

# Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy

**2025 – 2030**

April 2025



## Contents

Executive Summary .....	3
Introduction .....	3
Building on the Success of the 2019 - 2024 Strategy.....	4
Increasing Housing Supply .....	4
Reducing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping .....	4
Preventing Homelessness:.....	5
Housing Quality and Suitability .....	6
National Context.....	6
Renters' Rights Bill .....	7
Supported Housing (Regulatory Oversight) Act 2023.....	7
Local Context .....	7
Report of the Director of Public Health East Sussex 2019/20 .....	8
Improving Lives Together .....	9
Sussex Mental Health and Housing Strategic Plan .....	9
Strategic Partnerships .....	9
East Sussex Housing Partnership.....	9
East Sussex Health and Care Partnership .....	10
Multiple Compound Needs Board .....	10
Themes and actions .....	10
Reducing Homelessness via Early Intervention and Prevention.....	10
Actions .....	11
Increasing Housing Accessibility.....	14
Actions .....	15
Improving the Supply and Quality of Temporary Accommodation .....	15
Actions .....	16
Reducing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping for People with Multiple Compound Needs	16
Actions .....	16
Improving the Quality and Suitability of Housing.....	17
Actions .....	17
About Homeless Link.....	17

## Executive Summary

This Strategy covers the period 2025 – 2030. It sets out Rother's objectives to prevent homelessness and rough sleeping in the district wherever possible and to deliver lasting changes in the lives of people who have experienced homelessness.

This is Rother District Council's first standalone Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy. This approach ensures that the Council has a dedicated focus and action plan to collaboratively engage with all local agencies in Rother working with people who are at risk of or experiencing homelessness. It is important to note that this Strategy is distinct from the Council's Housing Development Strategy, which is being developed separately. However, together these strategies will work in tandem to ensure that all housing-related challenges are addressed comprehensively and effectively.

The Strategy indicates how Rother District Council (RDC) will use its statutory powers and work in partnership with East Sussex County Council (ESCC), other local authorities, and statutory, voluntary, and community sector organisations in East Sussex – bringing all local resources and partnerships together behind this aim.

The Strategy is formed around the following key objectives:

- **Reducing homelessness via early intervention and prevention.**
- **Increasing housing accessibility.**
- **Improving the supply and quality of temporary accommodation.**
- **Reducing homelessness and rough sleeping for people with multiple and compound needs.**
- **Improving the quality and suitability of housing.**

The Strategy will be delivered through a reducing homelessness action plan and will work in tandem with the Council's inaugural Housing Development Strategy 2025 – 2030, to ensure all housing-related challenges are addressed comprehensively and effectively.

The Strategy has been developed with support from Homeless Link. Homeless Link is the national membership charity for organisations working with people experiencing or at risk of homelessness and represents over nine hundred organisations across England. Its National Consultancy Development team provides expertise and independent evaluations of the full spectrum of homelessness and related services for local authorities, central and regional government-funded programmes, and its member organisations.

Work to develop this Strategy has included comprehensive document and data reviews, service mapping, and engagement with stakeholders and people with lived experience through an online survey of temporary accommodation residents.

## Introduction

The Housing, Homelessness, and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2019-2024 includes areas of action for Council and its partners around reducing homelessness and rough sleeping during 2019 – 2024. The Strategy identified a number of challenges within its three main themes of housing supply, reducing homelessness and rough sleeping, and improving housing quality and suitability. These included gaps in the supply of affordable rented accommodation, increased rough sleeping and homelessness leading to a rise in the use of temporary

accommodation, and damp and disrepair issues in some private rented accommodation.

### **Building on the Success of the 2019 - 2024 Strategy**

During the life span of the previous Strategy (2019 to 2024) the Council made considerable progress against the objectives that were developed as part of the accompanying Action Plan. Some of the key successes are set out below.

### **Increasing Housing Supply**

The Council began a programme of purchasing properties for temporary accommodation, to alleviate homelessness and increase resource effectiveness and value for money in this area. The Council has already purchased 63 units of accommodation and envisages this will include a further 10 units by October 2025. The Rother leasing scheme involves landlords leasing properties to the Council for use as temporary accommodation – this enables access to quality and affordable housing at lower cost to the Council.

The Council has purchased 12 properties for the Housing First scheme, which provides accommodation and support for former rough sleepers with multiple and compound needs. Additionally, Rother DC Housing Company Ltd (RDCHC), has reached agreement with a preferred registered provider to pre-sell 130 affordable homes and have a new build contract to construct 200 homes at Blackfriars in Battle. RDCHC is a private independent company, wholly owned by the Council, and for whom the Council is the sole shareholder. RDCHC will help the Council deliver additional affordable housing.

### **Reducing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping**

The East Sussex Young Person's Pathway and Coordinator role (funded by the five East Sussex District and Borough Council Housing Authorities) has ensured a responsive approach and clear pathway into commissioned accommodation and support for all young people in Rother who are owed a statutory duty by the Council. In Rother, this includes the London Road service – a total of 13 units, in rooms and self-contained flats. The Pathways project, based in Bexhill, provides supported housing for people with mental health challenges.

The county-wide protocol supports reciprocal arrangements between districts. This has increased Rother's residents' access to supported accommodation, especially those with support needs around substance use and domestic abuse.

**Reducing Rough Sleeping:** The East Sussex Rough Sleeper Initiative (RSI) is led by Hastings Borough Council (HBC). The programme provides funding for outreach, specialist support, and accommodation and enhances relationships between East Sussex local authorities which create a pathway for people experiencing rough sleeping from the streets into settled housing. The RSI funding enables rough sleepers to access an outreach worker, occupational therapist, mental health nurse, and social worker. The multi-disciplinary model used by the RSI outreach team includes specialist staff with a focus on substance misuse, social care, mental and physical health. This has improved coordination between services and reduced the risk of repeat homelessness for rough sleepers.

Rother's Off the Street Offer (OTSO) provides three units of accommodation for up to 28 days for verified rough sleepers. These customers do not have access to temporary accommodation because they do not have a priority need. We work jointly with the rough sleeper initiative (RSI) team to support the customers to find housing solutions, including supported accommodation and accommodation in the private rented sector.

### **Preventing Homelessness:**

RDC funds two Homelessness Prevention Officer roles and an Employability Broker funded via the homelessness prevention grant.

Rother Tenant Finder provides financial and other incentives for private landlords. The Council also offers rent deposits, insurance, and energy efficiency support to private landlords. This has enabled more Rother residents to move into private rented accommodation and is a more cost-effective option than temporary accommodation placements. The Council's two Private Rented Sector Officers help to sustain tenancies via move-in and tenancy support. The Council has recently recruited a Tenancy Support Officer to enhance the service. The Council's strong relationships with landlords and lettings agencies has prevented homelessness for some tenants who were at risk of losing their accommodation due to rent arrears by offering support, such as negotiating repayment plans.

Rother has access to a Health and Wellbeing Coordinator, funded via East Sussex Public Health, to support people living in temporary accommodation or at risk of homelessness to explore unmet physical and mental health needs, lifestyle choices, and provides budgeting, harm minimisation, and social networks support. The Council's resettlement schemes provide accommodation and support for people under the Government's Resettlement Schemes.

The ESTAR Employment and Skills Team service offers a holistic service to people with low skills, to help them gain access to work and move into long-term secure housing. The service is able to work with people in a range of housing circumstances, including temporary accommodation, supported accommodation, and hidden homelessness, and offers both support to develop "soft skills", as well as rent deposits and other financial support. The colocation of ESTAR staff in Rother and collaborative approach with other RDC teams enables service users to access the full range of housing and public-health funded resources.

**Safe Hospital Discharge:** The new mental health Housing Specialist role, funded by the NHS, is involved in triage and multi-agency casework support for people leaving psychiatric wards. This approach has reduced bed blocking, improved patient experience, and reduced the workload for local authority housing staff. With East Sussex Healthcare Trust, we are seeking to develop a multi-disciplinary protocol and co-location of NHS and Council staff. This approach will help ensure people have the right accommodation and support when they leave the hospital.

**Working with the Police and Community Safety Partners:** We have developed a new partnership approach to cuckooing. Where a property is taken over and used to facilitate exploitation, police and Housing Options work together to fully assess the victim's housing needs and facilitate a move into suitable housing, with follow up welfare visits. This has prevented homelessness for this group of very vulnerable residents. Police, Community Safety, and Housing Options staff have worked collaboratively around the Public Space Protection Order, which operates in Battle, Bexhill and Camber, to find solutions for local people experiencing rough sleeping who are involved in anti-social behaviour. This approach has increased understanding of the causes of rough sleeping and expanded options for support before any enforcement action is taken. This has also increased take-up of support by some chaotic and entrenched rough sleepers and improved their accommodation outcomes.

**Early Intervention and Prevention Measures:** The East Sussex Floating Support Service provides personalised short-term housing-related support across the county for vulnerable people aged 16+, who require support to live independently. Support is provided in people's own homes, via phone or video call and in community venues. This support helps people move into more secure and suitable accommodation and prevents evictions due to rent arrears or other reasons.

The Warm East Sussex Energy Partnership, Warm Homes Check, and Local Energy Advice Demonstrator Projects involve ESCC, the five local authorities, NHS, and Citizens Advice 1066 in offering free energy advice and support to people on low incomes, including access to insulation and boiler upgrades. NHS and other frontline staff are able to give positive messages about available advice and support, and this can lead to wider conversations about welfare benefits and other financial advice. This helps prevent fuel poverty, which is a cause of A&E admissions and to manage debt, which is a potential cause of homelessness.

Through our partnership with Jobcentre Plus we can flag problems around Universal Credit and Housing Benefit payments at an early stage and this reduces the risk of eviction. Rother's low-income family tracker identifies people on the Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit caseload who are in financial stress and who may be eligible for discretionary housing payments. This enables the Council to intervene before financial and housing stress reach crisis point.

### **Housing Quality and Suitability**

The Council operates a HMO Licensing Scheme (as required by the Housing Act 2004), which ensures good physical and management standards of shared properties. Our Environmental Health Enforcement Policy helps to address non-decent properties, provides for civil penalties and "minimum energy efficiency standards" within private and social rented properties. This includes an inspection programme to identify Category 1 and 2 hazards. RDC is also a member of the Pan-Sussex Environmental Health and Housing Standards Group, which develops collaborative working around enforcement, HMO licensing, Disabled Facilities Grant, and fuel poverty.

### **National Context**

The new Strategy comes at a time of severe pressure in housing, health, and other public services in England. It is very challenging to build sufficient affordable housing to meet demand. The private rented sector market has become inaccessible for many, due to rising rents and a local housing allowance which has failed to keep pace. These factors are leading to increased homelessness and rough sleeping. The recent cost of living crisis has also increased poverty, homelessness, and rough sleeping – with those on lowest incomes being hit the hardest – and has contributed to poorer mental health, worse living standards, and increasing health inequalities.

Homelessness is a complex problem, which requires collaborative working between organisations to solve it. The very tight funding environment for public services in England makes it more difficult for mental health, social care, and housing-related support services to offer a comprehensive and responsive service to all vulnerable people who need their support. This national context has a resource impact for local authorities, who are picking up the bill for temporary housing, care, and support.



### **Renters' Rights Bill**

The Bill contains a number of measures to reform the private rented sector. These include abolishing Section 21 Notices and introducing new grounds for possession for landlords, new powers for tenants to challenge rent increases, and a new homes standard for the private rented sector covering security, health, and safety standards. In future, landlords will not be able to discriminate against tenants with children or receiving benefits. Local authorities' enforcement powers will be strengthened to make it easier to identify and penalise bad landlords.

### **Supported Housing (Regulatory Oversight) Act 2023**

This requires councils in England to set up licensing schemes for supported exempt accommodation providers and establish regulations around property standards and support for vulnerable tenants. It also requires local authorities to review supported housing in their areas and to develop strategies to understand the current and future housing needs in their districts.

### **Local Context**

Rother District Council is one of five lower-tier local authorities, along with Eastbourne and Lewes Councils, Hastings Borough Council and Wealden District Council, within East Sussex. East Sussex County Council is the upper-tier local authority. Census population for 2021 indicates there were a total of 93,110 people (42,102 households) in Rother, with half of the population living in Bexhill and other residents dispersed across the surrounding rural areas. Since the previous census in 2011, the population of Rother has increased by 2.8%, compared to 6.6% nationally. The population in Rother is predominantly white (95.6%), with people of mixed ethnicity currently being the largest minority group – accounting for 1.8% of the population. Rother has the highest average age in the South East. Between 2011 – 2021, average age increased from 50 to 53 years old. The number of people aged 65 – 74 rose by 23.8% and the future trend is also upward. The proportion of residents aged 35 – 49 decreased during this period by 19.3%. Net international migration has decreased in recent years but remains a driver of population growth in Rother.<sup>1</sup>

Rother is within the 40% most deprived authorities in England, with higher than local average percentages for people claiming Council Tax support, children in low-income families, fuel poverty, and with lower-than-average levels of homes with an EPC rating of C or above. Rother has the lowest number of unemployed claimants of Universal Credit/Job Seekers Allowance compared to neighbouring districts and boroughs. However, Rother's average salary is £31k - 17.5% lower than the average salary in England of £38k - and this gap is increasing.

Rother has the highest proportion of rural villages and dispersed areas in East Sussex. Public transport links in these areas are often poor, less supported housing, and other support services.<sup>2</sup> Rother's large geographical size creates the need for more online resources to be developed to make interaction with those who are unable to visit Bexhill easier. However, lower than national average gigabit capability, 5G coverage, and low IT skills in some parts of the population create digital exclusion for some. These factors affect people's feelings of isolation and mean some homelessness can be more hidden.

---

<sup>1</sup> Hastings Borough Council and Rother District Council (2024) Housing and Economic Development Needs Assessment Update. Available [here](#). <sup>2</sup> East Sussex Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (2024) Rother district area profile. Available [here](#)

Hastings Borough Council is surrounded by Rother and shares the Bexhill and Hastings conurbation. There are strong commuter flows between Rother and Hastings and increasing resident moves from London. Some Rother residents utilise services in Hastings, such as Jobcentre Plus and specialist drugs or alcohol treatment services, and some Rother residents are placed in temporary accommodation in Hastings. This situation creates scope for shared services to build collaborative working and save resources.

This Strategy is aligned to the Council Plan. This includes a vision to 2040 for the district, which reflects our longer term aims and aligns with our Local Plan. To deliver the Council's 2040 vision, there are three supporting themes against which medium term priorities and progress to 2030 can be identified:

- A Thriving Local Economy
- Live Well Locally
- Green to the Core

These themes are underpinned by our Fit for the Future programme, which ensures that the Council can deliver the priorities and actions outlined in this document through effective and efficient services. The Council will deliver some of the actions or take a lead to co-ordinate with partners. In other areas, where the Council is not best placed to lead, we will continue to work collaboratively with partners to achieve the best outcomes for residents and businesses, taking an enabling role.

The Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy links to a number of other Rother and East Sussex strategies and reports, some of which are summarised below.

#### **Report of the Director of Public Health East Sussex 2019/20**

The report highlighted that housing is an important social determinant of individuals' physical and mental health and wellbeing; that the home environment can positively impact on health inequalities through enabling access to support and care services, employment, and social networks.

As the impact of poor housing on individuals affects health, housing, social care services, and voluntary, community and social enterprise, it makes sense to adopt a whole systems approach, involving a whole range of these organisations, to improve the availability of affordable decent housing and to reduce health inequalities. The report also highlighted the need for services to focus on the prevention of homelessness and rough sleeping, including understanding their underlying causes.

The report's recommendations have driven the development of strategic-level collaborative and partnership working around health and homelessness in East Sussex, including integrated planning and delivery of care and support in housing, sharing data and intelligence to understand housing needs, improving the health and safety of homes, workforce development around housing issues, posts funded by Public Health to promote health and wellbeing, homelessness prevention, access to employment, and fuel poverty.



### **Improving Lives Together**

The five-year Strategy by Sussex Health and Care, the integrated care system, sets out actions to improve the local health and care system, particularly for the most disadvantaged people in local communities – including those experiencing homelessness. The Strategy focuses on preventing ill-health and reducing health inequalities at key life stages and enabling people to live as independently as possible in the community. This involves a joined-up approach between local authorities, the NHS, and other organisations to deliver community services, workforce development, use of digital technology, and maximising the power of partnership working.

### **Sussex Mental Health and Housing Strategic Plan**

The Strategic Plan produced by Sussex Health and Care seeks to develop a holistic and integrated (and more consistent) approach which considers the wider determinants of health and greater role for the voluntary, community, and social enterprise sectors. The Strategy builds on existing integrated commissioning around supported housing placements – including for step-down accommodation and rehabilitation pathways; ensuring housing expertise is embedded within community mental health services and in multi-disciplinary teams to provide pathways out of homelessness and rough sleeping.

### **Strategic Partnerships**

East Sussex has a very active network of strategic partnerships. These bring together representatives from housing, NHS, public health, social care, mental health, and the voluntary and community sector, to build a collaborative and solution-based approach to support vulnerable people in East Sussex. The partnerships are innovative in the central role played by the integrated care system and public health and their promotion of systems thinking around homelessness prevention - including joint commissioning and delivery of support. Rother District Council has played a key role in the development of these strategic partnerships and their programmes of work.

### **East Sussex Housing Partnership**

This is a multi-agency group involving East Sussex housing authorities, housing providers, and partners from across health, social care, children's services, and criminal justice. The Partnership encourages integration and facilitates long-term planning around a number of homelessness-related issues, including social housing reforms, supply of affordable housing and temporary accommodation, funding homelessness prevention initiatives, and supporting people with multiple and compound needs.

Work in these areas is taken forward via the Partnership's sub-groups – *Development and Enablement*, *Housing Management and Standards*, and *Homelessness, Health and Support*. A Housing Partnership lead role, jointly funded by the five housing authorities and public health, supports strategy development, action planning, and delivering the housing and health agenda. The Partnership also delivers a housing workstream within the NHS shared delivery plan, which supports ongoing work to reduce health inequalities.

### **East Sussex Health and Care Partnership**

The Partnership was formed in 2020 bringing together key local health and care partners to deliver objectives of the joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy. It leads on delivering shared population health objectives, and seeks to influence wider determinants of health, such as service access. Current work relates to community mental health transformation, social housing reforms, development of integrated community teams, improved data sharing and intelligence, and workforce development.

### **Multiple Compound Needs Board**

This Board was created in 2023 in partnership with the Changing Futures Sussex programme and is chaired by RDC. The Board draws on learning from Changing Futures, to coordinate systems planning and a multi-sector partnership approach for people with multiple and compound disadvantages, including those at risk of homelessness and rough sleeping. Board members include Public Health, NHS, East Sussex Commissioners and Service Leads, mental health trusts, Probation, Rough Sleeping Initiative, and people with lived experience of multiple disadvantages. Work is currently focusing on developing long-term integrated solutions, including an accommodation pathway, improving data insights and “team around the person” multi-agency case working.

RDC takes an active role in a number of other boards and working groups across East Sussex which seek to address broader factors affecting homelessness and rough sleeping in Rother. These include the Rough Sleeping Initiative Board, the Multi-Agency Financial Inclusion Steering Group, East Sussex Housing Officers Group, Anti-Poverty Working Group, and the Homelessness Forum, which is attended by a wide range of statutory and voluntary sector agencies.

## **Themes and actions**

### **Reducing Homelessness via Early Intervention and Prevention**

Approaches to Rother's Housing Options service and initial assessments have risen over recent years. In 2022/23, Rother carried out a total of 536 initial assessments; in 2023/24, this figure was 571. Statutory homelessness acceptances have also increased, as have subsequent placements in temporary accommodation. The number of people who had a priority need and were unintentionally homeless rose from 106 in 2022/23 to 166 in 2023/24. Rother Housing Options continues to provide high-quality advice and support to people in housing need: a high proportion of people responding to the temporary accommodation survey rated their experience with Housing Options as “good” or “excellent”.

However, it is becoming increasingly challenging to support people via homelessness prevention interventions: between 2022/23 – 2023/24, the proportion of people owed a Prevention Duty decreased from 44% to just over 38% of people receiving an initial assessment. During this period, the proportion of people owed a Relief Duty remained stable – at around 52%. Housing Options data indicates a significant proportion of people approaching the Council for housing assistance were at risk of homelessness due to Section 21 Notices being issued. This was the case for 72 households in 2022/23 and 57 households in 2023/24. More people are approaching Housing Options who have compound needs or have experienced domestic abuse.

It is difficult to find suitable accommodation within the supported accommodation pathway commissioned by ESCC for prisoners with compound needs and/or no provable local connection to Rother, care leavers, and people leaving hospital who have additional support needs. Sometimes, people experiencing homelessness fall between legal frameworks for housing and social care – increasing their risk of homelessness. There are additional emerging pressures on Rother's stock of housing, such as from early-release prisoners. We would be in a better position to fully understand these needs if we undertook some more proactive work to capture insight from those with lived experience of homelessness and rough sleeping.

There is uncertainty over the long-term future of the Rough Sleeper Initiative Programme, with funding currently only guaranteed until 2025/2026. Some public health-funded posts are only until 2025. Cuts in revenue funding for supported housing means less opportunity for 24-hour support which makes it less likely that projects can accept higher risk/needs clients and increases the risk of these people having longer stays in temporary accommodation, hospital, prison, or returning to homelessness.

Similarly, proposed funding cuts for floating support in East Sussex make it more challenging to deliver tenancy support to people in their own homes and to reach people at an early stage (before their issues reach crisis point). Increased Local Housing Allowance rent shortfalls, and the amount needed for a rent deposit, is putting pressure on the Homelessness Prevention Grant budget. Currently, discretionary housing payments are not sufficiently targeted at households experiencing homelessness.

In this context, Rother's partnerships and joint commissioning arrangements - both inside and outside of the Council - are vital to addressing the complexities and root causes of homelessness. The Council needs to be even more creative in its approaches, to encourage people at risk of homelessness to seek help at an early stage and avoid a housing crisis.

### Actions

Outcomes from current jointly commissioned and multi-agency roles have demonstrated the benefits to service users and to respective organisations (health, housing, social care, etc.). The upcoming 10-year NHS strategy (due spring 2025) will focus on prevention, community care, and digital care. The NHS Sussex five-year strategy, Improving Lives Together, has priority around improving discharge practice. This gives the Council additional opportunities to link up housing and health agendas. **The Council will seek further collaboration and integration to provide services which provide an early intervention and homelessness prevention focus.**

Rother District and Hastings Borough Councils have similar population and economic profiles; some Rother residents use welfare and support services in Hastings. The Council has already worked together with Hastings to produce the Local Plan and Housing and Economic Development Needs Assessment. We will continue to develop strategic links which recognise these commonalities and the benefits of resource-sharing.

To increase homelessness prevention, the Council will:

- Work with statutory and voluntary sector partners to set up a new homelessness prevention hub in Bexhill. The Hub will draw on the experience of the successful hub in Eastbourne (hosting advice, food bank, and other services), and offer a holistic multi-agency approach. Building space for the Hub will be leased by Rother Voluntary Action.

Basing the Hub away from a traditional council office will make access easier and encourage engagement from a wider range of local residents.

- Continue to develop and expand use of the LIFT (Low Income Family Tracker) modelling tool to identify people in financial stress and use data to engage with vulnerable households.
- Work with Citizens Advice 1066 and other partners to identify and map households who are likely to qualify for help with energy support.
- Encourage registered providers to provide tenancy support; ensure good communication with the Council for people at risk of losing their tenancies and seek commitment to good practice around evictions.
- Explore the possibility of Housing Options staff carrying out some home visits to vulnerable households and other outreach.
- Explore via the homelessness forum if local voluntary, community, and social enterprise organisations have capacity to increase informal outreach work.
- Focus health and other public sector services to make enquiries about housing status/risk of homelessness during triage/assessments.
- Explore how digital inclusion for vulnerable people can be improved in rural areas of Rother.
- Consider re-establishing the schools' homelessness prevention programme.
- With Hastings Borough Council, explore shared models of advice and support and rationalising service contracts, such as those with Probation and around hospital discharge.
- Continue to work with the Council's Revenues and Benefits staff to increase collaboration with homelessness teams and better target Discretionary Housing Payments.
- Maximise access to the Household Support Fund (HSF), managed by ESCC for fuel vouchers, household items, and for rent arrears payments (up to £1,000) after Discretionary Housing Payment funding has been exhausted.
- Draw on learning from Hampshire and Isle of Wight Integrated Care Board about health, care and housing integration, to develop datasets involving acute health settings and duty to refer pathways, GP, and primary care services. This will help to identify vulnerable people with potentially poor health and social care outcomes, which can also link to the risk of homelessness.

To improve accommodation pathways, the Council will:

- Continue to support the county-wide framework for supported housing, to enable Rother residents to access the range of commissioned accommodation across East Sussex.
- Support ESCC's work to streamline referral processes and develop a consistent approach for all commissioned supported accommodation providers to manage risk, as this will speed up and increase access for Rother residents.
- Work with Probation and lobby for additional funding to fill current gaps in accommodation and support for released prisoners who have no demonstrable local connection and/or multiple support issues.
- Seek to increase buy-in from partners around changes to the joint housing protocol for care leavers.
- Consider the value of housing and children's services having formalised meetings to discuss challenging cases which require support from both services.

- Work with Registered Providers' Lettings Teams to speed up void turnaround times and to ensure they have all the information needed at referral to support vulnerable tenants – working through any GDPR concerns, as required.

To further integrate our work with health and social care, the Council will:

- Work to transform hospital discharge processes for people at risk of homelessness – with hospitals taking a leading role in developing processes and managing discharges.
- Complement investment by Public Health around homelessness prevention, focusing on early identification of people at risk of homelessness and holistic support to sustain their existing accommodation and avoid needing temporary accommodation. This will include links to well-being, employment, and training support.
- Work within the East Sussex Health and Care Systems Partnership to highlight risks to individuals and families and ensure this is reflected in broader work to reduce health inequalities.
- Utilise findings from the upcoming independent economic evaluation of public health-funded interventions to better understand and demonstrate the systems impacts of early intervention support.
- Seek funding from the Integrated Care Board system to:
  - Continue funding for the Health and Wellbeing Coordinator post.
  - Fund a part-time post, employed by East Sussex Hospital Trust, to facilitate safe hospital discharge.
  - With East Sussex Healthcare Trust, explore the potential for the Trust to procure emergency accommodation for medically fit low-needs patients, to facilitate safe discharge.
- Fully participate in development of integrated community teams. It is envisaged that Rother's Integrated Community Team will be shared with Hastings and include Housing Options and other council services, the integrated care system, East Sussex Public Health, and voluntary, community, and social enterprise sector, advice, and other services. The integrated community team will provide a locality-based and integrated approach to care and support, including for people with multiple long-term conditions and complex care needs, to improve quality and reduce health inequalities. As integrated community teams will pick up people in housing need, they will enable a homelessness prevention approach.

To ensure the Council has staff with the right skills and experience to prevent homelessness and rough sleeping, it will:

- Continue a training programme for frontline staff working with people experiencing rough sleeping and homelessness – this will increase understanding of relevant legal frameworks and statutory responsibilities, available services and support and embed trauma-informed practice.
- Explore the possibility of establishing a community of practice for frontline staff and managers to share expertise and good practice around issues relating to people experiencing homelessness and rough sleeping.
- Seek to boost the profile of housing as a career path through holding careers fairs and linking to the Build Your Future in Housing campaign.

To highlight the need for policy change to reduce homelessness and rough sleeping, the Council will:



- Work through the East Sussex Chief Executives Group to highlight the high cost of temporary accommodation in Rother and East Sussex, call for greater investment in homelessness prevention funding and future uplifts to Local Housing Allowance.
- With other East Sussex local authorities, continue to lobby Government to act to address the high level of people in temporary accommodation and the unsustainable financial impact of this on local authorities. This includes:
  - Maintaining Local Housing Allowance rates to cover the 30<sup>th</sup> percentile.
  - Investing (£200m) in Discretionary Housing Payments and £150m in the Homelessness Prevention Grant.
  - Shifting funding for the Homelessness Prevention Grant, Rough Sleeping Initiative, and Local Authority Housing Fund towards multi-year grants that fully reflect need in areas of housing stress.

### **Increasing Housing Accessibility**

At 73%, Rother's proportion of owner occupancy is much higher than the national average (61%). However, the proportions of people in private rented (16.2%) and social housing (10.2%) are both below national and county averages. House prices in Rother have increased to the South East average, but local wages and jobs have not kept pace. At 12.2%, the ratio between house prices and wages in Rother is significantly higher than the regional and national position (8.3%).

It is very challenging to meet annual affordable housing targets for the district. There has been a significant decrease in house building starts. A combination of increases in construction costs, limited grant funding, and the need to invest in improvements within existing stock has led to many registered providers withdrawing from "land-led" developments. This means that affordable housing via Section 106 arrangements has all but dried up.

Constrained house building delivery and the focus on open market sales increases demand for existing affordable housing. This is coupled with a highly competitive market for available private rented properties, rapidly rising rents, and large shortfalls in Local Housing Allowance. This is overstressing housing advice and homelessness services, increasing use of temporary accommodation for households experiencing homelessness, and leading to long waits on the housing register.

Despite a reduction since March 2023, as of December 2024 a total of 1,372 people were on the housing waiting list in Rother. Between 2022 – 2024, average waiting times increased for one-bed, three-bed and four-bed houses and sheltered accommodation. Demand is strongest for one-bed properties (with an average waiting time of 17 months) and three-bed properties (with an average waiting time of 20 months).

Lack of available affordable rented accommodation is slowing down move-on from supported accommodation. This means people are staying longer than they need to and preventing other people who need this support from accessing it. It is particularly difficult to find suitable long-term accommodation for people with multiple and compound needs and mobility issues.



### Actions

To increase the accessibility of longer-term accommodation, the Council will:

- Continue to fund the Tenant Finder Scheme and Private Rented Sector posts, to enable more people to move into and sustain private rented tenancies.
- Review move-on accommodation. This will include:
  - Assessing the potential to increase utilisation of non-commissioned exempt accommodation, drawing on learning from use of non-commissioned services by young people services in East Sussex.
  - Utilising Supported Housing (Regulatory Oversight) Act powers to ensure any exempt accommodation utilised in this way is comprehensively monitored and reviewed to ensure service users receive high quality support which represents value for money for the Council.
  - Continue to lobby the Government to take action to address the high level of people in temporary accommodation and the unsustainable financial impact of this on local authorities. This includes updating the basis for temporary accommodation subsidy rates to 2024 Local Housing Allowance levels from 2011 levels. Providing access to flexible single pots of capital finance, with support from Homes England and others to bring forward marginal development sites that prove to be unviable within the context of the current regimes.

### Improving the Supply and Quality of Temporary Accommodation

There has been a significant rise in the number of people in temporary accommodation over recent years. Housing Benefit caseload data indicates that in 2024 there are currently over 200 households living in temporary accommodation, up from 20 to 30 households in 2014.

People are typically staying longer in temporary accommodation and the Council is over-dependent on the use of expensive nightly-paid accommodation. These factors add to the bill and represent a big deficit for Rother. The cost of providing temporary accommodation is increasing and is placing a financial burden on the Council.

There isn't enough of the type of temporary accommodation in the location that Rother would prefer to use. Some people with compound needs are excluded from existing temporary accommodation due to the impact of their behaviour and may experience homelessness again. Multiple temporary accommodation placements (involving moves between different temporary accommodations) are becoming more common. In addition, some temporary accommodation is outside RDC's boundaries. This may make sense where placements are in Hastings, however, in other cases, this may disrupt residents' support and social networks.

#### Key findings:

- Over 70% of people responding to the temporary accommodation survey indicated they had an additional need around mental health, and around a third had issues with their physical health.
- Around half of people responding to the survey had been in another temporary accommodation placement immediately before their current one.

- Respondents would like more advice around budgeting and debt and help with furniture and other costs when they move into new accommodation.

### **Actions**

To address these issues, the Council will:

- Ensure that temporary accommodation provides support which is personalised and helps people to move on successfully – this will include access to move-in and tenancy support.
- Ensure that wherever possible people are placed in temporary accommodation which is close to their support networks – enabling them to maintain their current support networks.
- Continue to support housing enablement through collaboration with Rother housing colleagues and via participation in East Sussex partnerships around meeting demand for temporary accommodation – including for people with restricted mobility and those with additional support needs.
- Work with colleagues in Adult Social Care and Children's Services to coordinate a response around families assessed as intentionally homeless, which takes into account change in risk levels. This could enable people to move out of high-cost temporary accommodation placements (funded by social care) into stable long-term housing.
- Explore how savings from temporary accommodation and other areas of spend can be reallocated to fund additional upstream homelessness prevention interventions.

### **Reducing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping for People with Multiple Compound Needs**

People with multiple compound needs are a group with distinct needs, who need tailored responses to help them exit homelessness in a sustainable way.

### **Actions**

To prevent homelessness and rough sleeping for this group, the Council will:

- Draw on learning from Changing Futures Sussex and existing multi-agency working arrangements to ensure we work holistically. This will include:
  - Developing a consistent person-centred and trauma-informed approach to support across all statutory and voluntary sector services working with people experiencing homelessness.
  - Increasing the participation of people with lived experience of homelessness and their influence over service design – using the experience of the Changing Futures Sussex Peer Navigator role.
  - Promoting a risk-sharing approach between housing and other statutory services, to enable people to access the right accommodation and support package for their needs.
  - Exploring the possibility (within the current funding envelopes) of working with smaller caseloads with this group, to ensure all clients receive quality support.
  - Exploring the potential benefits of bringing the Housing First service in-house and determining if the Housing First model can be replicated for other service user groups with multiple and compound needs.
  - Considering if the current Rough Sleeping Initiative and Changing Futures Sussex teams can be merged after funding ends in 2025, to increase the Rough Sleeper Initiative project's focus on outreach and the accommodation pathway.

### Improving the Quality and Suitability of Housing

Data from the English Housing Survey 2022-23<sup>3</sup> indicates that Rother has higher than national average rates of dwellings that do not meet statutory minimum standards for “decent” housing; do not provide reasonable thermal comfort, are not in a reasonable state of repair, or do not have reasonably modern facilities and services. There are also some acknowledged problems around the quality of private rented accommodation in terms of disrepair, damp, and mould.

Government funding is available to increase energy efficiency via retrofitting – improving heating and insulation in older properties – but schemes are often short-term and can have narrow eligibility criteria. The Survey also revealed Council services are generally less able to respond to complaints from tenants, due to higher demand and reduced staff levels. There is an acknowledged national shortage of enforcement officers. In Rother there are also insufficient contractors available to carry out retrofitting – leading to delays for residents.

### Actions

- Increase engagement with social and private rented sector landlords – using reforms in the Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023 to drive improvements in management and standards around customer and resident complaints and other consumer standards.
- Review and update the East Sussex Temporary Accommodation Strategy, as members of the Housing Partnership Board, and carry out scoping to increase enforcement capacity across East Sussex. This will include shared roles to proactively inspect temporary accommodation, to identify providers who are not meeting required standards and offering poor value for money.
- Continue to engage with and develop the model designed by Operation Jigsaw. This initiative is led by Powys County Council and aims to improve standards in private rented housing, including by estimating the number of enforcement officers required per local authority and upskilling officers, including apprenticeships in housing standards improvement roles. We will aim to double the number of staff Rother employs in these roles – partly via income generated from collecting civil penalties.
- With the integrated care system and other East Sussex local authorities, promote initiatives which increase health and safety in residents’ homes, including adaptations and assessments to reduce falls.

### About Homeless Link

Homeless Link is the national membership charity for organisations working with people experiencing or at risk of homelessness in England. We aim to develop, inspire, support, and sustain a movement of organisations working together to achieve positive futures for people who are homeless or vulnerably housed.

Representing over 900 organisations across England, we are in a unique position to see both the scale and nature of the tragedy of homelessness. We see the data gaps; the national policy barriers; the constraints of both funding and expertise; the system blocks and attitudinal obstacles. But crucially, we also see – and are instrumental in developing – the positive practice and ‘what works’ solutions.

As an organisation we believe that things can and should be better: not because we are naïve or cut off from reality, but because we have seen and experienced radical positive

---

<sup>3</sup> Ministry of Housing, Communities, and Local Government and Department for Levelling Up, Housing, and Communities (2024) English Housing Survey. Available [here](#).

change in the way systems and services are delivered – and that gives us hope for a different future.

We support our members through research, guidance, and learning, and to promote policy change that will ensure everyone has a place to call home and the support they need to keep it.

**What we do**

Homeless Link is the national membership charity for frontline homelessness services. We work to improve services through research, guidance and learning, and campaign for policy change that will ensure everyone has a place to call home and the support they need to keep it.

**Homeless Link**

Minories House  
2-5 Minories  
London  
EC3N 1BJ  
[www.homeless.org.uk](http://www.homeless.org.uk)  
@HomelessLink

**Let's End Homelessness  
Together**

