



Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council's

# Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy

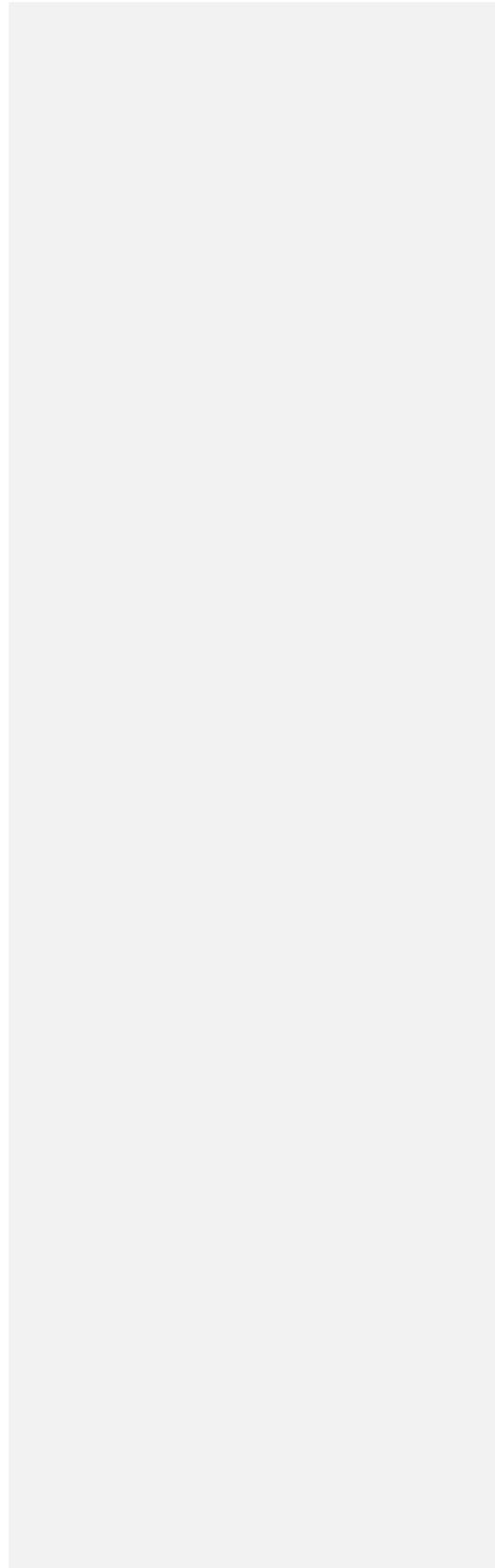
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## Executive Summary

### Introduction

Welcome to Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council's Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2019–2024. This strategy has been developed against a back drop of prolonged change and reform. It builds on the successes of our previous strategy, whilst being fluid enough to respond and adapt to the shifting environment in which homelessness, housing and support services have to be delivered in.

Our overarching aim is to prevent homelessness, and ensure a wide range of good quality, affordable housing options are available to meet the diverse needs of local people in our community

### Background

The council has a legal duty to have a Homelessness Strategy. The Homelessness Act 2002 requires all housing authorities to carry out a Homelessness Review and formulate a strategy based on the results of the review that includes plans for:

- Preventing homelessness
- Ensuring sufficient accommodation is available for people who are, or who may become homeless
- Ensuring there are satisfactory support services for people who are, or may become homeless, or who need support to prevent them from becoming homeless again

The statutory obligation to formulate a housing strategy, was removed under the terms of the De-regulation Act 2015. The council is however a strategic housing and stock holding authority, and as such it is appropriate to formulate and set out our plans and priorities for meeting local housing need.

### About this Strategy

**Part 1** – sets out:

Our 5 year strategic vision and aims for tackling homelessness, meeting local housing need, improving quality and increasing housing supply.

**Part 2** –sets out:

- How national / countywide policy and local conditions are affecting the way we address homelessness, provide housing services, improve housing quality and deliver housing supply.
- Key issues arising from the Homelessness Review and consultation with Housing Stakeholders
- The main challenges ahead and what Welwyn Hatfield and its partners plan to do to address the challenges

Part 3 – contains

- The councils detailed Housing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy Action Plan

## Part 1: Our Vision and Aims

### Vision

To provide local people with opportunities to access good quality, homes which they can afford to live in and where they can enjoy settled, secure and healthy lives

Our Aims are:

- Deliver More Housing to Meet the Needs of Local People.
- Make the Best Use of Housing in the Borough
- Meeting the Housing Needs of Older and Vulnerable People
- Improving Access to and Maintaining Standards in the Rented Sector
- To Prevent and Relieve Homelessness

These aims are supported by a number of objectives which set out how we intend to build on progress made in the last strategy to realise our aims and the measurable outcomes that we seek to achieve

## Part 2: Context for Developing our Housing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy

Our Strategy has been informed by a Review of Homelessness in our area, and has been influenced by strategic and policy objectives at national and regional level. It was developed in collaboration with a wide range of stakeholders, including service users, voluntary sector representatives, individuals and organisations from the housing sector.

### National Context

This strategy has been produced at a time where homelessness is growing nationally, housing is in very high demand, and the rate of policy change continues at unprecedented levels, in an attempt to tackle these issues.

A number of key national level strategies and policies both in the pipeline and in place, have influenced our Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy. Most notably ongoing welfare reform, homelessness reduction act and regulation on social housing.

### Local Issues and Challenges

#### Homelessness

Levels of homelessness here, have bucked both the national and regional trend remaining pretty static, since our last review. Implementation of the new Homelessness Reduction Act, means we are required to help more people for

longer, and caseload per officer has increased significantly. The availability of move on accommodation has slowed, resulting in people needing temporary accommodation for longer, which has created pressures accommodating new applicants coming in.

Cuts to support provision, has seen more people with complex needs, requiring assistance who would previously have been provided with a more supported offer. Rough sleeping is steadily growing and can in part be attributed to the reduction in support services for vulnerable people.

Despite these issues we have seen significant successes in homelessness prevention, through casework, designated housing pathways and an innovative partnerships approach e.g. 'Housing First', outreach work and our Homeless Prevention Hub (citizen's advice)

### Changes in the Local Housing Market

Understanding the local housing market in the borough and the changes within them is key to planning and delivering housing and addressing homelessness. Affordable housing in the area is in decline, social rented housing numbers are dropping, the high cost of home-ownership here, means less people can afford to buy, the private rented sector is in demand and outgrowing supply and as a result local people are also being priced out of this market.

### Housing Supply

There are a number of barriers hindering our ambitions to increase housing supply in the area. Historical restrictions on Council borrowing (recently changed), a severe shortage of brown field land, for which we are in competition with other providers and developers. Despite an ambitious affordable housing delivery programme we struggle to replace the number of homes sold under the right to buy.

## Tackling the Challenges

This strategy sets out how, with our partners the council are preparing to address the challenges:

### Local housing Company

An analysis of the range of tenures and housing products required in the borough, identified that housing need extends beyond the social and affordable housing delivery targeted through our AHP there is also a demand for sub-market / intermediate homes. We are in the process of setting up a local housing company to use as a flexible delivery vehicle to help meet this demand.

### Strengthening Development

The council is putting in place a number of measures to remove barriers and enhance development prospects in our area. These include, creating a post solely to work on maximising opportunities for new development, investigating use of modular housing, joint supported accommodation boards/local boards to maximise potential joint development etc.

### Homelessness

Our focus is on prevention and earlier intervention. We intend to achieve this through development of the required personal housing plans, refreshed housing pathways for vulnerable clients, developing partnerships and housing options, providing robust information and communication to enable households to better help themselves

### Welfare Reform

Tenancy education and sustainment work is key to addressing any issues that may develop from the changes to the benefit system. We are strengthening the work of our in-house sustainment teams as well as our partnership initiative with citizen's advice, to build on the successful outcomes we have been achieving

### Supporting Vulnerable Households

We are working closely with Hertfordshire's Children's Services, Adult Services and Healthcare teams to understand the housing demand and future support needs of vulnerable children and adults in our area. We have joint housing protocols to support 16/17yr olds and children leaving care. We have created multi-agency local supported accommodation boards to ensure specialist housing pathways are in place and the supply of supported housing is increased

We have a partner led Housing First programme which provides extensive support to people with complex needs whilst reducing rough sleeping. Secured rapid rehousing funding will be used to employ two navigator posts to work with the outreach services to proactively support rough sleepers in accessing the services they need to improve their health and wellbeing and prevent a return to the streets

### Part 3: Action Plan

The strategy is supported by an action plan, which provides in detail, the work that will be carried out by the council and our partners to successfully achieve our vision and aims. The action plan is intended to be a fluid document, one that will be subject to change, should the circumstances in which it operates alter.

## Introduction

Welcome to Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council's Housing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2019–2024; which sets out the council's plans to effectively tackle, homelessness and address local housing need over the next five years.

This strategy has been developed against a back drop of prolonged change and reform. It builds on the successes of our previous strategy, whilst being fluid enough to respond and adapt to the shifting environment in which homelessness, housing and support services have to be delivered in.

Our overarching aim is to prevent homelessness, and ensure a wide range of good quality, affordable housing options are available to meet the diverse needs of local people in our community.

## Borough Profile

Welwyn Hatfield is a fairly affluent borough in the rural County of Hertfordshire, but only 11 miles away from central London. Employment and wage levels are comparatively high against the national average, and with good transport links many who reside here commute to the city. Most people own their own homes but moving forward the number of people who can afford to purchase is diminishing and we are seeing an increase in the use of the private rented sector. We have a population that is increasing not only in numbers but also in diversity, but the predominant ethnic group remains white UK. Although we are low on the indices of deprivation, unemployment is on the rise, more people are losing their homes and foodbank use has increased.

## Background

The council has a legal duty to have a Homelessness Strategy. The Homelessness Act 2002 requires all housing authorities to carry out a Homelessness Review and formulate a strategy based on the results of the review that includes plans for:

- Preventing homelessness
- Ensuring sufficient accommodation is available for people who are, or who may become homeless
- Ensuring there are satisfactory support services for people who are, or may become homeless, or who need support to prevent them from becoming homeless again

Homelessness for the purpose of this strategy is defined by section 1 of the Homelessness Act 2002 (see appendix A) and includes people who are sleeping rough, homeless people for whom the local authority has a duty to find a pathway into appropriate housing, the "hidden homeless" who are living with friends and relatives or those at risk of homelessness because they are living in insecure, overcrowded conditions or accommodation which is in disrepair.

The statutory obligation to formulate a housing strategy, was removed under the terms of the De-regulation Act 2015. However the council is a strategic stock holding housing authority, with the responsibility for managing and maintaining 5,158 general

needs rented homes 1,682 sheltered homes and 1,301 leasehold flats and maisonettes<sup>1</sup>. As such we are required to take “strategic decisions and activities associated with effective planning and delivery to meet the housing needs of all residents across all tenures.”<sup>2</sup> It is therefore appropriate to formulate and set out our plans and priorities for doing this, in order that we can demonstrate how we assess need, determine local priorities and plan how the need for good quality affordable housing can be met.

### Our Other Statutory Housing Functions

The council has a number statutory housing functions and must have regard to codes of practice and other government guidelines related to them. As well as the Homeless and Advice duties already mentioned other key areas include:

- Having an Allocations Scheme for social rented homes
- Taking enforcement action to improve housing conditions
- Licensing for Houses in Multiple Occupation
- Administering grants (Disabled Facilities Grants)
- Operating a right to buy scheme for council tenants
- Engaging and involving its residents
- Keeping separate council housing finances from other council finances and producing a 30 year Council Housing Business Plan

### How we developed our New Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy

- ~~Set up a cross team Housing and Homelessness Strategy Steering Group to oversee its development and be ambassadors for promoting the strategy in their areas of expertise and with external partners.~~
- ~~Completed a review and evaluation of outcomes from the previous Housing and Homelessness strategy and Action Plan 2013-2018~~
- ~~Carried out a desk top review of national policy, statistical data / trends on homelessness and local housing market conditions.~~
- ~~Analysed data from the Office of National statistics to understand the demographics and potential growth in population in the borough for the future.~~
- ~~Compared Welwyn Hatfield's performance and approach against best practice and other Local Authorities priorities~~

<sup>1</sup> As at 12/02/19

<sup>2</sup> The Strategic Housing Role of Local Authorities: Powers and Duties, CLG, 2008

- ~~Engaged and consulted a wide range of stakeholders, including private and voluntary sector partners, council members, local residents, service users and staff. (A summary of responses to the consultation is set out in Appendix B).~~

## About this Strategy

Full details on how we developed this strategy are set out in Appendix B at the end of the document.

### Part 1 – sets out

Our 5 year strategic vision and aims for tackling homelessness, meeting local housing need, improving quality and increasing housing supply.

### Part 2 –sets out

- How national / countywide policy and local conditions are affecting the way we address homelessness, provide housing services, improve housing quality and deliver housing supply.
- Key issues arising from the Homelessness Review and consultation with Housing Stakeholders
- The main challenges ahead and what Welwyn Hatfield and its partners plan to do to address the challenges

### Part 3 – contains

- The councils detailed Housing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy Action Plan

## Part 1: Our Vision and Aims

### Vision

To provide local people with opportunities to access good quality, homes which they can afford to live in and where they can enjoy settled, secure and healthy lives

### The Priorities for our Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy

The Council's homeless review and consultation with key stakeholders has determined that the five key priorities identified in our Housing and Homelessness Strategy 2013-2018 are still relevant in this strategy and only require some refinement.

#### Our Aims are:

- Deliver More Housing to Meet the Needs of Local People.
- Make the Best Use of Housing in the Borough
- Meeting the Housing Needs of Older and Vulnerable People
- Improving Access to and Maintaining Standards in the Rented Sector
- To Prevent and Relieve Homelessness

#### Objectives and outcomes

The following objectives set out how we intend to build on the progress we have made in the last five years to realise our aims and the measurable outcomes we seek to achieve

**Aim 1: Deliver more housing to meet the needs of local people**

**We will:**

- Increase the number and mix of homes of all tenures to meet the assessed housing need of local people (including sites for local gypsy and travellers)
- Strive for 25/30% of all new homes developed to be affordable and for at least half of that figure to be at social rent levels
- Explore how the Council can best support the evidenced demand for Self-Build and Custom Housebuilding in the borough when carrying out its planning, housing, land disposal and regeneration functions.
- Refresh the council's agreed five year Delivery Plan for its own Affordable Housing Programme
- In partnership with [Hertfordshire County Council Adult Services](#), understand the demand, plan for and deliver the right type of accessible and specialist housing, for people with support needs, health and mobility problems
- Build on our working relationships with developers and housing providers, to encourage successful partnerships that overcome conflicting priorities, reduce competition for land and deliver the range of homes that local people need.
- Actively seek out opportunities for identifying new partnerships, sites and innovative house building methods to deliver new homes.
- Develop a stakeholder engagement strategy so that we can identify who is best placed to work with us on specific projects to help deliver our objectives.
- Set up a Local Housing Company as an additional vehicle for the delivery of new homes across a range of tenures, to complement our Affordable Housing Programme, with the aim of meeting a wide range of housing need in the borough.
- Complete a comprehensive assessment of Housing Revenue Account land and assets to identify potential housing development and regeneration opportunities
- Develop an optimum temporary accommodation portfolio, in-house and from the private rented sector and through other appropriate partnerships, that enables us to quickly respond to changes in homeless demand
- [Maximise access to funding and resources through funding bids and development of partnerships and/or joint ventures](#)

## Aim 2: Making Best Use of Housing in the Borough

### We will:

- Regularly review our Housing Allocation Policy and monitor lettings of council and other social housing provider homes, to ensure it is meeting the needs of people with the greatest housing need.
- Keep under regular review the condition of our stock to assess whether it continues to meet the diverse needs of our community
- Respond to the changing needs of our community, through change of use, planned programmes of renovation, redevelopment and regeneration of our existing housing stock
- Keep under review and implement any requirements resulting from the Governments proposals<sup>3</sup> on social housing property standards, fire safety and engagement with residents on these issues
- Take a range of measures to help reduce under-occupation in council owned homes. These will include:
  - Improving the offer for ~~existing tenants~~ ~~elder people~~ to encourage voluntary moves from larger family sized accommodation in all tenures
  - Investigating ways to support older owner occupiers who are struggling to manage in their home, to move from family sized accommodation and access accommodation that better meets their needs
- Improve our in-house temporary accommodation offer, delivering plans to redevelop sites, improve standards and increase supply

<sup>3</sup> Social Housing Green Paper – “Better Deal for Social Housing” August 2018

### Aim 3: Meeting the Housing Needs of Older and Vulnerable People

#### We will:

- Continue to implement the Older Persons Housing Strategy Action Plan
- Complete redevelopment plans at Minster House to increase the supply of high quality sheltered housing in the borough
- Develop and implement a programme of works to improve the quality of a number of sheltered housing units through modernising, improving accessibility, increasing space, storage and light.
- Continue with the programme of extension of community alarms and assisted technology services to existing tenants and the wider community to enable people to remain independent in their own homes.
- Continue to use the governments Better Care Fund grant in an innovative and creative way, to ensure we maximise the opportunity to support residents to live as independently as possible
- Promote existing services and keep abreast of the Government's review of disabled facility grant funding to ensure we maximise its use to help people stay independent for longer in their homes.
- Continue to work as a member of the multi-agency joint Strategic Board to consider the supported housing needs of families with children and care leavers in the borough
- Work with key partners such as Adult Social Care (HCC) and health services to better understand the housing needs of vulnerable groups in our area, such as adults with learning difficulties, mental health issues, drug and alcohol dependency, victims of domestic abuse and ex-offenders- [Agree a delivery plan to meet those needs](#)
- Support the HPNFT's<sup>4</sup> ambitions to reduce out of borough placements for people with complex support needs (e.g. mental health issues, learning difficulties [etc.](#)), through local recovery pathways and access to general needs housing
- Keep under review and monitor the effectiveness of our revised housing pathways for all key care groups e.g. victims of domestic abuse, people with mental health issues and/or drug and alcohol issues; care leavers, and other vulnerable groups.

<sup>4</sup> Hertfordshire Partnership University NHS foundation Trust

#### Aim 4: Improving access to and maintaining standards in the rented sector

##### We will:

- Be an exemplary landlord in managing the council's own housing stock and any additional housing delivered through a council-owned local housing company. We will achieve this by:
  - Embed our new housing operations restructure, to improve housing services and enhance the customer journey.
  - Strengthen our service standards
  - Implement a long term asset management strategy to repair, maintain and improve our housing stock
  - Implement an enhanced engagement strategy
- Work proactively with landlords to raise the standards in the private rented sector and continue to expand our Partnership Accredited Landlord Scheme, to encourage good practice in the private rented sector.
- Through our accredited landlord partnership, local marketing campaigns and possible procurement initiatives we will try and encourage private landlords and agents affected by the drop in demand for student lets, to provide diverse portfolios which meet the needs of all groups seeking private rented accommodation
- Consider how the council can deliver high quality market and sub-market rental homes to meet housing need across a range of tenures for local people
- Work with partner Registered Provider's to encourage varied development portfolios to increase schemes for affordable renting
- Implement the Government's new mandatory licencing scheme and use new powers and enforcement tools available to us to tackle rogue landlords
- Continue to contribute to the development of the council's fuel poverty strategy aimed at addressing fuel poverty across tenure in the borough
- Maximise access to funding and resources through funding bids and development of partnerships.

## Aim 5: To Prevent and Relieve Homelessness

### We will:

- Actively promote our housing options and advice services across the borough to enable earlier intervention with households threatened with homelessness, to increase prevention opportunities
- Work with customers to help them build resilience; assisting people to help themselves and take control of their lives within different circumstances
- Develop tailored Personalised Housing Plans where required, to help prevent homelessness and/or provide suitable housing options.
- Continue to work in partnership and increase opportunities with providers of specialist advice and support services, to prevent homelessness and increase the housing options available for the diverse range of households that need assistance.
- Strengthen our partnership and multi-agency approach, to work together to provide outreach services and specialist support and accommodation in order to eliminate rough sleeping,
- Work with landlords in both the private rented and social housing sector to increase availability of accommodation and encourage good practice in working with tenants to reduce homelessness.
- Improve the range of advice and information available to all households approaching the housing options and advice service to enable them to stay in their home or find their own housing solutions
- Keep under review the impact, costs and benefits of all homelessness related services
- Improve the way we collect and analyse data, utilise local intelligence to forecast and manage the demand for Housing Options and Advice services
- Maximise access to funding and resources through funding bids and development of partnerships.

## Part 2: Context for Developing our Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy

Our Strategy has been informed by a Review of Homelessness<sup>5</sup> in our area and has been influenced by strategic and policy objectives at both national and regional level. It was developed in collaboration with a wide range of stakeholders, including service users, voluntary sector representatives, individuals and organisations from the housing sector. This section touches on the key areas of importance for this strategy.

### National Context

This strategy has been produced at a time where homelessness is increasing nationally, and housing is in very high demand. The rate of policy change continues at unprecedented levels in an attempt to tackle these issues.

A number of key national level strategies and policies both in the pipeline and in place, have influenced our Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy, they are:

#### Existing Policy

- Ongoing Welfare Reform" - reducing benefits to "make work pay"
- Homelessness Reduction Act 2018
- The Licensing of Houses in Multiple Occupation (Mandatory Conditions of Licences) (England) Regulations 2018

#### In-coming Policy Change

- Changes to supported housing Funding
- Housing Green paper – 'A new deal for social housing'
  - Review of social housing regulation
  - Hackett Review on Safety
  - Review of Use of Right to buy receipts
- Improving Access to Social Housing for Victims of Domestic Abuse
- Consultation on priority for members and former members of Armed Forces

Much of this policy change is under consultation, so we understand the Governments aims but it is subject to change, so in response our strategy must be wide ranging and adaptable to meet the changes.

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<sup>5</sup> Review Completed March-July 2018

## Countywide Context

Welwyn Hatfield is one of 10 districts and boroughs that make up the County of Hertfordshire. Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) has the statutory responsibility for meeting the care and support needs of vulnerable groups in the region including older people and children. To address that responsibility, HCC has a number of priorities at regional level, that impact on how the borough addresses need for vulnerable people moving forward. Full details are set out in [appendix C](#)

## Local Context

Addressing local housing need and preventing homelessness is an important strategic priority for the council in its revised business plan. It supports the council's corporate vision to:

*"Work together to keep Welwyn Hatfield a great place to live work and study in a vibrant and growing economy".*

Our plans for housing and homelessness support the council's overall aims and objectives for "Our Housing". It underpins and is supported by, a range of local strategies, policies and plans that are set out in the diagram below.

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## Where Welwyn Hatfield's Housing and Homelessness Strategy Sits in Relation to Other Corporate Strategies and Plans



- Affordable Housing Programme 2016-2021
- WHBC Asset Management Plan 2015-2020
- WHBC HRA Business Plan 2019-2039
- Emerging Aids and Adaptations Policy
- Housing Allocations Policy 2018
- WHBC Mandatory Licensing Scheme
- WHBC Under Occupation Policy Dates xx
- Equalities Policy
- Customer Service Strategy
- Partnership Accreditation Landlord Scheme
- Development Strategy
- WHBC Revised Health & Wellbeing Strategy
- Emerging Fuel Poverty Strategy
- Local Housing Company Business Plan



To Be Delivered Through



## The Draft Local Plan

The local plan is a key document in informing the development of the council's Housing and Homelessness Strategy. It sets out the spatial planning framework for the long term development of the borough and identifies objectively assessed housing need. It includes policies on Place Making and High Quality design to ensure that new development fosters a positive sense of place, delivers roads and parking to agreed standards and helps create places with a sense of safety.

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The plan has been submitted to Government for approval and is currently under examination.

## Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA)

### Objectively Assessed Need for Housing

The council's Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) forms part of the evidence base for the emerging local plan. The SHMA and the objectively assessed need (OAN) for housing has been updated over time to reflect the changing context for assessing housing needs. Analysis has indicated a need for 16,000 new homes over the plan period. The size of homes required between 2013 and 2032 (SHMA Update 2017) to accommodate projected household growth is set out in the table below<sup>[1]</sup>:

<u>1 bed</u>	<u>2 bed</u>	<u>3 bed</u>	<u>4+ beds</u>
<u>13%</u>	<u>22%</u>	<u>41%</u>	<u>23%</u>

[1] This information, however is currently being re-assessed and may be subject to change

## Implementation of the new Homelessness Reduction Act 2018

Implementation of this Act has been a challenge for most councils. The legislation attracted additional funding from the Government's new burdens regime, the council received just over £35,000 per year for three years. The council has also invested additional resources and restructured the housing options team to ensure that there are adequate resources to implement this effectively.

### Resourcing Homelessness

The costs of homelessness generally to the council is increasing, as we see more people with complex needs seeking help and longer waiting times for those on the list to be rehoused. We obtain resources in various forms of grant from central government and allocate a budget from the council's own general fund. Over the last three years, the grant from government has been as follows – which includes the New Burdens funding mentioned above, additional funding to support IT changes and flexible homeless support grant.

Year	Grant sum
2017/18	£246K
2018/19	£264K

2019/20	£466K (including an additional £148K in March 2019)
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We have used this grant on a number of prevention initiatives including our Housing First project, supporting drug and alcohol dependent rough sleepers off of the streets, the Hatfield Nightshelter and the Homelessness Prevention Hub, using Citizens Advice as our main provider

We also keep abreast of funding from central government, allocated to specific areas of housing and homelessness, and bid where appropriate. Most recently the focus has been on rough sleeping, we have made three bids<sup>6</sup> to the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government. From the Rapid Rehousing – Early Adopters fund, our night shelter bid was unsuccessful due to high demand and successful council's having even more need than we do. However we were successful in obtaining funding for two full time navigator posts for one year, to support rough sleepers to access the services they need in order to stay off of the street. We also secured money from the 'Cold Weather Fund' to the cost of a flat in Howlands House, and 3 spaces of 'Emergency Provision' at YMCA.

#### The Gold Standard – award for homelessness preventions services

In 2012 government introduced 10 local challenges for authorities to adopt which have become the basis of a 'gold standard approach'. Welwyn Hatfield were successful this year (2018) in obtaining the Gold Standard status, one of only two authorities to have achieved this in Hertfordshire for our homelessness services. This has validated our belief that we provide an excellent homeless service and range of options for our customers.

## Outcomes from the Homelessness Review and Consultation

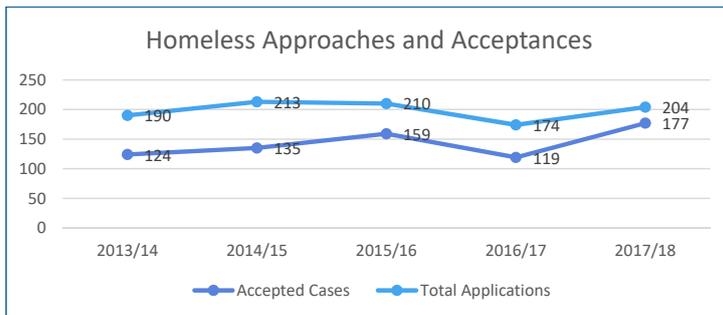
Welwyn Hatfield's Review of Homelessness was undertaken between February and August 2018, and included consultation with a wide range of stakeholders. The review identified a number of issues that have an impact on homelessness or the way homelessness is addressed. A summary of the key issues is set out below, more detailed information to support this section is in a separate document called Summary Review of Homelessness

### Homelessness Demand

In contrast to national trends, levels of homelessness approaches and acceptances have remained pretty constant over the past five years in this borough. We even saw a dip in numbers in 2016/17 which was completely contradictory to national

<sup>6</sup> Rough Sleeping Initiative, Access to the Private Rented Sector Fund and the Cold winter Fund

and even some local trends. However since then the figures have returned to previous levels as illustrated in the table below and are continuing to rise.



The main reason for homelessness has also changed during this time, the top three reasons cited for homelessness in the borough, are now:

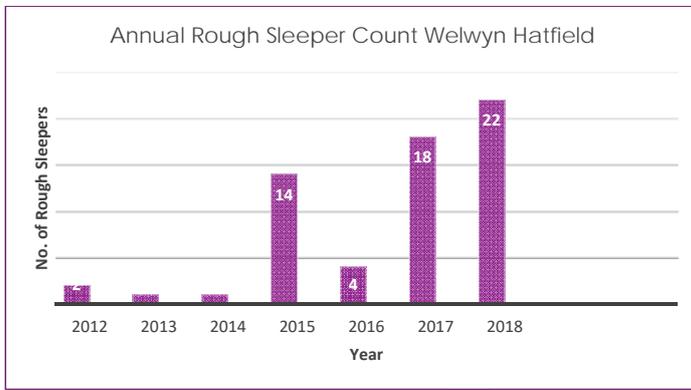
1. Loss of private rented accommodation (AST)<sup>8</sup>
2. Parent/relative/friend eviction
3. Violent relationship breakdown

### Rough Sleepers

Rough sleeping is on the increase at both a national and regional level. Our data locally shows levels fluctuating, this however is down to changes in counting methods rather than a fluctuation in numbers. As a borough with large remote rural areas we now favour using intelligence led estimating with our partners and outreach teams, which is giving a more realistic picture. Our numbers are in fact increasing significantly along with national and regional trends

<sup>7</sup> MHCLG P1E Homelessness Statistics 2017/18

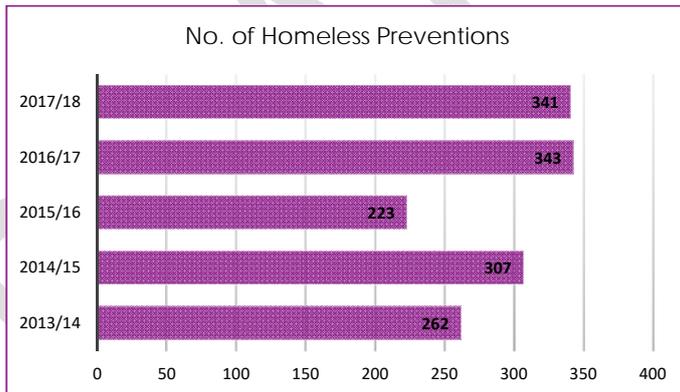
<sup>8</sup> Assured Shorthold Tenancies 6-12 mth lets - most commonly used tenancies in the private sector



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### Homelessness Prevention capacity

The Council has a successful record for preventing people from becoming homeless in the borough by taking positive action to enable them to remain in their home or enable them to find a new home before becoming homeless, as evident in the table below



Existing prevention work includes provision of the spend to save fund, partnership working with Citizens Advice on a dedicated homelessness prevention hub, rent deposit scheme, tenancy sustainment, working in partnership with Resolve and Druglink to support households with alcohol and substance dependency and housing pathways to support different vulnerable groups with high support needs.

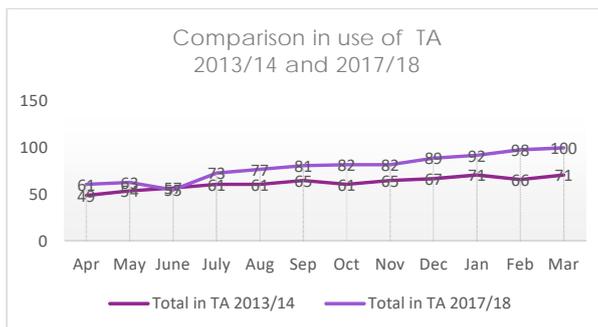
The number of housing options cases developing from initial enquiries under the new legislation increased from 24% to 78.7% in the first quarter. This trend has continued throughout the year, as well as a 20% increase in the number of households approaching the service for help. As well as restructuring the team, we have streamlined processes and improved our IT systems to help cope with the increase in caseloads.

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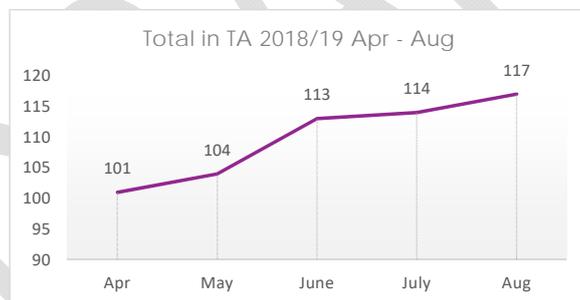
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### Use of Temporary Accommodation (TA)

Although homelessness figures have remained fairly static over the last five years, we have seen an increase in the use of TA. The table below compares monthly figures in TA five years ago<sup>9</sup> with the last financial year 2017/18; the greatest period of growth however has been seen in the last year and time spent in TA continues on an upward trend.



The reasons for the growth in numbers is mainly due to the lack of move on, the average time spent in [temporary](#) accommodation increased last summer from around 15 weeks 12 months. The following chart shows the rapid increase in the first few months of 2018/19



Of significant concern was the increased placements in expensive nightly paid B&B Hotels, something that in the past we have done only on a discretionary and strategic basis averaging 1-2 households at any one time. It is a priority for the council to find alternative solutions and we are working hard to reduce the number of placements in B&B. At the end of [December](#) there were 4 households, which is a reduction from the peak of 22 households [last summer](#). [This is a result of our](#) strategy to increase the number and variety of temporary accommodation options, looking at schemes in the private sector, use of our own housing stock and acquiring suitable property.

<sup>9</sup> 2013/14 end of year figures P1E

We are also planning to redevelop our main temporary accommodation site at Howlands House. The council has identified alternative sites to be used as TA in the interim period, whilst this site is redeveloped.

### National Policy Change

There are three key changes to national policy that have impacted the most on homelessness, the local housing market and accessibility to it. We need to respond to these and make sure that the right support is in place for our residents.

#### ➤ Welfare Reform –

- Universal Credit
  - Sees a number of fortnightly benefits rolled into one monthly household payment which includes the housing element
  - The housing element is paid directly to tenants and not landlords unless exceptional circumstances
- Implementation of a lower household benefit cap
- A four year benefit freeze
- Replacing support for mortgage interest with loans for mortgage interest
- Reduction in the numbers of people eligible for sickness and disability benefits
- New requirement for online-claims

#### ➤ Changes to supported housing funding –

- The government has just concluded a review of supported housing funding and has agreed that this will remain within the housing benefit system, but -development of supported housing has slowed during the period of review. Housing Related Support funding is administered by Hertfordshire County Council; it is important that we continue to work jointly with them both at a county level and at a local level to ensure that the needs of local residents are understood and delivery plans are in place to meet these needs.

#### ➤ Homelessness Reduction Act

- This has extended the duties of Councils to actively assist more households threatened with homelessness
- Engage earlier on in the “threatened with homelessness” process e.g. 56 days prior as opposed to 28 days and for a longer period – 56 days relief duty
- A new duty to develop a written action plan with customers, to enable them to secure accommodation

### Quality and Safety

The Grenfell fire tragedy, has put the spotlight on quality and standards of safety in social housing and improving the right of the tenants for their concerns to be heard. The new housing green paper “a new deal for social housing tenants” is going to be a significant driver of housing services and standards in the future. It sets the framework for better engagement with tenants on all aspects of their housing, improved regulation, better redress schemes, as well as legislation changes to implement the Hackett Review's<sup>10</sup> recommendations for higher fire and safety standards and improved accountability.

### Partnership working

Effectively preventing and relieving homelessness in Welwyn Hatfield, and increasing the supply of available homes (across tenure) relies upon the council working with a wide range of partners. As the demand for more homes is predicted to increase; working together, pooling knowledge, resources and expertise continues to be vital to the success in tackling homelessness and meeting local housing need

### Changes in the Local Housing Market

An understanding of the housing markets in the borough and the changes happening within them is important for planning, delivering housing and addressing homelessness. The review identified:

- The supply of social rented homes in the borough is in decline, fewer vacancies arise and people are waiting longer to obtain one.
- Until recently the Government's Affordable Homes Programme focussed on opportunities to increase the supply of affordable home ownership and there was a reduce supply of social rented homes. However more recently funding for social rented products has been increased and critically the government has removed the Housing Revenue Account borrowing cap, which gives the council the opportunity to review its development programme and to consider borrowing at a higher level to support delivery of affordable homes.
- The high cost of home ownership has meant that less people can afford this option. In addition borrowing has become more difficult as mortgage lenders tighten the requirements to borrow and demand high deposits
- In recent years there has been significant growth in the borough's private rented sector, rents are increasing and demand for affordable rented accommodation is outgrowing supply
- We have an extensive private rented housing sector in our area, however local landlords and agents prefer student lets to general single household lets, and/or letting to households who are not reliant on benefit, which restricts its use in meeting local housing need

### Housing Supply

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<sup>10</sup> Dame Judy Hackett, former health and safety chief completed a review to assess the adequacy of current guidelines on building regulation in the wake of Grenfell and found them not fit for purpose

Ensuring enough housing supply to meet local demand continues to be challenging, the review and consultation highlighted a number of barriers key to this trend.

- Local land supply, there is a severe shortage of brown fill land locally and we are in competition with other providers and developers.
- The right to buy, has diminished our social housing stock.
- The council has been proactive in delivering an affordable housing programme and has ambition to ensure that it does replace properties sold under the right to buy scheme with new affordable homes, but land availability is a challenge to this ambition.

The council will influence, where it can, local homes going to local people. In order to obtain any social or affordable housing (e.g. council / housing association homes and government subsidised shared ownership) a local connection with the borough has to be proven, which means new homes developed with council housing funding all go to local people.

With regard to private residential developments; the council adheres to its statutory responsibility to ensure developers meet their obligation to provide a percentage of affordable homes where they are required to. The remaining homes on private developments however, go to who-ever wants to buy them, and as with any area this is not necessarily people who already live or work in the borough.

## Our Challenges Ahead

The outcomes from the homelessness review and stakeholder consultation have shaped our views on the challenges that we have to face and prepare for moving forward:

- Preparing and planning for the policy change at national level that is currently in the pipeline or at consultation.
- Creating the opportunities for development to deliver the right amount and mix of different homes needed to meet the diverse housing need of local people.
- Building successful joint partnerships to develop new housing with other organisations who have competing priorities and development agendas
- Finding suitable brownfield land that is available, suitable and accessible for development and increasing housing supply
- Continue to foster our relationship with Hertfordshire County Council and the Hertfordshire Partnership Foundation Trust, to ensure we have the right supply of supported housing
- Continuing to plan and prepare for an increasing aging population

- Making the private rented sector accessible and of a good enough standard to meet more of the local housing need.
- Building resilience amongst customers who have to adapt to the changing culture forming as a result of changes to welfare benefits and challenging economy, to enable them to be more self-sufficient
- Effectively supporting customers affected by low incomes, welfare benefits changes, and debt, to sustain their tenancies and keep their homes
- Managing the increasing demand for our housing and homelessness services, developing our prevention options and maintaining our gold standard status in the process.
- Agreeing a protocol with HCC for addressing the housing and support needs of vulnerable residents.
- Effectively contributing to the Governments new strategy to eliminate rough sleeping by 2027
- Creating a larger bespoke portfolio of temporary accommodation using a variety of options that can help us respond easily to changing levels of demand and reduce the need for expensive bed and breakfast.

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## Tackling the Challenges

This section gives an overview of how the council with its partners are preparing to address the challenges and outlines some of the plans and work already in progress.

### Increasing Housing Supply

In addition to the level of housing need determined by our Strategic Housing Market Assessment, the council commissioned Savills<sup>11</sup> to provide analysis on the range of tenures and housing products that are required within the borough. It identified that housing need in the borough now extends beyond the social and affordable housing delivery targeted through the council's affordable housing programme, there is also a high demand for sub-market/intermediate homes.

### Local Housing Company

We are in the process of establishing a local housing company to use as a more flexible delivery vehicle, with the objective of providing good quality, well managed mixed tenure homes which local people can afford to live in and which complement the Council's existing and planned housing provision (including specialist housing where required) The company will meet the rising demand for intermediate, low cost home ownership or open market homes and letting sub-market and market rented homes.

### Removing Barriers and Strengthening Development

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<sup>11</sup> August 2018

The council has put a number of measures in place to remove barriers and enhance development prospects in our area. These include:

- Employing a “New Business Manager” to work solely on maximising opportunities for new development.
- Working with HCC and Herts Living<sup>12</sup> to maximise the joint working potential on the HCC owned sites in our area.
- Joint Supported Housing Accommodation Boards / Local Boards, in which we have been instrumental
- We commissioned a comprehensive assessment of Housing Revenue Account land and assets to consider development and modernisation.
- Significant regeneration plans for Highview neighbourhood centre
- The Council also launched “#Oneteam” which involves a series of project groups whose aim is to work together as one team – the council, to try and overcome any internal barriers for new development. A direct result of this approach is the creation of a new corporate regeneration group.

#### Resources

There are a number of resources we use to increase the supply of housing and develop new homes. Through the affordable housing programme we are able to use 30% of our right to buy receipts for each home replaced. The Government has recently given us more flexibility by removing the borrowing cap which was placed on councils and restricted the development of new homes. We aim to complete on more than thirty homes this financial year and have many hundreds in the pipeline.

We can also bid for funding if a development meets the criteria set from Homes England<sup>13</sup> and the council were recently successful in their bid under the Accelerated Construction fund, with £10.6m being awarded to aid delivery of 670 homes over the next five years.

#### Homelessness and TA

The new homelessness reduction legislation has re-focused the council on prevention and earlier intervention. We will achieve this through development of the required personal housing plans, refreshed housing pathways for vulnerable clients, developing partnerships and housing options and robust information and communication to enable households to better help themselves

We manage information intelligently, using adopted methods and new tools for analysis that will enable us to forecast future demand and be able to respond accordingly.

<sup>12</sup> Herts Living Limited is a private limited company, owned by Hertfordshire County Council, established for the purposes of buying, developing and selling real estate.

<sup>13</sup> Homes England the agency that administers government funding for new housing outside of London

We have developed an Action Plan to meet the demand for TA and increase. We plan to redevelop our main TA site and have made provision to use a newly purchased building and empty council properties in the interim.

### Policy Change

The council has actively kept abreast of issues and changes at national and regional level that may impact on homelessness, housing services and new delivery. We have responded to all published consultations, individually and in some instances jointly with neighbouring councils and the Local Government Association. This proactive approach enables us to “keep ahead of the game” and take all variables into account in our planning and decision making processes.

### Welfare Reform

Tenancy education and sustainment work is key to addressing any issues that may develop from the changes to the benefit system. The council has a tenancy sustainment team for its own tenants, to maximise income reduce debt and prevent eviction. We also partner with Welwyn Hatfield’s Citizens Advice (WHCA) funding the Homelessness Prevention Project. WHCA provides an extensive debt management and housing advice service to households we refer. They are present at our local courts and the job centre to provide support and advice to all households in order to prevent homelessness. There have been some very successful outcomes, (Set out in the homelessness review) which we need to keep building on.

In addition to this the CA are providing Personal Budgeting Support to claimants who are referred by Job Centre Plus.

We are keen to further develop these services and are applying for some government funding to help support tenancy sustainment in the private rented sector.

### Vulnerable Households

We are working closely with Hertfordshire’s Children’s Services, Adult Services and Healthcare teams to understand the housing demand and future support needs of vulnerable children and adults in our area. We have created multi-agency local supported accommodation boards to ensure specialist housing pathways are in place and the supply of supported housing is increased

HCC have now employed a Complex Needs Programme Manager, who will be working with all the Hertfordshire districts to review the current supported housing provision and to develop a strategic plan for the next five years.

We have also started working on a joint housing protocol for vulnerable adults. The aspiration is that this will be a countywide protocol.

There is a Joint Housing Protocol in place which covers young people (aged 16 & 17 and care leavers). This also includes a jointly commissioned Homeless Hub service, which provides joint assessments, advice, support and accommodation for this client group.

We have partnered with Drug link and Resolve to deliver a " Housing First" project to provide housing for homeless people with complex needs, this enables them to access the relevant support they need whilst reducing street homelessness. We are hoping to expand the project. We have also agreed a substantial financial investment in a local Night Shelter project led by Resolve.

We will be using the secured Rapid Rehousing funding to employ 2 full time Navigator posts, to work with the outreach services to proactively support rough sleepers in accessing the services they need to improve their health and wellbeing and prevent a return to the streets

### Part 3: Supporting Action Plan

Section three sets out the council's action plan, which provides in detail, the work that will be carried out to successfully achieve our vision and aims. The action plan is intended to be a fluid document, one that will be subject to change, should circumstances in which it operates alter e.g. initiatives end, projects deemed un-viable, funding changes, new legislation or significant change in strategic direction. The version in the published strategy is as at XXXXXX

The action plan will be monitored quarterly by a panel of senior officers to monitor progress, ensure compliance or make any amendments as necessary. The document will be updated on the Council's website annually.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A: Defining Homelessness<sup>14</sup>

#### Legal Definition: Homelessness and threatened homelessness.

(1) A person is homeless if he has no accommodation available for his occupation, in the United Kingdom or elsewhere, which he—

- (a) is entitled to occupy by virtue of an interest in it or by virtue of an order of a court,
- (b) Has an express or implied licence to occupy, or
- (c) Occupies as a residence by virtue of any enactment or rule of law giving him the right to remain in occupation or restricting the right of another person to recover possession.

(2) A person is also homeless if he has accommodation but—

- (a) he cannot secure entry to it, or
- (b) it consists of a moveable structure, vehicle or vessel designed or adapted for human habitation and there is no place where he is entitled or permitted both to place it and to reside in it.
- (c)

(3) A person shall not be treated as having accommodation unless it is accommodation which it would be reasonable for him to continue to occupy.

(4) A person is threatened with homelessness if it is likely that he will become homeless within 56 days.

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<sup>14</sup> Section 1 Homelessness Act 2002

## Appendix B: How we developed our New Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy

- Set up a cross-team Housing and Homelessness Strategy Steering Group to oversee its development and be ambassadors for promoting the strategy in their areas of expertise and with external partners.
- Completed a review and evaluation of outcomes from the previous Housing and Homelessness strategy and Action Plan 2013-2018
- Carried out a desk top review of national policy, statistical data / trends on homelessness and local housing market conditions.
- Analysed data from the Office of National statistics to understand the demographics and potential growth in population in the borough for the future.
- Compared Welwyn Hatfield's performance and approach against best practice and other Local Authorities priorities
- Engaged and consulted a wide range of stakeholders, including private and voluntary sector partners, council members, local residents, service users and staff.

## Appendix C: National Policy Details

### Housing White Paper 2017 “Fixing Our Broken Housing Market”

Last year the Government produced a housing white paper, that acknowledged the housing crisis, accepted faults lie with historic housing policy and decades of insufficient house building. It committed to plans to speed up house-building, widen the remit of development and no-longer rely solely on homeownership, tackle skills shortages in construction, support new and innovative methods of house building and changes to planning policy.

### Homelessness Reduction Act 2018

Additionally this year under the Government’s commitment to tackle homelessness they introduced the new Homelessness Reduction Act. This places increased duties on Council’s to actively assist more households threatened with homelessness, earlier and for a longer period; developing a written action plan with customers, to enable them to secure accommodation, preventing and relieving homelessness. The Act also increases the opportunities available to the applicant to request a review of decisions made by the council at various stages in the application process. There are 33 points in the process where an applicant may ask for a review.

### Government Manifesto on Domestic Abuse (DA)

The Government set out plans in its 2017 manifesto to tackle domestic abuse and improve outcomes for survivors. The Government has recently undertaken two consultations on the subject:

1. Asking for views on their proposals to improving access for survivors of DA to social housing e.g.
  - a. Higher priorities on waiting lists incl. medical priority for recovery
  - b. Not requiring a local connection
  - c. Increasing the use of tools available to enable survivors to remain in their homes etc.
2. Views on a new DA Bill legislative and non-legislative proposals for tackling domestic abuse
  - a. **Promote awareness** – to put domestic abuse at the top of everyone’s agenda, and raise public and professionals’ awareness
  - b. **Protect and support** – to enhance the safety of victims and the support that they receive
  - c. **Pursue and deter** – to provide an effective response to perpetrators from initial agency response through to conviction and management of offenders, including rehabilitation
  - d. **Improve performance** – to drive consistency and better performance in the response to domestic abuse across all local areas, agencies and sectors

### The Armed Forces Covenant

This covenant was designed to ensure those who serve or have served in the Armed Forces, (regular or reserve), and their families, should face no disadvantage in the provision of public and commercial services compared to others, and in fact special consideration is deemed appropriate, especially for cases who suffer injury or bereavement.

Implementation of this covenant has been given increasing priority in recent years especially in respect of housing provision; this has been due in large to increased publicity on the number of servicemen and women returning to the UK and finding themselves homeless. Local authorities are statutorily obliged to give support and housing priority to this group of people.

### New Housing Green Paper "A new deal for social housing".

In the aftermath of the tragic Grenfell Tower Block Fire, which took 79 lives and rendered 204 households homeless, the Government committed to bringing forward a green paper on social housing in England' to look at tackling homelessness, the quality of social homes, the rights of tenants, service management, tackling illegal sub-letting and the wider issues of community and the local economy.

The paper was published as part of a consultation on 14<sup>th</sup> August 18, key components consultation are:

- **Tackling stigma and celebrating thriving communities** - aims to break down inequalities in social housing; highlights the importance of good design ideas, resident engagement in new social housing, rewarding the best neighbourhood
- **Expanding supply and supporting home ownership** – consideration is being given to the following:
  - Looking at flexibilities on how social landlords spend the Right to Buy receipts (separate consultation), and not requiring council's to sell off vacant, higher value stock.
  - Partnerships with housing associations to boost the supply of new affordable homes through the benefits of funding certainty to some associations over a longer period.
  - Reforms to help those using affordable home ownership schemes – like shared ownership – to build up more equity in their homes.
- **Effective resolution of complaints** - how the current complaints process can be reformed so that it is quicker and easier; especially with safety concerns. How residents can access the right advice to make a complaint and obtain a stronger voice to influence decisions and challenge their landlord to improve living standards.
- **Empower residents and strengthen the regulator** - review of regulatory framework to ensure its "robust" enough to deliver safe, good quality homes with the right services; including a call for evidence which seeks views on how the current regulatory framework is operating. Ofsted style league tables for

social housing providers - performance linked to grant allocation and expanding the remit of the regulator

- **Ensuring homes are safe and decent** - acknowledges the Hackitt review and its call for fundamental reform. New legislation, pilots for resident engagement strategies for health and safety of their buildings. Review of the decent homes definition and standards.

### Mandatory Licensing of HMO's

This statutory instrument changes the prescribed description of houses in multiple occupation that are required to be licensed by a Local Housing Authority in England. It extends the scope of mandatory HMO licensing in England to any property occupied by 5 or more individuals (not all related to one another) removing the 3 storeys and over requirement for an HMO licence. Also revises minimum room sizes.

### Changes to supported housing Funding

#### Private Sector housing Reform

- Landlord Redress Scheme
- Banning Letting fees & capping deposits
- Banning orders
- Database of rogue landlords

### Rough Sleepers Strategy 2018

The Governments new strategy to eliminate rough sleeping. Published August 2018 it sets out the plans to achieve the Governments' commitment to halve rough sleeping by 2022 and to support every person who sleeps rough off the streets and into a home by 2027. They intend to achieve this vision through £10m of funding and three strands of work:

- prevention
- intervention
- recovery

## Appendix D: Regional (Countywide) Policy Details

### Hertfordshire's Plan for Children and Young People (July 2018)

This is a new strategy which aims to give every child, young person and family living in Hertfordshire the best opportunity to live happy and fulfilling lives. Hertfordshire's Plan for Children and Young People also sets out our ongoing commitment to ensure children and young people in care, or those who have recently left care, are safe, well cared for and supported to achieve their potential.

### The Corporate Parenting Strategy 2017- 19

'Corporate Parenting' is the term used to refer to the collective responsibility of the Council to provide the best possible care and protection for children and young people who are 'Looked After', that is, children and young people for whom the authority has, or shares, parental responsibility, or for whom the Authority provides care and accommodation on behalf of their parent. This strategy sets out how HCC will ensure that children looked after by Hertfordshire are able to enjoy a childhood where they are safe, well cared for and supported to achieve their full potential

### Hertfordshire Sufficiency Statement 2017-2020

Covers the Accommodation of Children & Young People Living Away from Home. The Children Act 1989 requires local authorities to take steps that secure, sufficient accommodation within the Authority's area boundaries which meets the needs of children that the local authority are looking after, and whose circumstances are such that it would be consistent with their welfare for them to be provided with accommodation that is in the local authority's area ('the sufficiency duty').

### HCC's accommodation strategy 2017-2027

This strategy sets out Hertfordshire's plans to develop more supported accommodation for the people of Hertfordshire. 'Supported accommodation' means any scheme where accommodation is combined with a support and/or social care service, provided with the purpose of enabling a person to live as independently as possible. This strategy sets out the way that the County Council will work with new and existing partners to develop both large scale supported accommodation schemes and local initiatives that will benefit smaller communities.

### HCC's Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2016-2020

The strategy was developed based on the four significant stages of the life course: Starting well, developing well, living & working well and ageing well. The goal is to optimise the health and wellbeing of people of all ages in Hertfordshire throughout the course of their lives.

### Aging well in Hertfordshire Strategy 2014-2019

The strategy is for older people and their families, and sets out our commitment to working with older people, carers and families and a wide range of stakeholders to ensure older people are supported well in their communities to lead their lives fully, and when they do need help and support it is joined up and at the right time. The strategy covers social care, health and public health services support for older

people in Hertfordshire and includes specialist and universal health services and preventative services provided by a wide range of partners including the voluntary sector and district councils.

#### [Herts County Council Market Position Statement for Older People \(2015\)](#)

The strategy outlines key achievements that have been commissioned and delivered by Hertfordshire County Council in partnership with the Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) and other key stakeholders in 2015. It also examines future market opportunities and commissioning intentions and should be used alongside our strategic documents to provide the necessary information to local, regional and national suppliers to allow them to make informed strategic business decisions. It offers personalised services developed to meet the needs, wishes and views of older people and their families and carers

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