



2024
2029

Braintree District Council

Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy

Annual Report - April 2026



Braintree
District Council

Summary

Braintree District Council published its Homelessness & Rough Sleeping (H&RS) Strategy in May 2024, covering a five-year period from 2024 to 2029.

Local Housing Authorities must publish a strategy every five years to set out how they will prevent homelessness and meet their legal duties to those who become homeless, including those at risk of sleeping rough. The ambition of the strategy is to prevent homelessness at an early stage. Where this is not possible, the strategy aims to support homeless households and those in housing need into secure, suitable and affordable housing.

Our focus is on supporting people who may be homeless or at risk of homelessness in the future, by offering advice and support when they need it most. We believe it is essential to apply early intervention principles and to collaborate in order to prevent homelessness from occurring in the first instance. Our efforts continue to investigate the underlying causes of homelessness to inform the design, planning and implementation of the services we provide.

This report focuses on the achievements and outcomes to date and considers the next steps to keep the strategy evolving and sustainable.

Introduction

The aim of our strategy is to ensure that Braintree District Council is doing everything possible to prevent and respond to homelessness in the district.

The data we collect from households presenting as homeless in the district has indicated an increase in households with more complex needs compared to previous years. Factors which impact households include recovering from Covid-19, the cost-of-living crisis and pressure on the local housing market.

Not having a place to call home impacts on mental wellbeing. It affects children's development and opportunities, and places households under financial and physical pressures.

Recent research from the Office of the Children's Commissioner for England shows the negative impact housing insecurity has on educational attainment, showing a direct relationship between the number of times a child moves home and declining GCSE pass rates.

While accommodation outcomes are improving, there has been a decrease in the rate of offenders housed on release from custody since 2022 across England, with data published by the Ministry of Justice highlighting homelessness as a key driver of reoffending.

The H&RS Strategy has four overarching strategic priorities, which are to:

Priority 1

Prevent homelessness: Work with partners to prevent homelessness at the earliest opportunity.

Priority 2

Deliver suitable temporary accommodation: Facilitate the delivery of suitable temporary accommodation for eligible households.

Priority 3

Access to accommodation: Improve access to appropriate and sustainable accommodation.

Priority 4

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

These priorities are reflected in our Corporate Strategy under the Communities theme.



FIT FOR THE FUTURE

The H&RS Strategy aligns with our Healthy Housing Strategy 2023-2028, linking into priorities 2 and 3

- **Priority 2 Support for specific needs:** Enabling housing across the district to meet the needs of all our residents, especially those who are vulnerable
- **Priority 3 Access:** Improving access to and the quality of existing properties, including the Private Rented Sector

The Homelessness Prevention Partnership

The H&RS Strategy outcomes are supported by a range of partnerships, sub groups and joint initiatives.

This approach enables both case by case collaboration and wider information sharing and early interventions. Some of the partnerships supporting our strategy and its outcomes are:

- **Community Safety Hub**
- **Joint Referral Panel**
- **Domestic Abuse Sub Group**
- **Tenancy Sustainment Sub Group**
- **Homelessness Prevention Partnership**
- **Disability Working Group**
- **Cost Of Living Partnership**

The Homelessness Prevention Partnership (HPP) is collectively responsible for ensuring the delivery of the outcomes of the H&RS Strategy, and its members are committed to ending homelessness and tackling the causes of homelessness. Members include:

- CHES
- Hope House
- Futures Together
- Salvation Army
- Sanctuary
- The Probation Service
- JobCentre Plus/DWP
- Braintree District Council
- Peabody
- First Stop
- Braintree Foyer
- Eastlight Community Homes
- NACRO
- Mental Health Practitioners
- Essex County Council
- Public Health

The partnership meets every quarter to review the **Homelessness and Rough Sleeping action plan**.

The focus of the meeting is to explore funding and partnership opportunities, share good practice and share challenges facing the delivery of their individual services. The focus is always on early intervention and prevention of homelessness.

Monitoring the strategy:

The Homelessness and Rough sleeping action plan is our living document that supports the overall aims from each of the four priorities of the H&RS Strategy. Each action is owned by a lead officer, with team support, and developments are updated monthly by tracking key achievements and outcomes. This keeps projects moving forward and documents and monitors progression throughout the year.

Services working within the homelessness sector recognised that prioritising and offering early intervention is essential. However, it is recognised that in order to provide effective early intervention services, teams require a deeper understanding of mental health, housing advice, housing legislation and relevant laws, as well as a need to develop a holistic approach to these services.

The HPP is focused on promoting more housing briefings, working with partners to deliver mental health and domestic abuse training, and reviewing and updating existing processes to enhance their clarity and accessibility. Our aim is to foster greater continuity across the housing services that our residents and customers rely on.

Future challenges

There are global and national factors which may impact housing across the country. These issues can have significant consequences which could affect homelessness and rough sleeping across the county.

The Renters Rights Act will introduce significant reforms to the private rented sector and will have implications for local authority responsibilities in terms of enforcement, monitoring, and tenant support. Central to the Act is the abolition of Section 21 'no fault' evictions, alongside measures to improve property standards and strengthen tenant protections.

While these reforms are intended to provide greater security and stability for tenants over the longer term, there remains uncertainty about the short term impacts on the private rented sector. There is a risk that some landlords may choose to exit the market or reduce their portfolios in response to the new regulatory requirements. This could lead to a reduction in the availability of private rented accommodation, increased competition for remaining properties, and upward pressure on rents, all of which may exacerbate homelessness risks, particularly for low income households.

In the transitional period following implementation, there may also be an increase in landlords seeking possession using new or strengthened grounds, which could result in short term increases in homelessness presentations. The Council will closely monitor trends in homelessness approaches, private sector access, and eviction activity to understand the local impact of the

with private tenants and landlords to provide advice, early intervention, and housing options support, with the aim of preventing homelessness wherever possible and mitigating any adverse effects arising from these changes.

Local Government Reorganisation in Essex has now been formally announced. Braintree District Council will merge with Colchester City Council and Tendring District Council to form a new unitary authority.

During this transitional period, the Council's priority will be to ensure continuity and stability in the delivery of statutory services, including homelessness prevention and housing support. However, it is anticipated that local government reorganisation may result in structural and governance changes across service areas, as well as revisions to strategic responsibilities and delivery models. These changes could have implications for the implementation and timing of some actions within this strategy.

The Council will continue to monitor developments closely and remain responsive to the evolving policy and governance landscape. Where necessary, the strategy will be reviewed to ensure it remains aligned with new structures and continues to effectively support the prevention of homelessness and rough sleeping throughout the reorganisation period.

Cost of Living

The ongoing cost-of-living pressures continue to have a significant impact on residents, particularly those on low incomes, in insecure employment, or living in the private rented sector. The removal of the two-child benefit cap is estimated to lift 450,000 children out of poverty, but housing costs continue to rise. Rent increases, affordability pressures, and higher energy, food and essential living costs, are increasing financial hardship and the risk of homelessness for vulnerable households.

These pressures are reflected in increased demand for housing advice and homelessness prevention services, with more households at risk of tenancy breakdown. This reinforces the importance of early intervention and targeted support to help residents sustain their accommodation and avoid homelessness.

The Council will continue to work with partners to support residents through financial hardship, including maximising income through benefits advice, providing discretionary housing support where appropriate, and assisting households to access energy efficiency schemes, hardship funds, and local support services. Cost-of-living impacts will be kept under close review, and service delivery and prevention activity will be adapted where necessary to respond to emerging pressures and maintain a focus on preventing homelessness and rough sleeping.

The Government's National Plan to End Homelessness

The Government has made a commitment to achieve long term sustainable change to address the root causes of homelessness.

Their immediate plan is to boost funding in communities to halve the number of entrenched rough sleepers and eliminate the unlawful use of bed and breakfast accommodation for families.

It is an ambitious long-term plan which includes:

- Building 1.5 million homes.
- Making sure that social housing goes to people who need it by updating social housing allocation schemes and making best use of current stock.
- Reforming the private Rented sector e.g. The Renters' Rights Act.
- Tackling poverty and boosting living standards by removing the 2-child limit for child benefit and increasing the National Living Wage.

The development of a Supported Housing Strategy will play a key role in strengthening pathways for residents with complex needs, supporting move-on from temporary accommodation and improving system-wide housing outcomes.

Climate, national policies and funding streams.

Wider global and national factors, including climate change, international conflicts, and shifting national priorities, continue to influence housing demand, legislative change, and the operation of homelessness services. These drivers can impact homelessness through changes to legislation, funding arrangements, migration patterns, and policy direction.

The strategy recognises the importance of being responsive to this changing landscape and ensures that Braintree District Council remains well placed to adapt to legislative and policy developments that may affect homelessness. This includes responding to changes relating to the Renters' Rights Bill, the Supported Housing Strategy, and the Essex Housing Protocols.

The H&RS Strategy also monitors the impact of national asylum and immigration policy, including the use of the Wethersfield site and other accommodation arrangements on homelessness and rough sleeping within the district. This enables the Council to identify emerging pressures at an early stage and work with partners to mitigate any local impact.

In addition, the Council will continue to actively monitor national and regional funding streams and work with partners to secure resources that support the delivery of homelessness prevention activity and improve outcomes for residents at risk of homelessness.

There remains scope for further development and improvement, and we will seek to embed lived-experience insight more systematically into the review and design of our services. We are committed to the continual evolution of our homelessness provision, informed by robust data and emerging evidence.



Outcomes 2025-2026

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.

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 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. In the Braintree District, the main reason for presenting as homeless continues to be loss of assured shorthold tenancy in the private rented sector.

While progress has been made in preventing and relieving homelessness, a number of local and national challenges continue to impact our ability to achieve the best outcomes for residents.

The most significant structural challenge is the limited supply of affordable, secure housing, particularly in the private rented sector. In the Braintree District the loss of Assured Shorthold Tenancies (ASTs) remains the main driver of homelessness, and prevention options are constrained when alternative accommodation is simply not available or affordable.

The district's rural geography can make it harder to identify and engage people living in insecure or unsuitable accommodation, including sofa surfers or those at risk of homelessness. Transport issues and service accessibility can also reduce engagement with support.

Homelessness is rarely caused by a single factor. Many households face interlinked issues, such as mental health needs, domestic abuse, substance misuse, debt, or poor housing conditions. Many households do not seek help until crisis point which can significantly limit the effectiveness of prevention activity.

To help prevent rough sleeping and support households at the earliest opportunity, the council has worked closely with partners across the district to deliver a range of successful outcomes.

- The Cost-of-Living Partnership has supported those on low income by distributing £300,945.92 small grants to 24 different organisations/charities across the Braintree District to directly support residents.

- 3,000 Boost Your Budget Cost-of-Living booklets were shared across partners and internal teams to help residents understand the support which is directly available for them to access.
- 1,123 people were supported through foodbank funding, alongside the Hardship Fund providing emergency help with urgent essentials such as school uniforms and furniture. A new Outreach Assistant was recruited, and continued funding supported Food & More, the Outreach Officer, delivery services and stock purchases.
- First Stop has been extremely busy, with the community fridge supporting over 15,000 people, including individuals collecting food on behalf of their families.

This provision has been particularly important for those in financial hardship. This support plays a key role in preventing homelessness by reducing financial pressure on households, helping individuals maintain their placements, and ensuring basic needs are met during periods of crisis.

- The Council has supported local voluntary organisations to apply for the Ending Homelessness in Communities Fund so that charities can deliver direct support to those who need it most in the community.
- The Council has created a Cost of-Living Dashboard which is an interactive dashboard that provides a comprehensive geographical view of financial vulnerability in the district. It enables targeted support to be delivered to specific areas, ensuring resources are directed where they are most needed to identify, and support households at the earliest opportunity.

- Over the past year, a range of domestic abuse training has been delivered to improve awareness, strengthen understanding, and support early identification and intervention among staff and partners. Training had strong partner representation and included DASH Risk Assessment, Technology Facilitated Abuse and Domestic Abuse Managers Training. These sessions focused on recognising the signs of abuse, understanding risk, using appropriate referral pathways and responding effectively to emerging forms of abuse, such as the misuse of technology. This programme of activity supports the ongoing aim of equipping staff and partner agencies with the knowledge and confidence to identify domestic abuse, respond appropriately, and intervene at the earliest opportunity to support those at risk.

We will

Undertake a comprehensive review of the Housing Service to ensure it continues to provide the best possible support to residents. The review will assess current operating arrangements, service performance, and the service's capacity to meet increasing and changing demand. Alongside this, the Council will review its prevention and early intervention approaches to strengthen support for households at risk of homelessness, helping to prevent housing crises and reduce reliance on temporary accommodation.

Delivery the National Plan to End Homelessness, the Council will also invest in staff training and development aligned with national workforce programmes, ensuring staff have the skills and knowledge needed to provide effective support and achieve the best outcome for customers.

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.

Local authorities are experiencing sustained growth in homelessness presentations, driven by rising housing costs, welfare pressures, relationship breakdown and domestic abuse. Between 2024/25 and 2025/26, the number of households entering temporary accommodation through Braintree District Council's Housing Service increased by 51.5%, with just under half of those households including children. This rising demand places additional statutory pressure on councils to secure accommodation quickly, which can limit the ability to source the most suitable placements and increase reliance on emergency options.

The Government's 'National Plan to End Homelessness' places a clear emphasis on reducing reliance on unsuitable temporary accommodation and ensuring that placements are tailored to meet the diverse needs of households, including families, survivors of domestic abuse and those with complex support requirements. This reflects a broader shift towards a prevention-led system, where homelessness is avoided wherever possible, and where, it does occur, it is brief and nonrecurring. Central to this approach is improving system flow through temporary accommodation, strengthening move-on pathways into settled housing, and ensuring that appropriate support is in place for residents with complex needs.

For the Braintree District, this agenda will form a key focus for the coming year. This will include continuing to review and improve the suitability and supply of temporary accommodation, reducing reliance on emergency and nightly paid placements, and strengthening pathways into both supported housing and longer-term accommodation. This approach aligns with the Council's wider housing strategies, ensuring a coordinated response that supports prevention, stability and sustainable housing outcomes.

Reviewing the suitability of temporary accommodation has been a key priority. Feedback from partners identified increasing demand from residents placed in temporary accommodation, particularly those living in settings with limited cooking facilities, such as Travelodge accommodation, who require access to basic food support. In response, the Council undertook a comprehensive review of temporary accommodation provision across the district. The review assessed the current supply, quality and suitability of accommodation and identified the type and scale of provision needed to meet local demand, support homelessness prevention and move-on pathways, and reduce reliance on emergency and nightly paid accommodation. The findings will inform future commissioning, partnership working and investment decisions, helping to ensure that temporary accommodation is fit for purpose and delivers improved outcomes for households in housing need.

This work is closely linked to the Healthy Housing Strategy and the emerging Supported Housing Strategy, ensuring that temporary accommodation is part of a wider system that supports prevention, stabilisation and move-on.

We will

Continue to work in collaboration with Registered Social Landlords to identify opportunities to bring forward buildings that meet the needs identified through the temporary accommodation review. This includes working towards the replacement of an existing temporary accommodation unit in Braintree Town, ensuring future provision is better aligned with demand, quality standards, and resident needs.

Explore options and undertake feasibility work to deliver temporary and affordable accommodation that is fit for the future, reduces reliance on nightly paid accommodation, and supports earlier move on into settled housing. This approach supports both local priorities and the Government's Ending Homelessness Framework by improving quality, suitability, and sustainability of temporary accommodation provision so that we can work towards the Government's priority to eliminate the use of B&Bs for families.

Support the delivery of the Supported Housing Strategy to help ensure residents can move into accommodation that meets their longer-term support needs. We will continue to work closely with colleagues throughout the Local Government Reorganisation to identify emerging needs and develop a coordinated approach to supported housing provision across the wider area.

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).

Supporting timely and sustainable move-on from temporary and supported accommodation is a core element of the Council's Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy. Clear, well defined pathways are essential to ensure households are supported to transition into settled accommodation, including social housing and other successful move on options, promoting independence and long term housing stability.

A fundamental challenge is the ongoing shortage of genuinely affordable housing, particularly 1-bed and self-contained homes needed for single households. High demand for social housing means move-on opportunities are limited, slowing down pathways from temporary and supported accommodation and increasing the risk of blockages in the system.

Where move-on is delayed, temporary and supported accommodation can become overstretched. This reduces availability for new homeless households and undermines the principle that such accommodation should be short term.

Delays in move-on from supported and temporary accommodation reflect wider system pressures, including limited supply of affordable housing and barriers to accessing the private rented sector. Rising living costs, welfare constraints, and limited employment opportunities can affect residents' financial resilience once they move on. These pressures increase the importance of securing accommodation that is not only available but genuinely affordable and well supported.

The Council works closely with providers managing supported accommodation to maintain strong partnerships that enable effective planning for move-on. Through these collaborative arrangements, residents receive a structured and supported journey out of temporary accommodation, tailored to their needs and readiness.

The Joint Referral Panel (JRP) has been instrumental in facilitating move-on for single households across the district, successfully enabling placements into social housing and appropriate alternative accommodation. This approach has helped reduce reliance on temporary accommodation, supported residents to progress towards independence, and ensured that supported and temporary housing is used as a short-term intervention rather than a long-term solution.

Clear pathways between temporary accommodation, supported housing and settled housing are being strengthened through alignment with the Healthy Housing Strategy and the emerging Supported Housing Strategy.

Despite continued housing pressures, the Council has delivered a range of positive outcomes for residents, helping more households access affordable accommodation and receive support when it is needed the most. Highlights include:

- The Council has delivered 233 new affordable houses in the district over 2025/26.
- 731 properties were let in the district through Gateway to Homechoice.
- The Private Rented Sector Scheme supported 51 households into private rented accommodation in 2025/26, with 102 households supported since its launch in November 2023. The PRS Scheme has now been extended until 2027.
- The Council has strengthened its commitment to prevention and early intervention by directly funding the supported housing element within New Directions supported accommodation and Digby's Court temporary accommodation. This investment ensures that residents are able to access the housing-related

support required to stabilise their circumstances, sustain accommodation, and progress towards settled housing.

- The Council jointly commissions a Mental Health Navigator service, providing targeted support to individuals with mental health needs to help them access, secure, and sustain accommodation. 287 referrals have been made to the service. This service plays a key role in bridging gaps between housing, health, and support services, and aligns with the Government's Ending Homelessness Framework by addressing the underlying causes of homelessness and improving long term outcomes.

We will

Focus on strengthening housing pathways and creating more effective move-on options for residents. This will include reviewing temporary and supported accommodation provision across the district, working with providers to improve move-on arrangements, and reducing barriers that prevent households from accessing settled accommodation.

Continue to support residents to secure affordable and sustainable housing through a range of housing options, including the private rented sector and social housing where available.

Work with people with lived experience of homelessness to help shape future services, ensuring accommodation and support are responsive to local needs and help residents achieve long-term housing stability.

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.

Due to the geographical size and rural nature of the district, accurately identifying the exact number of individuals who are rough sleeping at any one time can be challenging. Many people who rough sleep have multiple and entrenched needs, including mental ill health, substance misuse, physical health issues, trauma, or involvement with the criminal justice system. Addressing housing need alone is often insufficient without coordinated, long term support, which can be difficult to sustain locally.

It is vital that local organisations working directly with rough sleepers and those at risk of homelessness are supported to intervene early and prevent entrenchment. The Council will continue to work closely with partners to maximise the use and effective distribution of available funding and grant opportunities, including the Winter Pressures Fund and Cost of Living support, to prevent rough sleeping and support routes into accommodation.

Working in partnership with local organisations and support services, the Council has continued to strengthen its response to rough sleeping, helping individuals access accommodation, support services and longer-term solutions to prevent repeat homelessness. Key achievements include:

- In partnership with leisure centres in the district and the homelessness service, the 'Ask for Tommy' scheme provided 55 free shower visits over six months.
- The Council continues to commission and deliver the Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP), working closely with local partners to ensure rough sleepers are kept safe during periods of severe weather. During 2025/26, the Council activated its summer SWEP arrangements for 27 days of extreme heat, enabling outreach and support services to engage vulnerable individuals, provide welfare checks, and reduce the health risks associated with hot weather. During periods of cold weather, SWEP was activated for 27 nights, with emergency accommodation made available to rough sleepers to protect them from the immediate dangers of sleeping outside.

- In partnership with First Stop, 29 Summer rough sleeper care packages were created, including 'Ask for Tommy' shower tokens, hygiene products, clean socks, emergency blankets, towels, sun cream, water bottles and other essential items to support people sleeping rough.
- The Council has funded an element of Chess outreach, enabling proactive identification of rough sleepers and the provision of immediate advice, support, and pathways off the street. This outreach function is critical to early engagement and preventing entrenchment in rough sleeping.
- In partnership with Chess Outreach, Weekly Wednesday Community Meals have been funded for 12 months through the Council's Housing and Cost of Living teams. An average of 17 people attend each week, including individuals who are homeless, living in temporary accommodation, or have a history of homelessness, ensuring they have access to advice, support and a hot meal.
- The Council has published a homelessness leaflet developed in collaboration with people with lived experience of homelessness. The leaflet provides clear information on how and where to access support when facing homelessness or experiencing rough sleeping, helping ensure advice is accessible, relevant, and informed by those with direct experience.
- £24,857 of the Winter Pressure Fund has supported 14 households who have a history of homelessness or rough sleeping with financial support to maintain or gain sustainable accommodation.

- The Rough Sleeping Partnership (RSP) was launched with over 15 partners attending. The RSP is led by Housing and Community Safety with a purpose to support rough sleepers from the streets and into suitable accommodation.

This work is aligned with both the Healthy Housing Strategy and the Supported Housing Strategy, recognising the role of housing, health and support services in preventing and addressing rough sleeping.

We will

Deliver the Government's Ending Homelessness Framework through the Rough Sleeping Partnership and Homelessness Prevention Partnership, monitoring long-term rough sleepers and ensuring appropriate support is in place to prevent a return to rough sleeping.

Implement the Supported Housing Strategy to ensure that appropriate accommodation and support pathways are available for individuals with complex needs, helping to reduce the risk of repeat rough sleeping.

Involve people with lived experience of homelessness and rough sleeping in the Housing Service review and improvement plan, ensuring their insights help shape future service design and delivery.

