

Homelessness in Barnsley

1.0 Introduction

1.1 This report outlines the changes to homeless legislation and practice over the last few years, gives an update on the current position in Barnsley and outlines the plans to address homelessness post Coronavirus (Covid-19).

2.0 Background

2.1 A person is threatened with homelessness if they:-

- are likely to become homeless in 56 days
- have received a valid notice to quit (S21 notice)
- have received a notice that their landlord requires possession of accommodation (Notice Seeking Possession) which expires within 56 days

2.2 People present to the homeless service for many different reasons and each individual circumstance will require a unique response. Some people just require housing advice and signposting in the right direction and will not fall into the categories above, whereas others will meet the triggers above and a homeless application will be taken. This includes a full assessment of needs and will determine what legal duties are owed to the customer, including whether there is a requirement to provide temporary accommodation.

2.3 The main reasons for homelessness in Barnsley over the last couple of years have been:-

- Family and friends no longer willing to accommodate
- Relationship breakdown
- Leaving prison
- Section 21 notices – end of a private rented tenancy
- Domestic Abuse

2.4 The impacts of homelessness are far reaching, not having a home can make it harder for individuals to get jobs, stay healthy and maintain relationships, as can be seen in the diagram below:-



Source: <https://www.homeless.org.uk/facts/understanding-homelessness/impact-of-homelessness>

2.5 As a result, the main support needs identified are:

- Mental and physical health
- Offender history
- History of repeat homelessness
- Drug dependency

2.6 The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, which came into force on the 3 April 2018, changed the statutory duties and the way of working around homelessness. The main changes included:

- Strengthening the preventative approach to homelessness, ensuring that applications were taken earlier to try and prevent homelessness.
- An emphasis on the need to develop robust Personal Housing Plans, outlining the reasonable steps that the council, partners and the individual would take to resolve their housing situation.
- The introduction of the Duty to Refer - a legal duty on specified public bodies to refer people into the service who were homeless or at risk of being homeless.
- Outlining the need to ensure that the assessment process considered the causes of homelessness and what measures needed to be in place to stop reoccurrence.
- An increase in the number of people the council has a duty to support and provide advice to, especially aimed at single people.
- The introduction of the concepts of 'prevention' and 'relief' duties. Prevention is where someone is still in accommodation, and relief is where the customer is already homeless. In both cases, we have a duty to work with them for a minimum of 56 days to try and prevent or relieve homelessness. If this is not possible and certain conditions are met, the council may owe someone a full housing duty. This means that they have been unable to either prevent or relieve their homelessness within the 56 days or longer and the individual is eligible (immigration status) for assistance, in priority need, are not intentionally homeless, and have a local connection.
- Placing a duty on local authorities to provide comprehensive housing advice to all residents of the borough with a particular emphasis on certain groups such as care leavers, veterans, those leaving prison.

2.7 In Barnsley, the Homeless Reduction Act 2017 built on the direction of travel we were already taking around homelessness, as plans had been put in place to move towards a more preventative and partnership approach to tackling and reducing homelessness. The Homeless Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2018-2023 then set out the vision and ambitions for the borough. (Rough sleeping is defined by the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government as 'people sleeping, about to bed down [sitting on/in or standing next to their bedding] or actually bedded down in the open air [such as, on the streets, in tents, doorways, parks, bus shelters or encampments], and people in buildings or other places not designed for habitation [such as stairwells, barns, sheds, car parks, cars, derelict boats, stations, or 'bashes']'. The definition does not include people in hostels or shelters, sofa surfers, people in campsites or other sites used for recreational purposes or organised protests, squatters or Travelers sites').

2.8 The Barnsley Strategy includes a commitment to end rough sleeping locally, to work in a preventative way, reduce the use of bed and breakfast accommodation, and to ensure that appropriate accommodation and support is available to prevent homelessness and rough sleeping. The strategy acknowledges the need to work in partnership, develop appropriate accommodation and support pathways and target high-pressure areas that can lead to homelessness and rough sleeping.

2.9 In recognition of this, the Housing Options team was restructured to give more capacity to prevention and tenancy sustainment, bringing in tenancy support, a dedicated private rented sector officer, a financial resilience officer and additional outreach capacity through a successful RSI (Rough Sleepers Initiative) bid. A Homeless Alliance was established and supported the strategy action plan's delivery, promotion work with partners about the importance of early referrals had commenced, and the scoping of a more productive accommodation and support pathway had begun. Intelligence around rough sleepers had improved alongside understanding of their complex support needs and how to tackle these.

3.0 Current Position

3.1 Prior to Covid-19, the service had started to see positive homeless prevention work with slightly more successful preventions than reliefs, showing that people were approaching the service earlier, and we were able to intervene to prevent homelessness. The numbers in temporary accommodation started to level off, and new options as alternatives to bed and breakfast were being implemented, such as Shared Lives (where homeless people would be placed with host families as a form of temporary accommodation – currently on hold due to restrictions), and dispersed self-contained local properties. The service was working positively with a number of entrenched rough sleepers, building up trust and supporting them to move from the streets.

3.2 However, with the onset of the pandemic, the dynamics of the situation in relation to homelessness were compounded, particularly regarding rough sleeping and those in unstable accommodation and sharing with other households. Therefore, the social issues of homelessness and rough sleeping were brought more sharply into focus with the added dimension of an acute and immediate public health risk associated with those affected by unstable housing and rough sleeping. The major impacts of this are outlined below, and this has led to changes in service delivery and the development of a Homeless Recovery Plan.

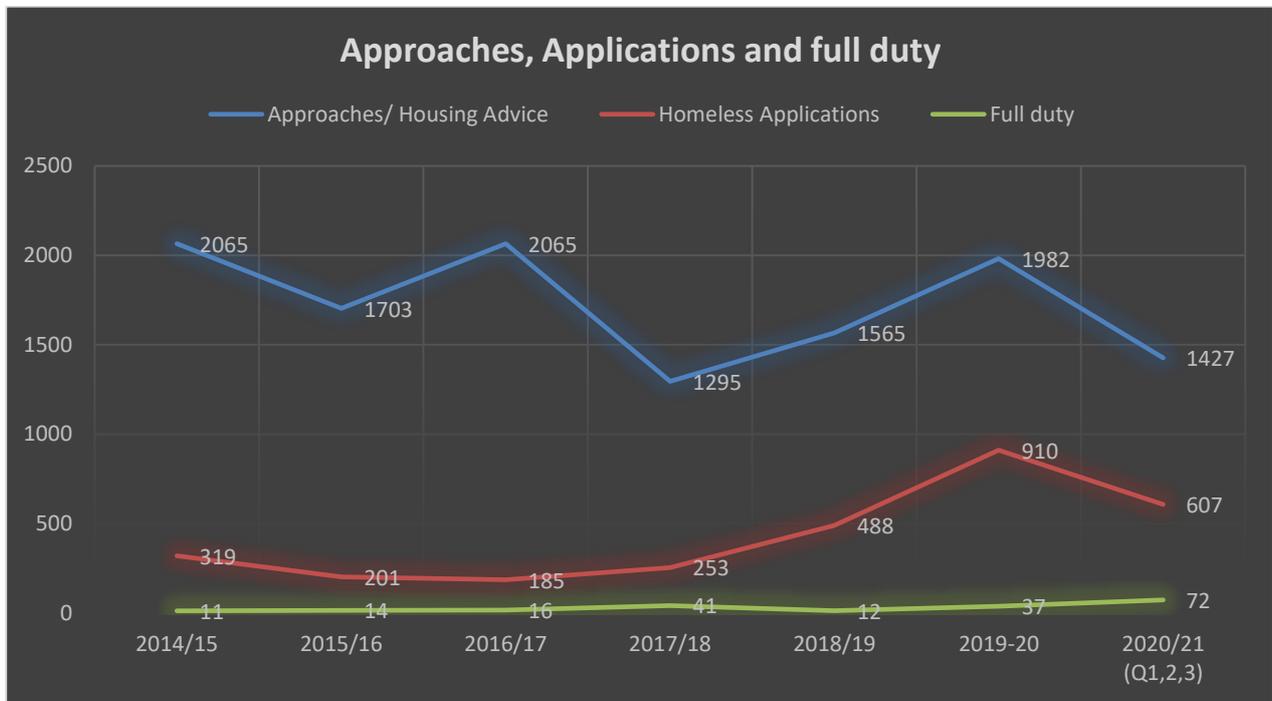
- In March 2020, the Government announced the 'Everyone In' policy, asking local authorities to ensure that as a result of the pandemic, rough sleepers were offered temporary accommodation.
- There have been restrictions on evictions and increased notice periods of six months. So, eviction cases have not been coming through the service, although we have seen an increase in approaches over the last few months.
- The Housing Options team took over the temporary management of twelve flats; this was increased through winter to fourteen and increased its capacity of dispersed temporary accommodation units.
- The focus of the team has changed during Covid-19; there has been less opportunity to support prevention work, and staff have been pulled away to support the management of the temporary accommodation.
- People are generally presenting in the 'relief' stage, meaning they are already homeless and many of these have more than just accommodation needs.
- Covid-19 has led to an increase in people being placed in temporary accommodation across the board, including bed and breakfast and hotels. This is mainly singles as a result of Everyone In. In normal circumstances, the council would not always have a duty to provide temporary accommodation to some of these customers, mainly due to them not being classed as a 'priority need'.
- The majority of presentations have been from single people.
- Access to general needs accommodation and move on options has slowed due to Covid-19 and the three lockdowns across all tenure types. This has resulted in longer stays in temporary accommodation and more people being owed a full housing duty as opportunities to prevent and relieve homelessness have been limited.
- The office has been closed as staff have worked from home; however, a freephone number was provided as soon as the office closed, and rough sleeper outreach has continued throughout, supported by partners.

4.0 Data Analysis

Approaches, Applications & Full Duty

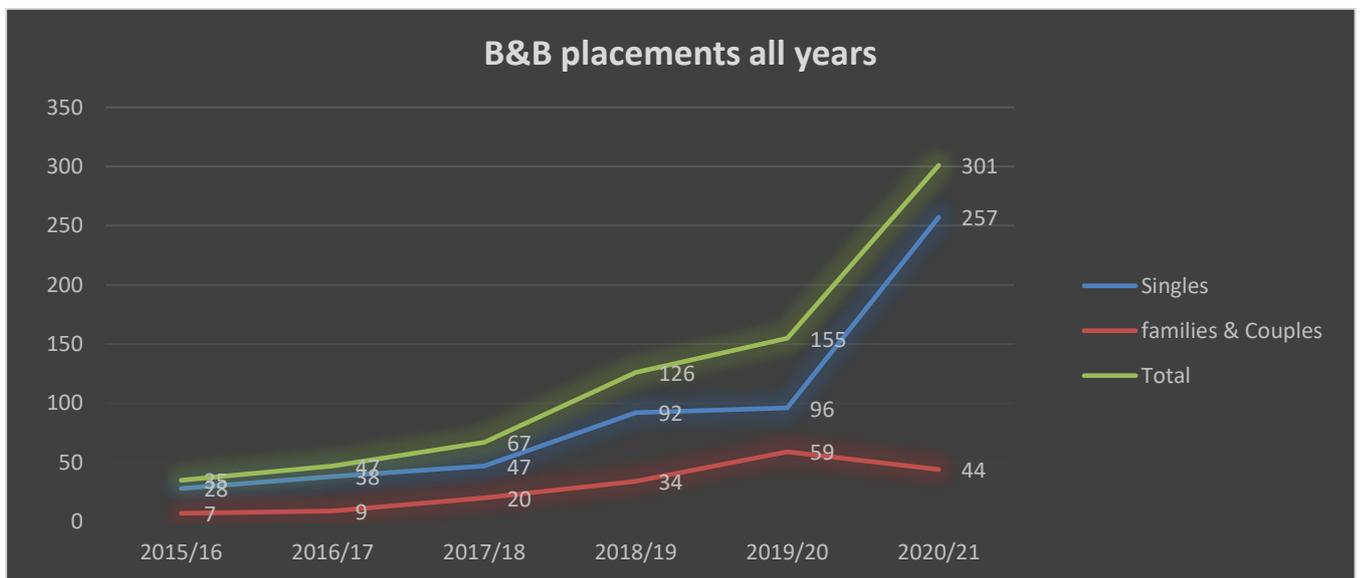
4.1 The graph below shows the trends for the number of people approaching the service/receiving housing advice, submitting homeless applications, and those entitled to full housing duty over a seven-year period from 2014/15 to 2020/21 (quarter 3).

4.2 The number of approaches to the service have remained similar to last year, but it needs to be recognised that this is likely to increase once eviction proceedings start again. This may also be compounded by the economic impact that Covid-19 has had on residents of the borough, with more people struggling to pay essential bills, including rent and the threat of unemployment. All of which could lead to an increase in homeless presentations.

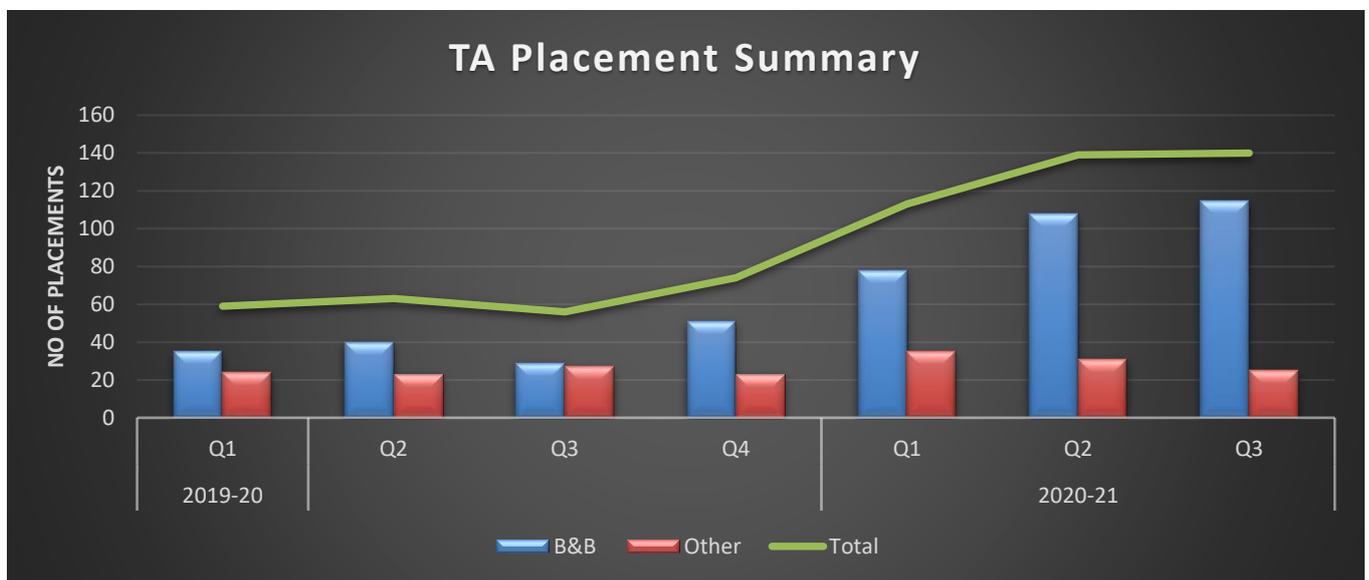


Temporary Accommodation (TA)

4.3 The graphs below show the bed and breakfast placements and costs over the last few years. As can be seen, there was an increase when the Homeless Reduction Act was implemented at the beginning of April 2018 as more people approached the service, and more duties were owed. But it was starting to level off as alternative options came into use and more prevention activity was taking place. However, when Covid-19 hit, this increased significantly, especially for singles. This is mainly attributed to the 'Everyone In' policy and correlates to the national picture.



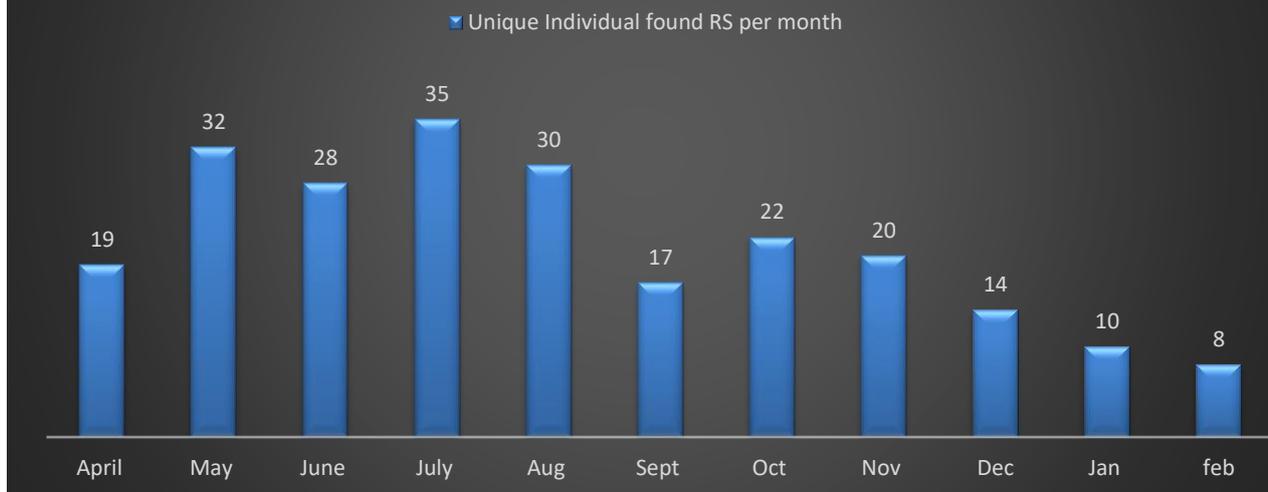
The 2020-21 figures only include Q1,2 and 3 data



Rough Sleepers

- 4.4 The nature and causes of rough sleeping are complex, and rarely is accommodation just the solution. Since 2016 we have employed a rough sleeper outreach worker within the team, and in 2019, we successfully secured RSI funding and employed another worker. Their role is to undertake proactive early morning outreach a minimum of three times a week and respond to all reported rough sleepers. They work with partners to try and facilitate engagement in the options available and carry a small caseload to prevent repeat rough sleeping. Between April 2020 and February 2021, they have undertaken proactive outreach/responded to 857 rough sleeper reports, engaging with 235 individuals. These are a mixture of entrenched rough sleepers, those new to the streets, those who may be returning after a period away from the streets and those who already have accommodation available to them.
- 4.5 The graph below shows the individual rough sleepers found each month. It should be noted that some individuals will be found over several months. An analysis of rough sleepers for 2019-20 showed that the service had worked with 106 unique individuals, 89 males and 17 females. There is a high rate of returning rough sleepers in Barnsley, and this is an area we are keen to address. There tends to be patterns of accessing accommodation, losing it, in and out of prison with periods of rough sleeping. Evidence shows that rapid rehousing and support can reduce repeat presentations and overall numbers of rough sleeping.

Individual RS per month found per month 2020/21



- 4.6 Through 'Everyone In', all verified rough sleepers have been offered a bed. To date, we have accommodated 135 individuals; some of these have been accommodated several times in different accommodation types. A significant number of these are still accommodated in temporary accommodation, have moved into more settled accommodation or moved to supported housing. Since January 2021, numbers have dropped significantly, and a contributory factor to this could be the triggering of cold weather protocols. If the temperature drops to zero degrees SWEP (Severe Weather Emergency Protocol) will be triggered, offering all rough sleepers a bed for the night. In effect we have been operating like this since 'Everyone In' was announced in March 2020. However, some of the rough sleepers who had previously refused or had been asked to leave accommodation were placed under SWEP. Rough sleeper numbers do tend to drop over winter due to the cold weather.
- 4.7 The challenge for the Housing Options service and its partners now is to move back to a more preventative way of working, to reduce the numbers in temporary accommodation, especially bed and breakfast; move the accommodated rough sleepers on in a planned way to more sustainable options; and ensure we are prepared for any post-Covid-19 fallout in terms of homelessness.

5.0 Future Plans & Challenges

- 5.1 A Homeless Recovery Plan has been developed; this is a dynamic document in line with the changing landscape in which Covid-19 has us operating. Plans are in place to close down the fourteen temporary flats that were stepped up due to 'Everyone In'. These were always intended to be a short-term option. The existing residents all have robust support plans in place and move on options are progressing.
- 5.2 The Housing Options team will continue to manage its own portfolio of dispersed temporary accommodation and in addition will be developing a supported housing scheme for those with more complex needs/rough sleepers as an alternative to bed and breakfast out of the area, making sure that accommodation and support can be provided to address homelessness and underlying support needs.
- 5.3 Alongside this, a new staff team will be recruited to support people both in this accommodation and in the community as part of move on plans. There is a proposal to pilot a Housing First model of support and plans to work alongside several partners to develop a clear housing and support pathway. This will involve working with key partners such as health (mental and physical), Recovery Steps (support for drug and alcohol usage), the probation and criminal justice system, the police, the voluntary and faith-based sector, the Department for Work & Pensions (DWP), social care, commissioned and non-commissioned housing providers and a range of landlords both social and private.

- 5.4 A further RSI bid has been submitted to support the recovery plan, focussing on the complex needs of customers and the high-risk areas of repeat homelessness. This will involve the development of prison and hospital protocols, again focussing on early identification of the threat of homelessness or the insecure housing situation that people can find themselves in.
- 5.5 A multi-agency panel has been established to ensure that all partners are feeding into effective support plans and risk assessments for the most complex customers. Bringing their expertise and ideas to cases often leads to better outcomes.
- 5.6 The recovery plan also recognises the longer-term impact Covid-19 could have on homelessness from a financial hardship perspective and the pending lifting eviction ban. It is essential in these circumstances that we ensure people contact us or seek advice at the earliest opportunity to prevent a reactive crisis.

6.0 Invited Witnesses

- 6.1 The following witnesses have been invited to today's meeting to answer questions from the Overview & Scrutiny Committee:-
- Wendy Lowder - Executive Director Adults & Communities, BMBC
 - Phil Hollingsworth - Service Director Stronger, Safer, Healthier Communities, BMBC
 - Paul Brannan - Head of Safer Barnsley, BMBC
 - Michelle Kaye - Group Leader, Housing and Welfare, BMBC
 - Rachael Todd - Team Leader, Housing & Triage, BMBC
 - James Harding - Team Leader Housing & Support, BMBC
 - Cllr Jenny Platts - Cabinet Spokesperson Adults & Communities, BMBC

7.0 Possible Areas for Investigation

- 7.1 Members may wish to ask questions around the following areas:
- What have been the greatest challenges and opportunities presented to the service over the last 12 months? What has gone well and not so well?
 - What do you anticipate the next 12 months to look like in relation to the number of people requiring support? What plans are being put in place now?
 - How will you know if your strategy is successful and what outcomes do you hope to achieve?
 - How have you worked with partners to ensure that they meet their 'Duty to Refer'?
 - How will you know whether Personal Housing Plans are robust and of sufficient quality and who is responsible for ensuring that the actions are carried out?
 - What happens if an individual does not agree with the content of their Personal Housing Plan?
 - How will you ensure that people contact you at the earliest opportunity to 'prevent a reactive crisis'?
 - Would you describe local systems and services as proactive or reactive and is there an alignment of checks and balances between the different layers of the system to prevent homelessness?
 - Did Covid-19 expose the full extent of hidden homelessness in Barnsley? If so, were you surprised by the figures?
 - How do rough sleepers access primary care services for basic physical health care needs, health checks, and mental health support? Is provision suitable and sufficient?
 - What plans are in place to vaccinate rough sleepers against Covid-19?

- What work has been done to fully understand the root causes that lead to people becoming homeless in Barnsley and how to address the issues to prevent reoccurrence?
- How do you ensure that those with multiple-complex needs do not fall through the gaps?
- Are there any people in Barnsley who have become, or are already homeless, and have no recourse to public funds, or who did not meet the eligibility criteria? If so, what support is available to them?
- Have any homeless people been the subject of a Safeguarding Adults Review in recent years, either locally or nationally, and what lessons have been learned?
- What can Elected Members do to support the work of the service in preventing and relieving homelessness?

8.0 Background Papers and Useful Links

8.1 Homelessness Prevention & Rough Sleeping Strategy 2018-2023:-

<https://www.barnsley.gov.uk/media/15451/homeless-prevention-and-rough-sleeping-strategy.pdf>

Crisis one-page explainer of the Homelessness Reduction Act:-

https://www.crisis.org.uk/media/238825/crisis_hra_guidance_1pp.pdf

BMBC Website:-Homeless & Housing Advice:-

<https://www.barnsley.gov.uk/services/housing/homeless-and-housing-advice/>

UK Government Statistics – Live Tables on Homelessness:-

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-homelessness>

UK Government website – Rough Sleeping Snapshot in England (Autumn 2020:-

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/rough-sleeping-snapshot-in-england-autumn-2020/rough-sleeping-snapshot-in-england-autumn-2020>

Shelter – Housing Advice:-

https://england.shelter.org.uk/housing_advice

Shelter – Priority Need Categories in Housing Applications:

https://england.shelter.org.uk/legal/homelessness_applications/priority_need/who_has_a_priority_need

9.0 Glossary

9.1	B&B	Bed and Breakfast
	DWP	Department for Work and Pensions
	HRA	Homelessness Reduction Act
	NSP	Notice Seeking Possession
	OSC	Overview & Scrutiny Committee
	RSI	Rough Sleeper Initiative- a government funding pot to end rough sleeping
	TA	Temporary Accommodation
	SWEP	Severe Weather Emergency Protocols

10.0 Officer Contact

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15 March 2021