

Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2025-2029



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Introduction

Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council's (the Council) Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2025–2029 has been developed to set out the council's plans to effectively prevent and relieve homelessness, eliminate rough sleeping and address the local housing need, over the next five years. It builds on the successes of our previous strategy (2019-2024), whilst being fluid enough to respond and adapt to the shifting environment in which homelessness, housing and support services must be delivered in.

Residents' housing circumstances shape their experience of living in our borough. A good home is more than just a place to live, it provides a foundation from which people can build a happy and healthy life. In short, a good home is the foundation of a good life. Despite our best efforts there continues to be residents who are still at risk of homelessness, living in temporary accommodation or sleeping rough.

Since the introduction of the Homelessness Act 2002, and amendment in 2017, the council – and all housing authorities – has a legal duty to carry out a Homelessness Review and take responsibility for tackling and preventing homelessness, and to publish a strategy every 5 years. This strategy will review the current condition of homelessness and rough sleeping within Welwyn Hatfield Borough, account for comments from stakeholders and set out the objectives and actions that we will undertake to address the pressures which cause homelessness and rough sleeping.

Borough Profile:

Welwyn Hatfield is a fairly affluent borough in rural Hertfordshire, situated only 11 miles from central London. There are high employment and wages comparative to the national average, coupled with excellent transport links, making it an attractive commuter area. However, these factors also drive up the housing demand, particularly for affordable housing, creating significant challenges to access and to provide suitable accommodation for all residents.

Recent events, including the Covid 19 pandemic, the subsequent cost-of-living crisis and housing crisis, have exacerbated homelessness and rough sleeping nationally, and within the borough. Recognising our increased responsibility, the council is committed to working closely with partners, applicants and housing agencies to offer advice and support. A critical importance of this strategy is to ensure delivery of secure, high quality social housing for those in need.

Initiatives from our previous homelessness strategy included restructuring the housing options team and enhancing relationships with partners to deliver a wide range of services. This continue to be instrumental in maintaining low rough sleeping numbers and improving responses to homeless applications. A full list can of key successes from our 2019-2024 homelessness strategy can be found in appendix B.

This strategy is of high importance to our councils' vision to 'Put the Community at our Heart' and priorities for 2024-2027 (see appendix C):

- **Homes to be Proud of.**
- Enable an economy that delivers for everyone.
- Action on climate change.
- Run an effective council.
- Together, create opportunities for our communities.

Within our priorities “tackling homelessness, meeting local housing need, improving quality and increasing housing supply” are all at the forefront of the Council’s dedication to lowering the levels of homelessness and rough sleeping.

Local Context

Our previous strategy highlighted in earlier years most people within the borough owned their own homes, but the number of people who can afford to purchase continues to diminish.

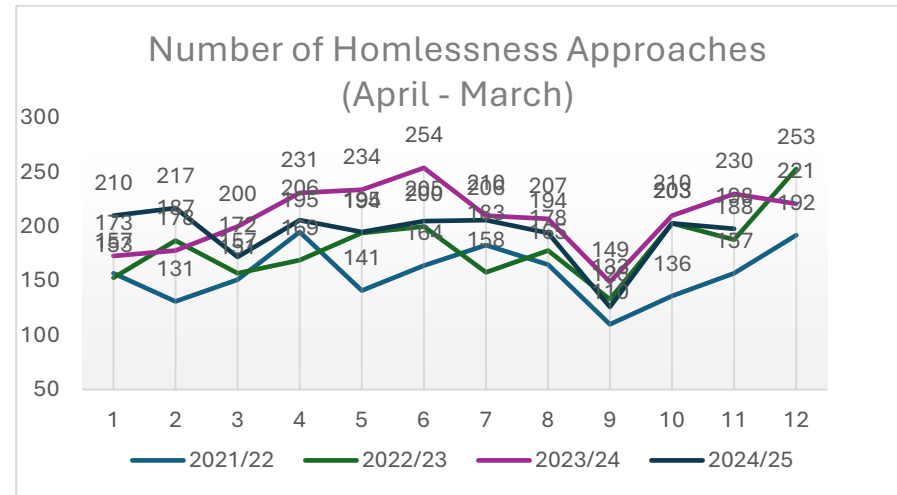
Although Welwyn Hatfield is low on the indices of deprivation, in current circumstances, unemployment continues rise, more people are losing their homes and food-bank use has considerably increased. The council recognises this inflation significantly worsened due to the housing crisis, Covid-19 pandemic, and the cost-of-living crisis.

Homelessness Approaches:

Increased difficulty of rent payments, purchasing of homes and the exacerbated number of evictions – primarily due to selling of privately rented properties – have caused a significant rise of homelessness

approaches within the borough. The number has substantially increased to over 200 a month in the past year (2024/25).

The number of Homelessness Approaches from 2021-2025:



The main reasons for homelessness approaches within Welwyn Hatfield have remained similar since our last strategy was published.

As of 2024-25, 2235 approaches required assessment, and of those assessed 723 (33%) were owed a duty as they were homeless or threatened with homelessness.

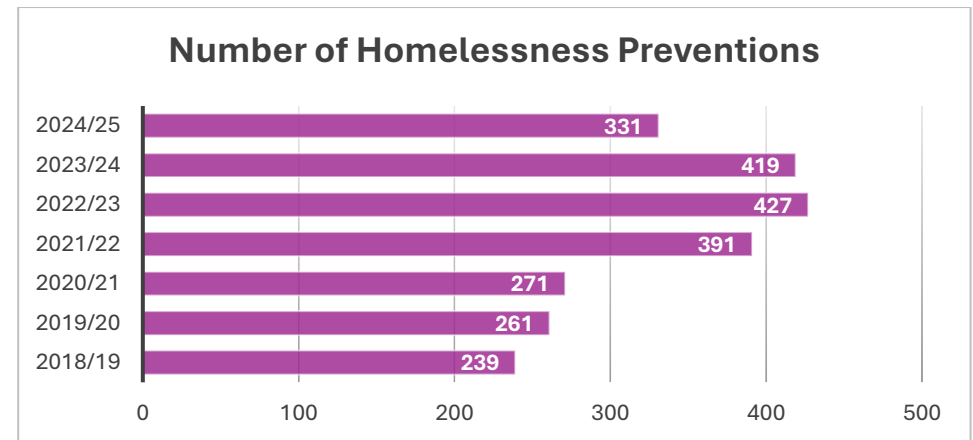
The top 5 reasons for homelessness approaches were as follows:

Reason for Homelessness Approach	Number of Approaches
Family or friends no longer willing or able to accommodate	325
End of private rented tenancy - assured shorthold	154
Non-violent relationship breakdown with partner	100
Domestic abuse	98
Eviction from supported housing	96

Reason for Homelessness Approach 24/25	Number of Approaches
Family or friends no longer willing or able to accommodate	195
End of private rented tenancy - assured shorthold	124
Non-violent relationship breakdown with partner	61
Domestic abuse	88
Eviction from supported housing	59

Homelessness Preventions:

Since our last strategy, the number of preventions has increased proportionally to the number of approaches, as presented below:

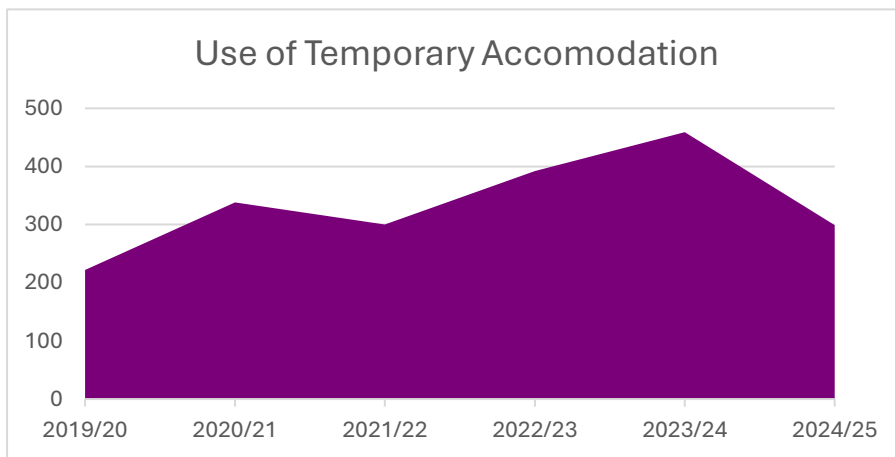
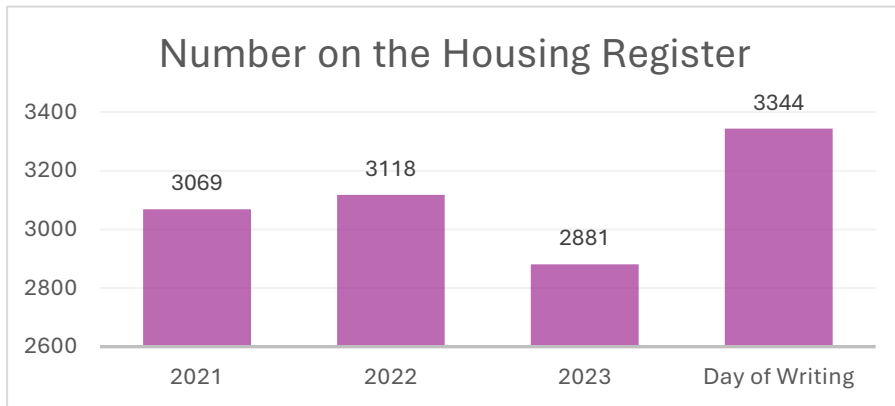


Actions which led and continue to aid in the prevention or relief of homelessness include working with partner organisations to offer mental health support, tenancy sustainment and advice, paying off rent arrears, assisting with the cost of a new tenancy, and funding projects that provide supported accommodation.

Temporary Accommodation and Housing Register:

A secondary impact of the high increase of homelessness approaches and cases is number of those in temporary accommodation and those on the housing register. A crucial reason for this is due to the lack of affordable and social housing within the borough to accommodate the current numbers.

The following graphs shows the numbers of individuals on the housing register since 2021, and use of TA since 2019/20:



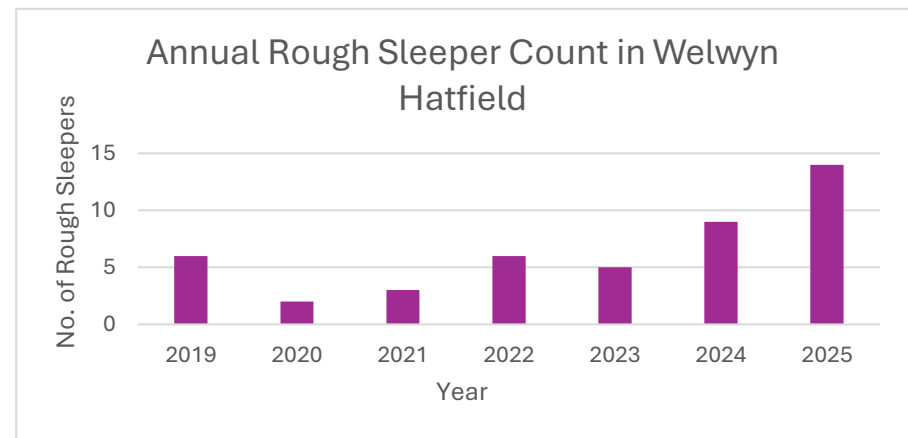
Addressing the significant rise in temporary accommodation needs within the borough is a top priority. The concern continues as we currently have 202 households in temporary accommodation and 12 households in hotels/B&Bs, however the council holds 118 units of temporary accommodation.

Additionally, two of our key TA sites (Howlands House and Burfield Close) are redevelopment projects underway. The lack of sufficient move-on options has necessitated the use of costly night shelters and the placement of residents outside the borough, such as in Peterborough. Although these emergency measures are not ideal, they have been essential for maintaining low rough sleeper numbers.

Rough Sleeping:

Compared to the national average of 6.8 per 100,000, the number of rough sleepers in Welwyn Hatfield remains low. At the time of writing, we are aware of 14 rough sleepers within the borough. It should be noted that despite best outreach efforts not all individuals desire to engage with officers and support.

In our borough, we continue to use an evidence-based estimate, including a spotlight count, to provide a realistic snapshot of those sleeping rough. This approach, chosen due to our large remote and rural areas, is also used by 237 other local authorities. The results from the past five years are as follows:

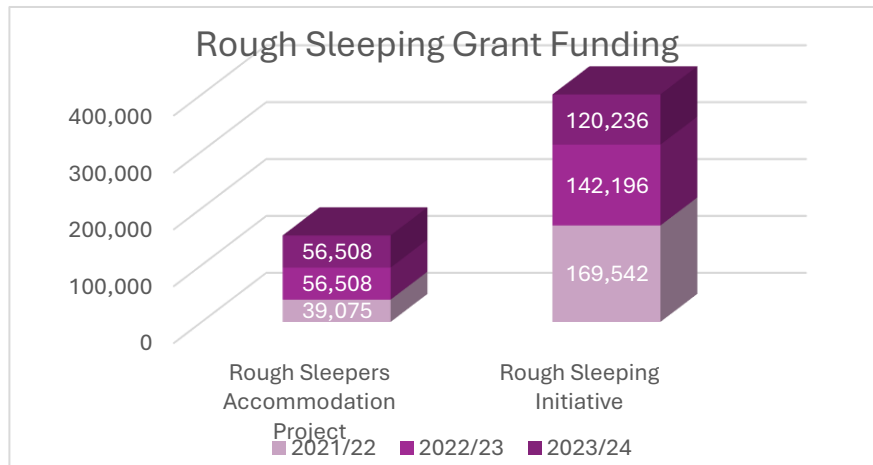


Resourcing:

A crucial way to minimise numbers and ensure the smooth implementation and delivery of our homelessness services is through securing grants from central government. Over the last three years, the Homelessness Prevention Grant's from government have been as follows:

YEAR	GRANT SUM
2021/22	£605,589
2022/23	£584,549
2023/24	£723,402
2024/25	£729,482

In addition to this, we were successful in receiving funding for accommodation, which is provided by YMCA and Drug link, and received Rough Sleeper initiative grants. These have been instrumental to our efforts over the past three years, however, are set to end 31/03/2025. The below graph shows the funding over the past 3 years and its decrease:



Whilst there is an expectation that these grants will be replaced, there can be no assurance. Councils across the country are waiting for announcements from government departments about what might replace these funding streams. There will almost certainly be a bid put in for funding for rough sleeping services if/when that opens, and other funding pots will be considered.

National Context

The biggest impact for years to come will be the re-introduction of a Labour government. There are numerous measures favoured and promised for the future, and although at the time of writing no laws have been passed by this government, there is a clear shift in direction for housing. In specific reference to housing and homelessness, they have promised to “deliver the biggest boost to affordable, social and council housing”.

The following points are noted from post-election broadcasting, outlining the new labour government's commitments which may impact our services:

- Planning reform
 - Devolution of services - changes to planning restrictions and requirements in which local authorities will take more control of building homes.
 - Seek to accelerate the delivery of high-quality infrastructure and housing by including targets for local councils to build more homes.

- Renter Protection
 - The ending of section 21, “no faults” evictions - this has been noted from our housing staff, and nationally, as the number one cause of homelessness from the private sector.
 - Extension of Awaab’s Law to the private sector to guarantee safe, high-quality homes and regular standards checks.

Additionally, national policy has been a driver of many notable changes in actions towards reducing homelessness and rough sleeping, both nationally and across the borough, since writing our last strategy:

- The effectiveness of services since the **Homelessness Reduction Act 2017**, and **Rough Sleeping Strategy since 2018** has driven national levels of rough sleeping down by 50% since 2017.
- The **Coronavirus Act in 2020**, introduced national changes to delivery of front-line services to residents, massively impacting landlords and housing authorities through protecting tenants from eviction. Another related scheme “**Everyone In**”, whereby the government provided councils with initial funding of £3.2m, representing the necessity and will to reduce rough sleeper levels.
- The impact of **Brexit**. Reduction of housing assistance from local authorities from January 2021, meant citizens from the European Economic Area no longer receive access to social housing to homelessness assistance, until granted indefinite leave to remain. Similarly for rough sleepers, they will be asked to leave with assistance or if not, in some cases forcibly removed.

- **Domestic Abuse Act 2021** imposed a greater duty on local authorities in England to accommodate, provide refuge and support victims of abuse and their children.
- **Armed Forces Act 2021** introduced increased responsibility for local authorities. Due regard must be paid to the principles of the Covenant, when carrying out specific public functions in various areas, including of housing.
- **Social Housing White Paper 2023** came into effect April 2024 and lays out the standards needed to be met by social housing landlords in order to provide adequate housing and tackle the stigma of inequalities in social housing. This holds local authorities to account and ensures the same standards for permanent social housing are replicated for those in temporary accommodation.

Stakeholder Engagement

Engaging our staff, partner organisations, and residents was crucial to understand the real impact of the housing crisis on residents in our borough. It required more than analysing statistical data, which led us to undertaking conversations with those directly involved to provide a broader perspective, and to be directly responsive to the community's needs.

What our residents say:

It was important to us to understand resident perspectives on housing and homelessness within the borough, and the importance of our measures. We used our community survey undertaken in August to September 2023 and discussed feedback staff received from residents they had engaged with, particularly in temporary accommodation.

From the community survey, with over 1300 responses, the importance of tackling homelessness within the borough ranked 3rd most important for our priorities in the local community. 4/5 top priorities were housing related within this section, and 9% of the comments about priorities for the local community were focused on preventing homelessness. Through this resident told us we need to:

- “Ensure the homelessness situation is addressed, and support is provided”.
- “Prevent homelessness by providing support to vulnerable people”.
- “Finding suitable accommodation for homeless people”.

Residents recognised the necessity of more affordable housing, and the importance of planning for local needs, and many comments clearly indicated simply to “care for local people”.

This survey fed directly into developing our corporate priorities, most significantly it encouraged our aim of “support and prevent homelessness” under our wider vision of “Homes to be Proud of”.

What our partners say:

At Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council, we collaborate with a range of partners and organisations to deliver diverse support services for those in need of. We are dedicated to ensuring there is a series of support available and are determined to increase awareness and use of these services.

Through consultations with these partners, several key strengths were identified: our determination to help in any way possible, strong communication, and the supportive relationships maintained by our housing officers.

Partners emphasised the importance of continuing to be responsive and flexible, as each homeless application presents unique challenges and must be treated on a case-by-case basis.

While maintaining these strong relationships is not without its challenges, our partners are committed to working together to uphold them. They suggested certain areas for improvement:

- Sharing relevant information from the start of each process to reduce repeat questioning or delays.
- Standardising our housing support criteria to enhance service efficiency, especially when multiple people are involved or during handovers.
- Educating the public and council officers about homelessness to aid in reputation building and removing stigma.
- Improving and better support for move-on services. Whilst this is challenging in the current housing climate, it remains a critical area for development within Welwyn Hatfield and wider areas.

Additionally, Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) Child Services emphasised the importance of understanding and fulfilling our role as a "corporate parent," particularly in supporting care leavers and considering their trauma.

What our staff say:

During this consultation we spoke with our frontline staff from the Housing Options, Housing Allocations and Temporary Accommodation teams. Our staff stressed the increase of homelessness approaches and the numerous, complex reasons for these.

Our staff highlighted the impacts and strain of the section 21 evictions, therefore the necessity of engaging further with private landlords. Section 21 is now set to be removed under the new government. This change in policy prompted the importance of keeping staff up to date on new regulations and additional pathways to keep residents housed. Additionally, the importance of strengthening ties with private sector housing and landlords, to avoid further evictions.

It was widely expressed the increase of number of households threatened with homelessness requires fluid services that engage and guide residents, encouraging proactive solutions and public education. Moreover, staff noted while we offer a strong range of services and maintain good relationships, we must regularly review and ensure their effectiveness.

Our staff explained the increase in complex needs among rough sleepers, which has risen particularly due to post-pandemic mental health impacts. Partners and organisations need a better understanding of Welwyn Hatfield's context and the individuals' complex needs in order to combat this challenge. Staff recognised the clear need for intermediate services, as many repeat returners don't fit the requirements of existing support options or have lacked adequate support. To keep rough sleepers off the streets, we must provide services and accommodation for those with vulnerabilities who aren't at the extremes.

Vision and Action Plan:

Our Vision: To ensure people are safe and have a good home with the foundation from which they can build a happy and healthy life.

The Council's homelessness review and consultation with stakeholders has determined that the key priorities identified in our Housing and Homelessness Strategy 2019-2024 are still relevant, however, requires some refinement.

The strategy has been developed to build on the progress we have made in the last five years, but to enhance our objectives and the measurable outcomes we seek to achieve, working with all essential stakeholders.

The Council aim to achieve this through developing a dedicated structure of realistic solutions, outcomes and actions to bring key stakeholders together, work to review and implement future structures.

Our Main Objectives:

1. Eradicate Rough Sleeping within the Borough
2. Proactive Prevention and Relief of Homelessness
3. Maximise the Efficiency of our Services
4. Enhance Housing Options to Meet Residents Needs

Aims	Objectives	Measures
<p>Aim 1: Eradicate Rough Sleeping within the Borough</p>	<p>1. Ensure there are no rough sleepers in the borough.</p>	<p>All rough sleepers are in contact and engaging with outreach support.</p> <p>Developed a plan to organise assistance for rough sleepers nightly.</p> <p>Confirm no one is sleeping rough within in the borough, offering assistance to those that are, and where necessary, taking enforcement action against those that refuse.</p> <p>Ensure the principles of Housing First are sustained throughout our practises, through work with Homeless Link.</p>
	<p>2. Develop and expand our relationships with partners.</p>	<p>Uphold and track the frequency of meetings with partners, through organisation and attendance of cross partnership meetings.</p> <p>Consultation held with partners to understand their requirements and ensuring frequent communication and meetings</p>
	<p>3. Increase move on options from temporary accommodation to reduce repeat cases.</p>	<p>Using successful thought from the “Everyone In” programme, ensure it is known anyone sleeping rough has at least one offer of accommodation available.</p> <p>Engage with TA residents to inform them of their options.</p> <p>Development and engagement of intermediate support services.</p>
	<p>4. Review emergency accommodation as means to provide warm and cool spaces. 4a. With a focus on winter provisions</p>	<p>Explore locations within the borough to provide warm/cool spaces.</p> <p>Develop a policy/strategy for emergency night provisions.</p>

	5. Improve provisions and support for those who are not owed an accommodation duty.	<p>Work with services to provide “intermediate support services”.</p> <p>Improve awareness and access to support services for all residents (mental health, drug and alcohol) through media communications.</p>
	7. Promote rough sleeper support services and increase public knowledge around the subject.	<p>Create leaflets/flyers describing the services and support available.</p> <p>Host drop-in sessions to provide advice and support for those who may need the support services.</p>
	8. Development of the website to include a range of support services	<p>Monitor the number of clicks and responses.</p>
Aim 2: Proactive Preventions and Relief of Homelessness within the Borough	1. Continue to implement new and current legislative framework into everyday work.	<p>Monitor changes to policy and law, collating into a document.</p> <p>Monthly team meetings to review changes and discuss “next steps forward” from legislation.</p> <p>Attendance of meetings with HCC and Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government.</p> <p>Provide up to date training and advice for staff on the front line.</p>
	3. Increase efforts to reduce and react to situations of Domestic Violence	<p>Regular review meetings with SADA to ensure supported services and up to date knowledge.</p> <p>Establish pathways of support and housing for those fleeing Domestic Abuse – work with HCC on their commissioned specialised DA service.</p> <p>Continue strong working relationships with DV partners; SADA, HCC, WelHat Womens Refuge, Safer Places.</p>

	4. Work with service users to build up resilience and self-sufficiency.	<p>Implement support programmes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Tenancy sustainment workshops and advice. - Understanding housing options <p>Have the programmes in collaboration with partners for visibility of services.</p>
	5. Continue to work on the Homelessness Prevention protocol, with partners - “eviction as last resort”	<p>Work with Registered Social Landlords and supported housing providers to explore all options before eviction process is taken.</p> <p>Commit to involve prevention services before any possession action starts.</p>
	6. Increased awareness of responsibilities for the Armed Forces.	<p>Uphold the armed forces covenant within the borough, through work with HCC.</p> <p>Housing officers and outreach services are always aware of asking individuals whether they are a veteran, giving special consideration.</p>
Aim 3: Maximise the efficiency of our Services	1. Improvement of external services and their efficiency	<p>Undertake a review of external services impact, costs and benefits.</p> <p>Continuation of the efficient and essential services.</p> <p>Uphold a record of services and their delivery.</p>
	2. Improvement of internal services and their efficiency	<p>Regular reviews of the team and internal support service’s efficiency.</p> <p>Ensure standards of service are maintained in line with the council’s CORE values.</p> <p>Highlight gaps within the team and services, including identifying the need for specialised positions.</p>

	<p>3. Commit to maximising access to funding and resources.</p>	<p>Monitor new funding opportunities released and ensure applications are sufficient to receive interested funding streams.</p> <p>Determine the appropriate funding for services internally and externally.</p> <p>Regular meetings held with the Homelessness Advisor from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to review funding prospects.</p>
	<p>4. Marketing campaign and signposting to advise services</p>	<p>Increase the presence of service options to residents and housing officers within town centres and relevant buildings, i.e. GP surgeries, reception areas, libraries.</p> <p>Develop an education campaign with our partners to inform the public on homelessness and how to help.</p> <p>Identify opportunities to promote the services, i.e. in public spaces such as doctor's clinics, libraries, schools.</p>
	<p>5. Improved understanding of local services.</p>	<p>Hold regular multi-disciplinary team meetings to discuss complex cases, specifically mental health cases.</p> <p>Support residents to access available services, i.e. Food Banks, Debt Advice and Health Services.</p>
	<p>6. Consult with service users and residents to identify the primary needs of the borough.</p>	<p>Develop a feedback form to obtain information from services users (in TA and Move-on accommodation)</p> <p>Ensure there are representatives of residents/service users in cross partnership meetings.</p>

<p>Aim 4: Enhance Housing Options to Meet Residents Needs</p>	<p>1. Increase availability of Temporary Accommodation throughout the borough.</p>	<p>Redevelopment of Howlands House.</p> <p>Redevelopment of Burfield Close.</p> <p>Ensure supply levels of temporary accommodation exceed the demand.</p>
	<p>2. Review and strengthen the housing pathways in place for hospital discharges, care leavers, ex-offenders, ex-armed forces and people with Mental Health issues.</p>	<p>Document procedures and referral pathways in place with local hospitals, HCC adults and children's services, probation/prison services, MoD/ Armed forces charities and NHS.</p>

Appendices

Appendix A: Defining Homelessness and threatened with 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 is probable that occupation of it will lead to violence from some other person residing in it or to threats of violence from some other person residing in it and likely to carry out the threats, or
 - (c) 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.
- (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

Appendix B: Key Successes

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- Improvements and streamlined IT systems have helped to cope with caseloads.
- Promoting housing options and advice services have been successful through partners with earlier referrals.
- Work with Drug-link and Resolve to expand the Housing First project to assist rough sleepers with complex needs off of the streets was successful and continue to maintain a good working relationship.
- Worked with the YMCA on the redevelopment of a new more modern offer.
- Begun working with Welwyn Hatfield's Citizen Advice on more services for the homelessness prevention hub.
- Joint working with HCC has improved and continues to work well.
- Increased relations/partnerships with the private sector.

Appendix C: Corporate Visions and Priorities



Community
at our
HEART

 <p>H Homes to be proud of</p>	 <p>E Enable an economy that delivers for everyone</p>	 <p>A Action on Climate Change</p>	 <p>R Run an effective council</p>	 <p>T Together, create opportunities for our communities</p>
<p>Build new social and affordable homes</p> <p>High-quality homes for all</p> <p>Support and prevent homelessness</p> <p>Plan for future homes in the right places</p>	<p>Champion local businesses</p> <p>Support vibrant town centres</p> <p>Enable access to amenities in our neighbourhood centres</p> <p>Boost the economy in rural areas</p>	<p>Renew our commitments to be a net zero Council by 2030</p> <p>Step up climate change adaptation and mitigation measures</p> <p>Lead by example and encourage others to make positive change</p> <p>Increase and promote biodiversity</p>	<p>Be accessible</p> <p>Be accountable and adopt a first time right approach</p> <p>Make financial decisions to deliver efficient and quality services</p> <p>Build our reputation, locally and with partners</p>	<p>Be proud of our environment and heritage</p> <p>Promote health and wellbeing through local leisure and cultural opportunities</p> <p>Celebrate our diverse cultures and communities</p> <p>Help us feel safer where we live</p>

WE WILL BE: **COLLABORATIVE OPEN RESPONSIBLE EXCELLENT**