes Social Care, the Liberty Centre, Probation Services, Police, Mental Health services and local community groups.

We have worked with neighbouring districts and partners to develop the Lancashire Care Leavers Joint Housing Protocol, which is delivered through regular meetings of the Leaving Care Lasting Homes Panel.

The Council leads the West Lancashire Health and Wellbeing Partnership, who are focusing on Health in Housing as a key priority.

The team is represented on the Lancashire Armed Forces Covenant Network and supports the rehousing of armed forces personnel through its Allocations Policy.

The service has a good working relationship with HM Prison & Probation Services and is represented at regular Central Lancashire Prison Leaver Meetings to aid accommodation outcomes for individual prison leavers.

We are part of the Local Priorities & Genga Group which brings together a multiagency team, including Police, Community Safety team, Police, NHS, Probation services, Social Care Domestic Abuse Services together to tackle local issues and organised crime.

We attend regular meetings of MARAC, working with partners to ensure survivors of domestic abuse can access the help and support they need. The Council partners with the Liberty Centre to operate a Sanctuary scheme to provide additional security measures to allow people at risk of ongoing abuse to stay in their own homes.

Together with the West Lancashire Liberty Centre and Edge Hill Students Union, we have developed a social media campaign, 'Don't be a bystander'. The campaign aims to help encourage people who think that a friend, relative or colleague who is suffering from domestic violence, to get support, advice or assistance.

In partnership with Birchwood we provide 10 units of accommodation with support, to Rough Sleepers or those who have a history of homelessness and who have complex needs that may be preventing them from accessing or maintaining their own accommodation.

#### **Homelessness Review**

To inform this strategy, a review of homelessness was carried out early in 2023. The purpose was to:

- Review the current and likely future levels of homelessness.
- Identify the people at risk of homelessness.
- Identify the main causes of homelessness.
- Review the homelessness prevention measures carried out by the Council.
- Review the accommodation and support options available for those who are homeless or threatened with homelessness.

#### Key findings from the Review

In West Lancashire:

#### **Housing Register**

Demand for Social Housing is increasing with the number of active applications with West Lancashire HomeFinder, the Council's choice based letting scheme, increasing from 938 in April 2018 to 1365 in April 2023.

The proportion of applicants experiencing a higher level of Housing Need has also increased, with 20% of applicants now in the High Priority Category (Band B) compared to 10% in 2018.

There has been a significant increase in the time taken for applicants in the High Priority (Band B), which is the banding awarded to those accepted as having a homeless duty owed to them, to be rehoused. Applicants in Band B are having to wait on average, over 5 months longer, to be rehoused than in 2018/19.

#### **Homeless Applications**

Homelessness Presentations and numbers of cases owed the Prevention, Relief and Main duties are all increasing. In 18/19 the Council received 221 Homeless presentations, this increased to 372 in 22/23 and is projected to rise further to 480 in 23/24.

The main reasons for homelessness remain, the ending of private rented tenancies, family and friends no longer able to accommodate and domestic abuse.

#### **Temporary Accommodation**

The numbers of homeless people needing to go into temporary accommodation is increasing, with 23 households accommodated in 2018/19, compared to 50 in 2022/23. The length of stay in temporary accommodation has also increased by on average 40 days to 99 days in 22/23.

#### **Rough Sleeping**

Whilst the last rough sleepers estimate recorded five rough sleepers; there are a significant number of people particularly single persons who are sofa surfing and therefore at risk of rough sleeping at any time.

#### Support

There is a lack of housing related support services in the borough, which is a concern as a higher proportion of those presenting as homeless have a history of mental health issues, rising from 41% in 2018/19 to 70% in 2021/22.

#### **Social Housing Stock**

Whilst the Council has undertaken a sustained programme of development over the past few years, Right to Buy sales continue to exceed new build completions, reducing overall stock levels.

#### Home Ownership

Average house prices are high whilst income levels are lower than average, making it more difficult to get on the property ladder, and as the mortgage interest rate increases many are finding it increasingly difficult to maintain mortgage payments.

#### **Private Rented Sector**

Whilst rent levels in Private Rented sector are mid-range for Lancashire, there is an affordability gap for those claiming benefits as LHA (local Housing Allowance) rates are below market rent levels. Whilst LHA is set to increase in April 2024, this may have limited impact if private rents continue to increase. The private rented sector is gradually reducing. This may escalate further as private landlords face the challenges of tax changes, cost of living crisis, increases in interest rates, concerns about tenants' ability to pay and the impending removal of s21 notices i.e., no fault evictions.

## **Our Vision**

# To prevent homelessness in West Lancashire, helping residents to find and keep their home.

To achieve our vision and stop the cycle of homelessness we will continue to work collaboratively with our partners, seek out funding opportunities and develop new and innovative solutions to prevent and relieve homelessness. This Strategy outlines our key priorities and actions that we will take over the next 5 years to achieve this.

The Action plan will be reviewed every 6 months in the first year and then annually, to ensure that it remains relevant; and to consider any emerging priorities and actions.

#### **Our Key Priorities**



# Homelessness & Rough Sleepers Strategy 2024-29 – Action Plan

#### **Objective 1 Preventing Homelessness**

Action	Task	Responsible Officers	Timescale
Identify Homelessness at an early stage.	Implement Triage Service on a pilot basis.	Tenancy Service Manager/Homefinder Team Leader/Senior Homelessness Officer	June 2024
	Deliver training for partner agencies to help them identify and refer those who might be at risk of homelessness at an early stage.	Senior Homelessness Officer	Dec 2024
Develop partnerships to maintain people in their home	Work across services and organisations to proactively prevent and reduce homelessness.	Tenancy Service Manager/Homefinder Team Leader/Senior Homelessness Officer	April 2025
Provide better outcomes at Prevention stage	Develop a Homelessness Prevention Partnership linking voluntary, and statutory organisations.	Tenancy Service Manager/Homefinder Team Leader/Senior Homelessness Officer	April 2025
	Prioritise Homeless prevention cases on Housing Register at earliest opportunity, offering support to identify all housing options.	Triage & Homelessness Officers	June 2024

	Creating links to local services; offering opportunities to improve physical and mental health, education, leisure and cultural activities; and providing access to training, volunteering and employment	Homefinder Team Leader/Senior Homelessness Officer	April 2025
Involve people who have had experience of homelessness to improve our service	Carry out feedback survey with customers who have approached the Homelessness service, to inform strategy. Use data, feedback and evidence to understand ways to work smarter to manage demand and to inform how we improve prevention and relief intervention services.	Tenancy Service Manager Tenancy Service Manager/Homefinder Team Leader	Complete 2023 Jan 2024
Ensure that when people are discharged from institutional settings, they have accommodation and services in place to help them avoid homelessness, including good health support.	Review and develop protocols for care leavers, prison leavers and hospital discharge Provide early advice and housing options services to people leaving the armed forces and prioritise veterans for housing and support.	Senior Homelessness Officer Senior Homelessness Officer	Dec 2025 June 2024

Deliver easy access to specialist advice to reduce risk of homelessness	Review team structure to ensure it offers resilience and is fit for purpose.	Tenancy Services Manager/ Homefinder Team Leader	June 2024
	Review service to ensure it is as accessible as possible via telephone or face to face, or through digital channels.	Senior Homelessness Officer/Homefinder Team Leader	Sept 2024
	<ul> <li>Improve advice available online.</li> <li>Promote service and key messages on social media.</li> </ul>		
	Ensure staff are well trained, up to date with homelessness case law and have the expertise required to prevent homelessness using a variety of tools and techniques.	Senior Homelessness Officer	June 2024
	Expand links to mediation services to maintain or repair relationships whilst longer term housing solutions are identified.	Senior Homelessness Officer	Dec 2024

	Expand our understanding and service offer to ethnic minorities, the LGBT+ community and other minority groups.	Tenancy Services Manager/ Homefinder Team Leader	April 2025
Build on our relationships with Registered Providers and Private Landlords.	Develop pre-eviction protocols with RPs to notify of impending possession proceedings.	Senior Homelessness Officer/ Housing Strategy & Development Programme Manager	April 2026
	Investigate options for introducing a Call Before You Serve Scheme Offering advice to Private Landlords prior to serving notice.	Tenancy Services Manager/Homefinder Team Leader/Senior Homelessness Officer	April 2026
Stop repeat homelessness by getting people tenancy ready.	Develop Pre-Tenancy Training Package	Financial Inclusion Team Leader/Homefinder Team Leader/Neighbourhood Team Leader	April 2024
	Develop homelessness employment pathways for people who have recently lost employment or who are otherwise looking for work.	Tenancy Services Manager/Homefinder Team Leader/Community & Wellbeing Manager	Dec 2024

## **Objective 2 Relieving Homelessness**

Action	Task	Responsible Officer	Timescale
Take timely action to relieve homelessness	Update Allocations Policy to allow matching of Homeless applicants to suitable properties outside CBL bidding system.	Tenancy Services Manager	Complete July 2023
	Develop allocations procedures to ensure fairness and transparency	Tenancy Services Manager/Homefinder Team Leader	Complete September 2023
Find innovative solutions to increase the supply of temporary accommodation	Work with voluntary and private sector to find innovative solutions for the provision of temporary accommodation.	Tenancy Service Manager/Homefinder Team Leader/Senior Homelessness Officer/Birchwood	April 2025
	Work with TVD to investigate use of Modular housing solutions.	TVD/Head of Housing/Tenancy Services Manager	April 2024
	Develop cost recovery charging model for Council temporary accommodation.	Tenancy Service Manager/Principal Finance Business Partner	Dec 2024
Provide support to those in the Councils Temporary accommodation to reduce length of stay and get tenancy ready	Work with partners including Health & Wellbeing Partnership to develop an integrated support service including finding settled accommodation, provide financial advice, health advice and	Tenancy Services Manager/Homefinder Team Leader/Senior Homelessness Officer	Dec 2025

	support finding training/employment. Ensure support needs are identified and referrals are made to relevant services.	Triage and Homelessness Officers	Sept 2025
Investigate the feasibility of delivering more specialist forms of housing in partnership with private sector landlords	Consider options for acquiring/working with private sector to develop houses of multiple occupation to provide more housing options for young people on low incomes.	Tenancy Services Manager/Homefinder Team Leader/Senior Homelessness Officer	April 2026
	Develop options for future use of the Heversham properties (previously Crisis Centre)	Birchwood/ Housing Strategy & Development Programme Manager	April 2026
	Drive the development of new Refuge provision to support victims of Domestic Abuse.	Housing Strategy & Development Programme Manager, Liberty Centre	April 2026
Encourage and enable development of affordable homes across the borough.	Utilise data to drive the direction of TVD future developments to ensure that new affordable housing addresses the needs of homeless people and is the correct size, type and in the right location to meet our housing need requirements.	Head of Housing Services/ Tenancy Services Manager/Tawd Valley Developments	Ongoing

	Develop a plan for investing Council Right to Buy receipts to meet our housing need requirements. Bring back long-term voids into use and identify opportunities for maximising units through redesign of empty homes.	Head of Housing Services/ Principal Finance Business Partner Head of Housing Services/ Tenancy Services Manager/Investment Manager/Tawd Valley Developments	October 2024 April 2027
Review the impact of the Allocation Scheme on people who are at risk of homelessness.	Review allocation outcomes for homeless people, including waiting time and length of stay in temporary accommodation.	Tenancy Services Manager	July 2024
Make sure that people can access affordable, good-quality homes in the private-rented sector,	Review private rented provision. Develop relationships with larger landlords in West Lancashire and neighbouring areas	Tenancy Services Manager/Homefinder Team Leader/Senior Homelessness Officer	Jan 2026
Create a framework for closer working with Registered Providers	Establish partnership forum for RPs working in West Lancashire	Housing Strategy & Development Programme Manager	May 2024

# **Objective 3 Improve Support to Prevent, relieve and stop reoccurring homelessness.**

Action	Task	Responsible Officer	Timescale
Ensure that people have access to ongoing support when they move on to their own tenancies,	Investigate options/funding opportunities for resettlement services	External Grant funding Officer/Tenancy Services Manager/Homefinder Team Leader	July 2025
Help shape Support for those suffering domestic abuse	Ensure any victim of domestic abuse has somewhere safe to stay and receive support.	Homelessness Advice & Prevention Team	June 2024
	Develop Domestic Abuse Policy for Housing Services	Tenancy Services Manager	Sept 2024
	Consider options of becoming member of Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance and look at options for achieving accreditation.	Tenancy Services Manager	Sept 2024
	Review Sanctuary scheme to ensure that it is fit for purpose.	Homefinder Team Leader	June 2025
Provide timely high quality financial advice to those who are homeless.	Develop a coordinated network of support, to offer those in temporary accommodation money advice and help into work where appropriate.	Senior Homelessness Officer/Financial Inclusion Team Leader	July 2025

Offer high quality support to new tenants.	Develop new more flexible Furnished Tenancy Packages	Tenancy Services Manager/Neighbourhood Team Leader	Complete December 2023
	Carry out a review of Tenancy Services focusing on how we support new and existing tenants to maintain their tenancies	Head of Housing/Tenancy Services Manager	April 2025
Review the provision for Rough Sleepers	Develop close links with the third sector investigation options for joint working to improve outcomes for rough sleepers.	Tenancy Services Manager/Homefinder Team Leader/Senior Homelessness Officer	December 2024
	Explore options and funding for provision of outreach services.	External Grant funding Officer/Tenancy Services Manager/Homefinder Team Leader	Aug 2025
	Work with partners to investigate options for short term accommodation/sit up service linked to Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP)	External Grant funding Officer/Tenancy Services Manager/Homefinder Team Leader	Sept 2024
Promote awareness of available support	Promote services and mechanisms for reporting rough sleeping.	Senior Homelessness Officer	December 2024
	Develop media campaigns to promote advice and support services.	Senior Homelessness Officer	December 2024