



2024
2029

Braintree District Council

Draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy

Foreword

We recognise that homelessness is complex, and everyone’s experience of homelessness is different. To be able to tackle homelessness and rough sleeping and prevent it from happening in the first place requires a joint approach with stakeholder and community engagement, we cannot work in isolation.

I am proud of the work that is undertaken with our partners to work with and support people facing homelessness. The Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2024 -2029 seeks to bring together partners and outlines how we intend to work collaboratively to prevent households becoming homeless and reduce rough sleeping.

Not having a place to call home impacts people’s physical and mental wellbeing, it affects children’s development and future opportunities and places households under extreme financial and physical pressures. It’s imperative that people get help when they most need it, that’s why the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2024 - 2029 has an emphasis on early intervention and prevention.

There are many challenges that people face when trying to find a home and more people require temporary accommodation than in previous years. Key to supporting the delivery of this strategy is a complete review of homelessness provision.

This Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy sets a clear vision to prevent and end homelessness in Braintree District over the next five years. A home needs to be affordable, suitable and provide a settled base from which people can ultimately thrive. Our aim is to offer support at an early stage and make it easier for people to find and keep a home.

We look forward to delivering this work with our partners and seeing the positive impact this will have on our residents and communities.



Cllr Bowers-Flint,
Cabinet member for Housing,
Health & Wellbeing

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Executive Summary

The aim of the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy is to prevent homelessness at an early stage and, where this is not possible, to support homeless households and those in housing need to secure suitable affordable housing.

The data and research gathered from the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping evidence document provides valuable insights into the local homelessness situation in the district, enabling us to comprehend the extent of the issue and, crucially, the specific needs of each household. This knowledge empowers us to offer early intervention and preventative services within the housing sector. By identifying households at risk of homelessness, we can intervene proactively and address their needs in a timely manner.

The aim of this strategy is to work with our partners through shared aims and aspirations to deliver the following strategic priorities.

- 1** Work with partners to prevent homelessness by intervening at the earliest opportunity.
- 2** Facilitate the delivery of suitable temporary accommodation for eligible households.
- 3** Improve access to appropriate accommodation.
- 4** Continue to work with partners to prevent and break the cycle of rough sleeping.

Introduction:

People can lose their accommodation and become homeless for a range of reasons. Homelessness is complex, many people live in insecure and unstable housing which can be in poor conditions. The most visible form of homelessness is rough sleeping where people are sleeping outside, on the streets and in tents.

A refresh of the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2018 - 2023 is required to ensure that the council and our partners are doing everything possible to prevent and respond to homelessness in the district.

The pressure on local authorities to find accommodation for homeless families has increased dramatically in recent years. Anyone can become homeless, the main underlying cause of homelessness is lack of access to stable, affordable and decent homes. There are a range of factors that can increase the risk of losing a home and be a barrier in being unable to find another. These include limited or low income, unemployment, poor physical and mental health, alcohol and substance misuse, relationship breakdown, or perhaps a combinations of these.

Local Authorities are legally required to have a Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy in place and they must be updated every 5 years. While there is no legal requirement for a Housing Strategy, it is best practice to have one in place due to the link between housing, homelessness and rough sleeping.

Healthy Housing Strategy and Evidence 2023 - 2028 promotes healthy, sustainable communities by raising the standard of existing homes and enabling provision of quality new ones; resulting in suitable, affordable housing that meets the needs of our current and future residents and enables them to live healthy lives and supporting everyone to reach their full potential.

The Local Plan outlines the districts strategic aim of developing housing. As Braintree District Council does not possess any social housing stock, collaborating with registered providers in our district is crucial.

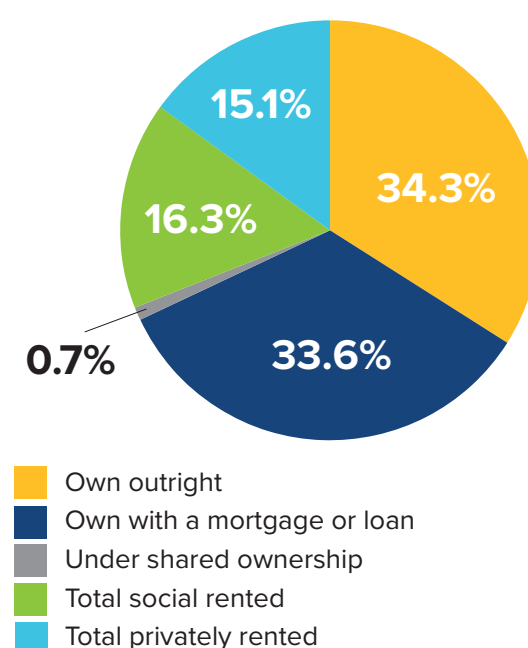
Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2024 - 2029 focusses on supporting people who may be homeless, or at risk of homelessness in the future, by offering advice and support when they need it the most. Early intervention and working together to prevent homelessness happening in the first place is vital to help improve our understanding of the underlying reasons for homelessness, we will use this understanding to help inform service design, planning and operation.

About Braintree District

Braintree District Council Housing Data shows:

- In June 2023 there are **69,186 properties in the district**
- **1/3 of all properties** in the district have a mortgage or loan
- Nearly **10,000 properties** are let within the private rented sector
- Over **10,000 properties** are social housing lets
- In 2022 – 2023 Braintree district let **380 social rents and 188 affordable rents**.
- As of June 2023, there are **2387** applicants on the council housing register.
- In 2022 - 2023, **1179** households presented as homeless.
- For households approaching as homeless, the most frequent age range of the main applicant is between **25 -34 years old**.
- The highest rate of household's composition presenting as homeless are single males.
- Between 2021 and 2022, the percentage of households owed a homeless duty, who have a record of mental health issues, **stood at 32%**. This figure is comparatively higher than the national average for England, which was **recorded at 25%**.
- **31%** of households who present as homeless in the Braintree District do so due to their accommodation in the private rented sector coming to an end.

Figure 1: Housing Tenure in Braintree District (Census 2021)



69,186
properties

in the district in June 2023

Successes

Over the last 5 years Braintree District Council has worked incredibly hard with our partners to achieve the following:

- **Received the 'Working in Partnership' award** alongside Rough Sleeping Initiative partners in the 2022 Essex Housing Awards for collaborative efforts during the pandemic. Additionally, achieved the second place for the 'Covid 19 Recovery' award.
- **Collaborated with partners** including Essex County Council, NACRO and Peabody to establish a pathway for rough sleepers and those at risk of rough sleeping. The pathway provides accommodation to help support and develop independent living skills to facilitate those individuals to sustain their own accommodation moving forward. The pathway consists of 6 units of accommodation with shared facilities and on site support.
- **The next stage on The Pathway is due to come on stream winter 2023.** This provides the opportunity for residents to move from higher support into 3 self-contained units with light touch support, before moving on to live independently.
- **Introduction of the Essex prisoner release protocol:** The purpose of the protocol is to reduce the risk of offenders becoming homeless upon release, consequently reducing the risk of re-offending.
- **Agreeing an Essex-wide Hospital discharge protocol:** The aim is to identify at an early stage any housing-related issues which may prove a barrier to discharge: reducing the risk of delayed discharge and improving outcomes for patients.
- **Duty to refer:** partners can alert the Housing Options Team easily about a customer at risk of homelessness by using the 'duty to refer' portal on the BDC website.
- **Housing team dealing with homelessness hold regular briefing sessions** to share knowledge with partners on the legislation and function of the housing allocations policy.
- **Rough Sleeper Initiative funding secured March 2019:** partnership between Essex County Council, Chelmsford CC, Braintree DC, Epping DC, Maldon DC and Churches Homeless Emergency Support Scheme (CHESS). The partnership has subsequently expanded to include a number of other local authorities across Essex.
- **Horizon Project** is delivered by Pheonix Future. The project secured funding to establish a facility offering on-site support and accommodation in the district for individuals experiencing homelessness or vulnerable to homelessness.
- **1325 affordable properties were complete between 2018 - 2023** The number of newly constructed affordable homes completed in recent years has made a significant contribution to addressing the housing demand in the district.

Challenges

- The affordable rental rates for new housing association homes can reach up to 80% of the market rents, making them higher than social rents. In light of the ongoing rise in rental costs, there is a concern that affordable lets may soon be unaffordable for households receiving full Housing Benefit (HB), Local Housing Allowance (LHA), or Universal Credit housing element (UC).
- Local Housing Allowance (LHA) was frozen across the country in 2020 at the rate of rent in 2018 - 2019. The rising market rents has resulted in affordable rents becoming increasingly inaccessible for households relying on housing benefits or the housing element of Universal Credit to cover their rent.
- The recent rise in mortgage rates may pose challenges for individuals looking to purchase a property. As a result, competition for properties in the private rented sector (PRS) will continue to rise. Landlords in the PRS may face additional pressure to either raise rental prices or exit the market altogether.
- Evidence shows that there is an increasing demand for larger homes (3 bedrooms plus) which are not readily available. The demand is from a variety of cohorts including those as a result of immigration and asylum, legislative changes, and the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 as examples. They have all resulted in a stretch of resources across housing services.
- There are some barriers for individuals with additional and complex needs accessing supported and temporary accommodation in the district.
- There is a limited financial incentive or guarantees to support households to secure housing in the private rented sector.
- There are limited options for move on support from supported accommodation into independent living.
- Delivery of new affordable homes may decline in the current market.

Covid and Everyone In

On Thursday 26 March 2020, during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, the government launched its 'Everyone In' campaign. This required local authorities to take urgent action to house rough sleepers and those at risk of rough sleeping in order to protect public health and stop wider transmission of COVID-19.

Braintree District Council accommodated 33 individuals
in response to this campaign.

Positive longer term accommodation options were secured for the vast majority of those who were accommodated

National and Local Influences:

Links to other Strategies and Frameworks

Under the Homelessness Act 2002, all housing authorities must have in place a homelessness strategy which is renewed at least every 5 years.

There are many strategies, policies, and frameworks both nationally and across Braintree District Council that the Housing Strategies operates alongside: these can be found at Strategy and policy documents – Braintree District Council.

- **A ‘Levelling Up’ agenda** stimulating economic activity, investment in infrastructure and promoting community activity
- **The National Planning Policy Framework**, revised 20 July 2021 sets out the government’s planning policy for England and how they will be applied
- **A new Fire Safety Act and an emergency Building Safety bill** which aims to make provisions about safety and standards of buildings
- **A fairer private rented sector** This white paper sets out plans to fundamentally reform the private rented sector and level up housing quality in this country.
- **A Housing White Paper ‘Fixing our Broken Housing Market’** published by the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government in February 2017 setting out the government’s plans to reform the housing market and boost the supply of new homes in England
- **The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017** ensures that all homeless people will be able to receive advice and assistance from their council, councils must try to prevent people becoming homeless in the first place.
- **Health and Social Care Act 2012** each local authority has a duty to take steps as it considers appropriate for improving the health of the people in its area. This includes people experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness.
- **Homes England Strategic Plan 2018-2023** ensuring affordable and sustainable homes are built in areas of greatest need.
- **English Housing Survey Private Rented Sector 2020-21** is a national survey of property owners and letting agents who own and/or manage privately rented properties in England

- **The Climate Change Act 2008** is the basis for the UK’s approach to tackling and responding to climate change
- **Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016** introduced Universal Credit and made amendments to jobseeker’s allowance, employment and support allowance, income support, tax credits, industrial injuries benefit, housing benefit and the social fund
- **Everyone In: how to end homelessness in Great Britain 2018**
- **Social Housing White Paper 2020.** Charter for Social Housing Residents. The charter sets out seven commitments that residents should expect from their property owner
- **The Future Home Standards 2021** This consultation set out the government’s plans for a new green Future Homes Standard and sought views on changes to building regulations in England to improve energy efficiency and cut carbon emissions in new build homes
- **Coronavirus Act 2020** Introduced to provide guidance on the impact of Covid-19 pandemic on the economy, housing, homelessness, and the welfare system
- **Domestic Abuse Act 2021** designed to promote awareness of domestic abuse; protect and support victims and their families; transform the justice process to prioritise victim safety and provide an effective response to perpetrators; and to drive consistency and better performance in the response to domestic abuse across all local areas, agencies and sectors.
- **The Renters (Reform) Bill**, which recently started its progress through Parliament, may also, when introduced, result in further pressures as it is anticipated this may be another cause of landlords exiting the market and will also make it easier for landlords to gain possession in some circumstances.
- **Localism Act 2011** came into force in November 2012 and supports the improvement of local housing options. The Act contained some key provisions relevant to homelessness including the power to discharge the full homelessness duty with an offer of private rented accommodation.

Local Strategies and Policies

- Corporate Strategy 2020 – 2024
- Healthy Housing Strategy 2023 – 2028
- Climate Change Strategy 2021 – 2023
- Economic Growth Strategy 2023 – 2028
- Economic Development Prospectus 2013 – 2026
- Digital Strategy 2022 – 2026
- Local Plan 2013 – 2033
- Marketing & Communications Strategy 2021 – 2024
- Annual Plan 2023 – 2024
- Live Well Strategy 2024 – 2028
- Gateway to Homeschoice Allocations Policy July 2022
- Essex County Council 2021 - 2025
- Essex Joint Health & Wellbeing Strategy 2022 – 2026

Partnerships

Braintree District Council has established several significant partnership meetings. These meetings provide a platform for discussing cases through a collaborative forum involving multiple agencies. The aim is to share information and tackle concerns effectively. This approach enables a range of services to intervene and provide support to individuals who are currently homeless or at risk of homelessness. The aim is to prevent homelessness by taking appropriate measures at an early stage.

- **Community Safety Hub**
- **Joint Referral Panel**
- **Domestic Abuse Sub Group**
- **Tenancy Sustainment Sub Group**
- **Disability Working Group**

Additionally, there are other multi agency meetings which provide an opportunity for the council and partners to discuss national, regional and local influences and trends that may impact the work that is being delivered.

- **Homelessness Prevention Partnership**
- **Costing of Living Partnership**

There has also been the development of specialist roles across the service.

- **Domestic Abuse Specialist**
- **Mental Health Navigator**
- **Private Rented Sector & Empty Homes Officer**
- **Tenancy Sustainment Officer**
- **Cost of Living Officer**
- **Ukraine Resettlement Officer**
- **Health and Wellbeing Manager**



The Importance of Preventing Homelessness

The government defines 'Homelessness prevention' as providing people with the ways and means to address their housing and other needs to avoid homelessness.

The conversations around early intervention is well developed and documented, but current prevention efforts often rely on individuals approaching local authorities to seek support.

This has resulted in a weighting towards homeless support, rather than early intervention. In partnership with others, we recognise the need to re-balance with a stronger focus on early intervention around homelessness.

Our research has informed us that cohorts most affected by the cost-of-living crisis include single person households, lone parents with dependents, and people in later life.

Benefits of early intervention and taking a whole systems approach

- Protects vulnerable residents from becoming homeless, this can include the elderly, the young, those experiencing mental health, substance misuse, physical disabilities and those leaving institutions.
- Promote health and wellbeing as those experiencing homelessness have a higher rate of poor short and long term physical and mental health conditions.
- Preventing homelessness has a positive impact on children's wellbeing and life chances as it supports families to live in stable secure accommodation. This is supported by evidence from the Braintree District Councils Health and Wellbeing which highlights the importance of giving every child the best start in life.
- Promotes stability and helps people be able to continue to work and studying.
- Provides the opportunity to address causes of homelessness and help make sustainable changes.
- Prevention services are cost effective as they cost less than providing emergency services and temporary accommodation.
- Creates healthier connected communities and maintains social support and networks.
- Helps end rough sleeping and homelessness.

Our Priorities

Priority 1

Work with partners to prevent homelessness by intervening at the earliest opportunity.

- 1 Support more households to remain in their home.
- 2 Where this is not possible, help households find a new home as quickly as possible.
- 3 Build knowledge within the community so that support and advice can be offered at the earliest opportunity.
- 4 Reduce risk of households facing homelessness by influencing wider issues in relation to vulnerability to homelessness and the local housing market.

Our ambition is to work with partners to offer advice and support to individuals and families at risk of homelessness at an early stage. In order to accomplish this, it is crucial for us to gain a comprehensive understanding of the factors leading to homelessness in our district.

By using a range of national and local data sources and collaborating with partners, we aim to establish a shared vision for preventing homelessness.

Many households are ‘at risk’ of homelessness, they may be threatened with eviction or living in insecure tenancies, this is where households live with the worry that their tenancy may come to an end, many live in poor housing conditions or must leave their accommodation due to range of reasons. There are also households who experience ‘hidden homelessness’, they are not rough sleeping, but they don’t have a long term settled place to stay. The reason people present as homeless varies, no two situations are the same.

National and local data shows us that cohorts most affected by the cost-of-living crisis include single person households, lone parents with dependents, and people in later life. Working with people at the earliest possible opportunity is key to preventing homelessness. Understanding our residents is key. In 2022 – 2023, 64% of households

who present at the foodbank in Braintree Districts is due to low income, 11% is due to benefit changes or delays.

Between 2022 and 2023, the primary factor for households experiencing homelessness while residing in privately rented sector was due to the landlord intending to sell the property.

From 2018 to 2022, the primary cause for households experiencing homelessness as a result of social rented tenancy was rent arrears due to tenants facing challenges managing their finances or making payments due to the shortfall between their benefits and rent costs.

With the widening disparity between the rental market, local housing allowance, and wages, an increasing number of households face the risk of homelessness. This is especially concerning as it includes individuals who already have low incomes and minimal savings, coupled with higher rates of debt, substance misuse, poor physical and mental health, and relationship breakdowns. Consequently, the ability to secure alternative housing promptly becomes progressively more challenging.

Working in partnership to promote and deliver initiatives around finances is crucial. Whether this is employment and skills training to enhance job stability, providing guidance on income maximisation, offering financial assistance and guarantees to help secure housing in the private rental market; or practical support to help form be completed for grants and benefits. The key is knowing what is available in the community and ensuring it is offered at the first sign its required.

Priority 2

Facilitate the delivery of suitable temporary accommodation for eligible households.

- 1 Understand the needs of those presenting as homeless.
- 2 Continue to work with partners to supply suitable temporary accommodation for eligible households to move into.
- 3 Establish suitable temporary accommodation for people with support needs.

The number of households in temporary accommodation has steadily increased over the past five years, especially since Covid-19, the cost-of-living crisis, higher mortgage interest rates and the increased inflation rate.

In Braintree District, a household could be placed in a variety of temporary accommodation, this includes the use of Bed and Breakfast (B&B's), a hostel, a hotel, a refuge or a private or a housing association property. This could be in or outside of the district.

Local authorities are facing mounting pressures on finding suitable temporary accommodation. This has led to a growing number of households being placed in B&Bs and nightly let accommodation. There is a growing demand to secure such accommodation outside of the local authorities' own boundaries. While this is occasionally necessary for safety concerns, it can unfortunately lead to households becoming separated from their support networks and experiencing isolation.

People experiencing homelessness are presenting with increasing levels of additional support needs and these can be exacerbated by the experiences of homelessness. Providing accommodation which offers support is critical, but it may not be available. This strategy will include a review of our homelessness provisions in the district.

The data captured in Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Evidence document 2024 - 2029 provides detailed insights and understanding of the underlying reasons for homelessness. We will work with our partners and use this information to help shape and inform service design, service delivery and planning over the next 5 years,

Priority 3

Improve access to appropriate accommodation.

- 1 Review move-on arrangements with all supported housing providers.
- 2 Support household to access affordable and sustainable housing options which are suitable for their needs.
- 3 Undertake service reviews through co-production (lived experience).

Developing and maintaining robust partnerships with providers who manage supported accommodation is crucial. The Joint Referral Panel (JRP) has successfully placed a significant number of single households in the district.

The JRP provides a gateway for referrals for people with a local connection, to supported (lower-level needs) accommodation schemes within the Braintree District.

The aim of the JRP is to ensure that every application made to a supported housing scheme is assessed for eligibility and suitability and provide a forum for all agencies to share appropriate information in the consideration of an application.

The JRP ensures that successful applicants are offered the most appropriate service according to their support need and reduces the number of people moving from one service to another following placement breakdown.

With high demand for housing, which is in short supply, there is a need to expand housing options available to those who are homeless, those at risk of homelessness and also those who are in supported schemes and ready to move on. We want to improve access to a range of tenures.

As part of the Healthy Housing Strategy 2023 – 2028, one objective is to improve engagement and work in collaboration with landlords, letting agencies, and other private owners. Further work needs to be undertaken to make the private rented sector a viable and sustainable housing options. We need to strengthen and encourage take-up of suitable accommodation in the private rented sector.

Currently, we are reviewing our financial initiatives to assist households in obtaining housing in the private rented sector. This includes support for individuals and families who may be at risk of losing their private sector tenancy.

Using data and intelligence to make recommendations and evidence led decision on homelessness and rough sleeping is key. But co-production and actively engaging and listening to those working on the front line and those who have experienced homelessness is crucial. This is to learn what can be done better and it provides insight to what is happening right now. When designing and reviewing services that meet people’s needs, there needs to be input from those who have experience.

Priority 4

Continue to work with partners to prevent and break the cycle of rough sleeping.

We will continue to review our policies and work with partners to meet the ambition set out in DLUHC’s Ending Rough Sleeping for Good.

- 1 No-one should leave prison homeless or to sleep rough.
- 2 Young people leaving care will receive the support they need to secure and maintain suitable accommodation.
- 3 No-one should be discharged from hospital to the streets.
- 4 No-one who has served in the UK Armed Forces should face the need to sleep rough.
- 5 Review the impact of the new asylum dispersal system on homelessness and rough sleeping.

In 2022, the Government published their long awaited updated rough sleeping strategy: ‘Ending rough sleeping for good.’ In this strategy, the Government have for the first-time defined a vision for ending rough sleeping, which is that it is **prevented wherever possible, and where it does occur it is rare, brief and non-recurrent.**

Housing is critical to the prevention of mental health problems and the promotion of recovery. The Governments ‘Ending Rough Sleeping for Good’ Strategy sets the ambition that no one is released from a public institution as homeless. Braintree District with our partners have a series of agreements and policies in place which include The Community Accommodation Service Tier 3 (CAS3), this provides temporary accommodation for up to 84 nights for homeless prison leavers and those moving on from Approved Premises (CAS1) or the Bail Accommodation and Support Service (CAS2), and assistance to help them move into settled accommodation.

Vulnerable veterans across the country will have access to Op FORTITUDE, a new dedicated referral pathway for homeless veterans, including those sleeping on the streets.

It is understood that there is a strong connection between homelessness and poor health. Many individuals experiencing homelessness also have various additional needs that make

them more susceptible to rough sleeping. Our objective is to establish solid partnerships with a range of organisations in order to effectively tackle the root causes of homelessness and rough sleeping.

Strengthen work with partners to provide a joined-up approach to preventing and tackling drug and alcohol related anti-social behaviour. Improve our understanding of the underlying reasons for homelessness, and use this understanding to help inform service design, planning and operation.

Monitoring the Strategy

The partnership strategy will be delivered through the Homeless Prevention Partnership (HPP). This meeting takes place quarterly with our partners in the district who are working with those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. The HPP will lead on the delivery plan which will meet the priorities set out within this strategy.

The strategy will be reviewed regularly to take into account national and local legislative changes as well as ensuring the strategies effectiveness.

