



# **Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy**

**2022-2027**

**The Homelessness Review 2022**

**Consultation draft**

## 1. The Homelessness Review 2022 - Understanding homelessness in Epsom & Ewell

In developing the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2022 to 2027 a detailed review of homelessness in Epsom & Ewell has been undertaken.

The purpose of the Homelessness Review is to establish the extent of homelessness in the area, identifying future trends and any gaps in the service currently being provided. The review has considered a range of information including:

- Number of homeless approaches
- Reasons for homelessness
- Homeless Prevention and Relief cases and outcomes
- Support needs of homeless households
- The type of individuals and households becoming homeless
- Households in nightly paid accommodation & in-borough temporary accommodation
- Supply and Demand of Affordable housing - Housing Needs Register and social housing lettings
- Private rented housing & the Rent Deposit Scheme
- Rough Sleeping & Single Homelessness
- The current Housing Options Service & existing homelessness prevention measures

The data within the Homelessness Review will be updated, evaluated and monitored on a regular basis so we are able to predict future trends of homelessness, identify households at risk of homelessness and to inform new service improvements.

The Homelessness Review provides comprehensive information to develop the Council's Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2022 to 2027 and the Homelessness Review document should be read in conjunction with that strategy. A summary of the key findings of the Homelessness Review can be found in section 11.

The data set used to undertake this review was from information extracted from the Council's Abritas Housing System for the period 2018/19 up to quarter 3, 2021/22 and is based on Homelessness Case Level Collection data (H-CLIC).

### **The number of households approaching the Council's Housing Options Service for homeless assistance**

The number of households approaching the Council for homeless assistance continues to increase. The complexity of problems presented by these people has also increased, (for example people with multiple and complex needs - mental health issues; physical health; substance misuse issues) as has the difficulty in finding ways to help them.

As shown in the table below, between April 2018 and December 2021 the Housing Option Service dealt with 1385 approaches for advice and assistance regarding homelessness.

<b>Homeless Approaches &amp; Outcomes</b>	<b>2018/19</b>	<b>2019/20</b>	<b>2020/21</b>	<b>2021/22 Q1-3</b>
Total number of homeless approaches	320	435	316	314
Early Advice given to resolve housing problem/ case closed (triage)	68	289	218	212
Number of homeless applications where homelessness was successfully prevented	20	49	64	33
Number of homeless applications where homelessness was successfully relieved	17	34	49	36
Number of homeless applications where the Council accepted a full homeless duty	6	54	30	52
Number of homeless applications where the Council did not have a full duty - not eligible/no local connection/ intentionally homeless	7	11	6	4
Number presenting at prevention stage	80	132	82	79
Number presenting at relief stage	84	153	144	101

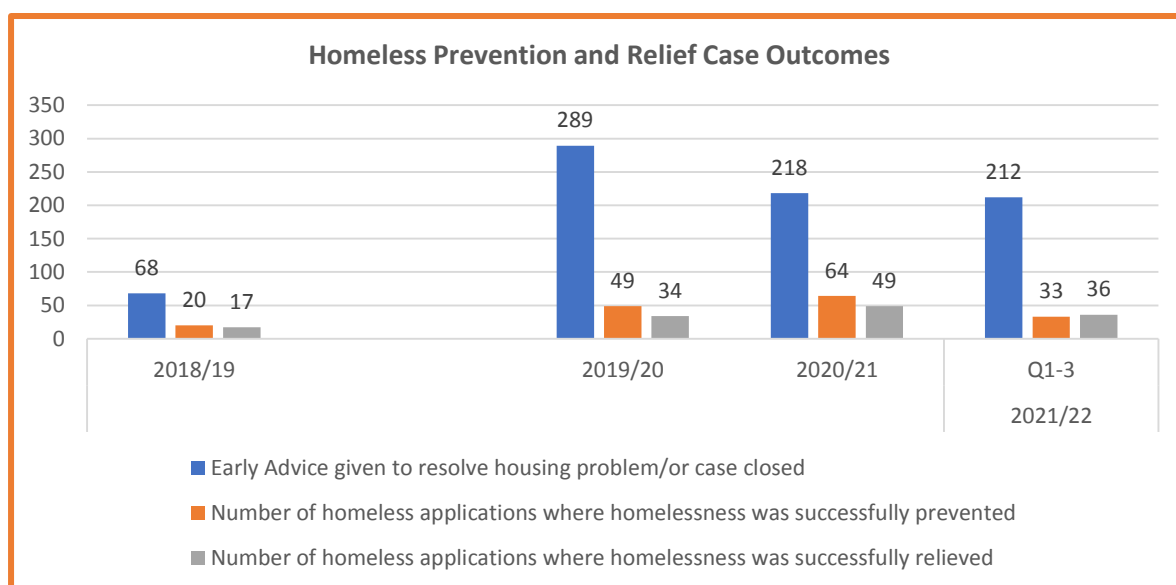
## 2. Homeless Prevention and Relief cases

Despite the rising demand, the Housing Options Team continues to successfully prevent and relieve homelessness. The number of cases where the Council has successfully prevented or relieved homelessness is outlined in the chart below.

The Homelessness Reduction Act requires local housing authorities to focus upon preventing or relieving homelessness.

Prevention duties include any activities aimed at preventing a household threatened with homelessness from becoming homeless. This would involve activities to enable an applicant to remain in their current home or find alternative accommodation to prevent them from becoming homeless. Relief duties are owed to households that are already homeless and require help to secure alternative accommodation.

The Council is focused upon preventing or relieving homelessness at the earliest opportunity and in 2020 created a new Housing Options Preventions officer post. The success of this role can be seen in the number of cases that were resolved at the triage early advice stage since 2020.



Analysis of the approaches being made has shown that the majority of people who approach the Housing Options Service for assistance do so either before they are threatened with homelessness (at the triage stage) or within 56 days before becoming homeless (the prevention stage).

It is important to maintain this as the earlier people approach us for assistance, the more opportunity there is for us to prevent any homelessness occurring.

The statistics from this Homelessness Review indicate that single people are more likely to approach the Council when they are actually homeless (at the relief stage). This makes the task of resolving their housing difficulty harder and may mean that the Council has a duty to provide interim accommodation. A challenge for the Council therefore is to ensure that our services are targeted to ensure that all demographics/groups approach us for assistance at an earlier stage in their housing situation.

Early identification of problems, early targeted interventions and the provision of high-quality advice and assistance will ensure people have the best chance of staying in their home or obtaining alternative accommodation.

## 3. Reasons for Homelessness

People become homeless for many different reasons. There are social causes of homelessness, such as lack of affordable housing or private rented accommodation, as well as wider economic and social factors such as poverty & unemployment and life events that cause individuals to become homeless. For many, life events like a relationship breaking down, losing a job, mental or physical health problems, or substance misuse, can be

the trigger. Being homeless can in turn make many of these problems even harder to resolve, especially without adequate or available support.

Changes of circumstances and removal of support systems can also lead to homelessness, such as release from prison, discharge from the armed forces, or coming out of the local authority care system.

In Epsom & Ewell and nationally the 3 main causes of homelessness are:

- Asked to leave by family and friends
- Termination of Assured Shorthold tenancies
- Domestic Abuse

The chart below indicates all the reasons for homeless approaches to the Council over the last 4 years since the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act in 2018.

For 2020/21 & 2021/22 because of the Emergency Covid-19 legislation there was a ban on most forms of evictions, so for this period these figures are not representative. These restrictions were removed in October 2021 and cases are now starting to progress their way through the County Court system. It is anticipated that into 2022/23 a significantly higher number of people will approach the Council as homeless/threatened with homelessness from the private rented sector, many of whom would not have previously needed to use the service before.

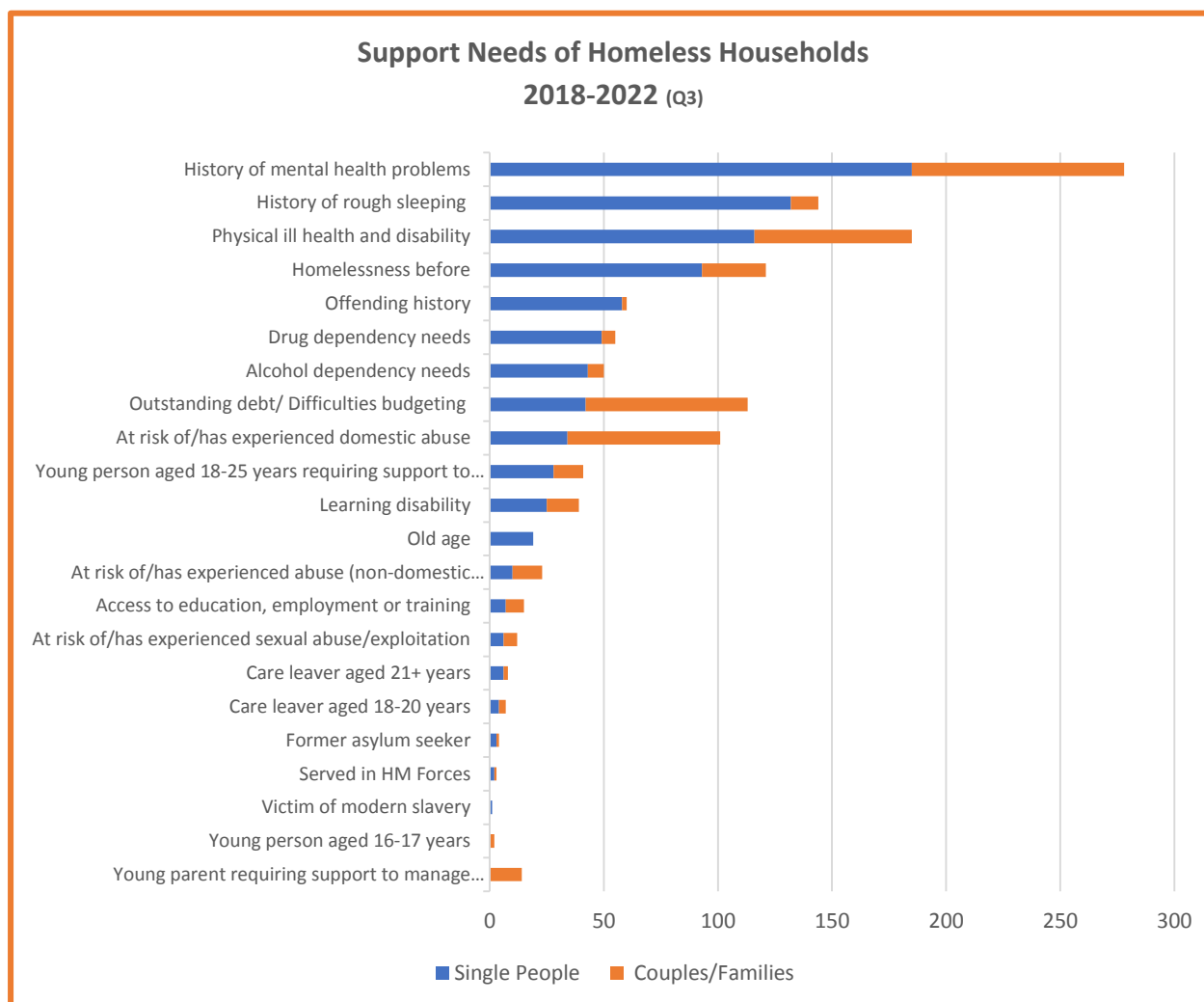
<b>Reasons for Homelessness</b>	<b>2018/19</b>	<b>2019/20</b>	<b>2020/21</b>	<b>2021/22 Q1-3</b>
<b>Family no longer willing or able to accommodate</b>	64	79	83	48
<b>Friends no longer willing or able to accommodate</b>	19	13	8	11
<b>End of private rented tenancy - assured shorthold tenancy</b>	52	83	29	41
<b>Domestic Abuse</b>	31	26	21	18
Relationship with partner ended (non-violent breakdown)	5	21	22	6
Non-racially motivated / other motivated violence or harassment	5	4	5	8
End of private rented tenancy - not assured shorthold tenancy	5	3	2	5
End of social rented tenancy	5	3	4	2
Eviction from supported housing	2	4	2	1
Fire or flood /other emergency	1	2	1	4
Left institution with no accommodation available	2	1	1	1
Left HM Forces		1	1	3
Mortgage repossession	3	2		
Property disrepair	2	2	1	
Required to leave accommodation provided by Home Office as asylum support		2	1	1
Domestic abuse - alleged perpetrator excluded from property				1
Racially motivated violence or harassment		1		
<b>Other</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>36</b>
Early Advice given to resolve case/or case closed	83	117	79	128

#### **4. Support needs of homeless applicants**

Data, collected as part of the new Homeless Reduction Act requirements have given a much more detailed picture of the support needs of clients. The data for Epsom & Ewell shows that the most prevailing support need for all clients was with their mental health. Amongst the single homeless population the most prevailing support needs were; mental health; a history of rough sleeping; physical ill health/disability; offending; and

drug & alcohol dependency. For the other households, including those with children, was debt/budgeting; physical ill health/disability; and domestic abuse.

The information collected in the charts below has been separated out into the support needs of the single homeless population and then other households including those with children.



## 5. Demographics of homeless households

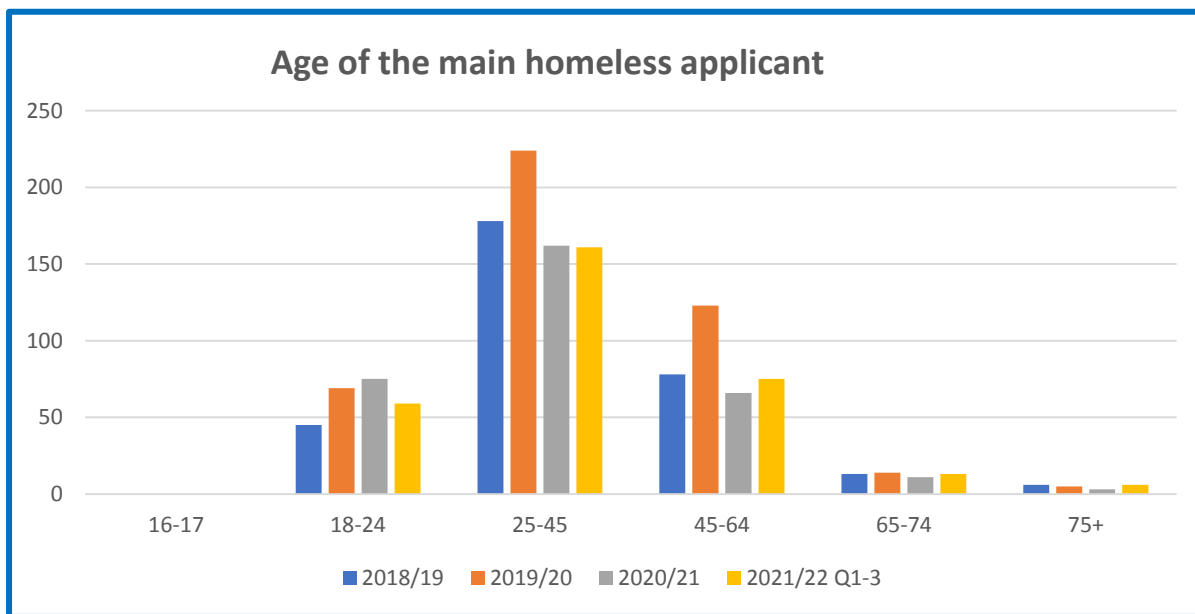
The following charts provide indicative figures demonstrating the demography of households approaching the Council. They do not cover a complete data set for the Housing Service and only include data for ethnicity, age and household composition.

### Household composition

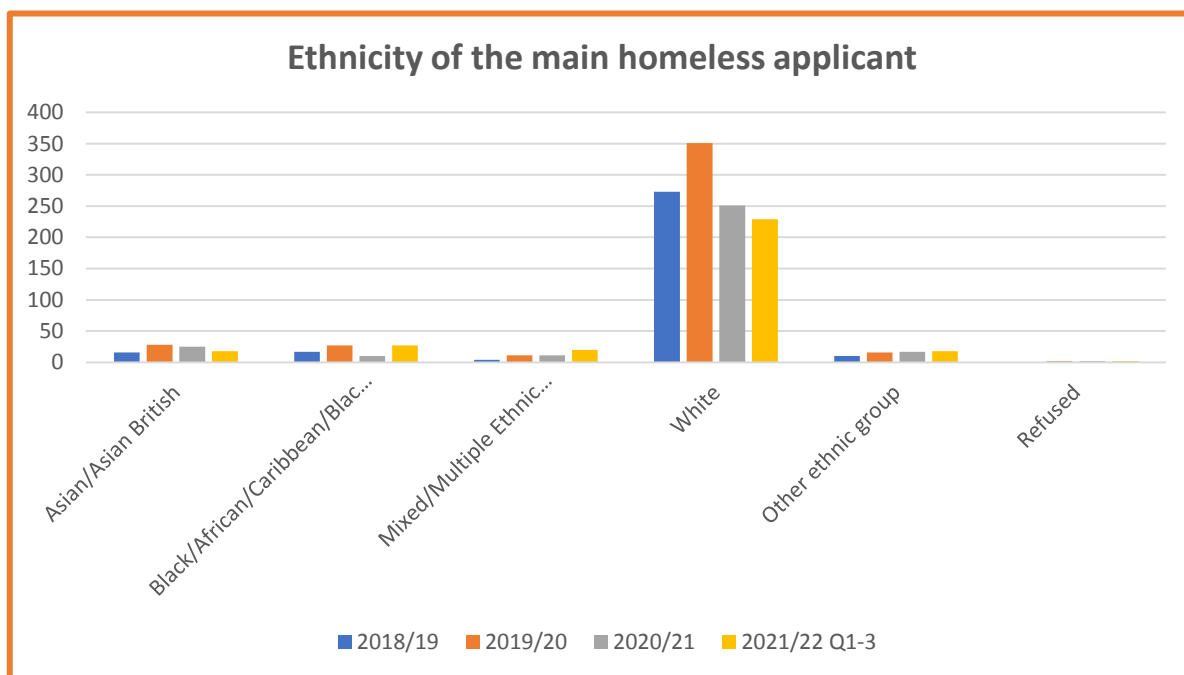
The chart below provides a breakdown by household composition and shows that consistently over the last 4 years single homeless people have account for over 50% of the Council’s homeless approaches. 39.6% are from families with dependent children or who are pregnant.

Household Composition	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22 Q1-3
Single Person households	132	231	176	162
Households with dependent children/ or pregnant	146	166	119	118
Couples/Households with non-dependant adult children / other	42	38	22	34

The chart below demonstrates the age range in terms of people approaching for advice and assistance over the past 4 financial years.



The table below demonstrates the ethnic origin of the main homeless applicant approaching the Housing Options Service over the past 4 years. The ethnic origin of homeless households appears to largely reflect the demography of the borough.



## 6. Homeless households in temporary accommodation and nightly paid interim/temporary accommodation

The duty to provide interim/temporary accommodation is triggered when there is a reason to believe a household may be eligible for assistance, homeless and in priority need. As at December 2021 there were a total of 235 households accommodated by the Council in either in-borough temporary accommodation (155) or nightly paid accommodation (80). Of these, 161 households had dependent children, with a total of 302 children.

### Nightly paid interim/temporary accommodation

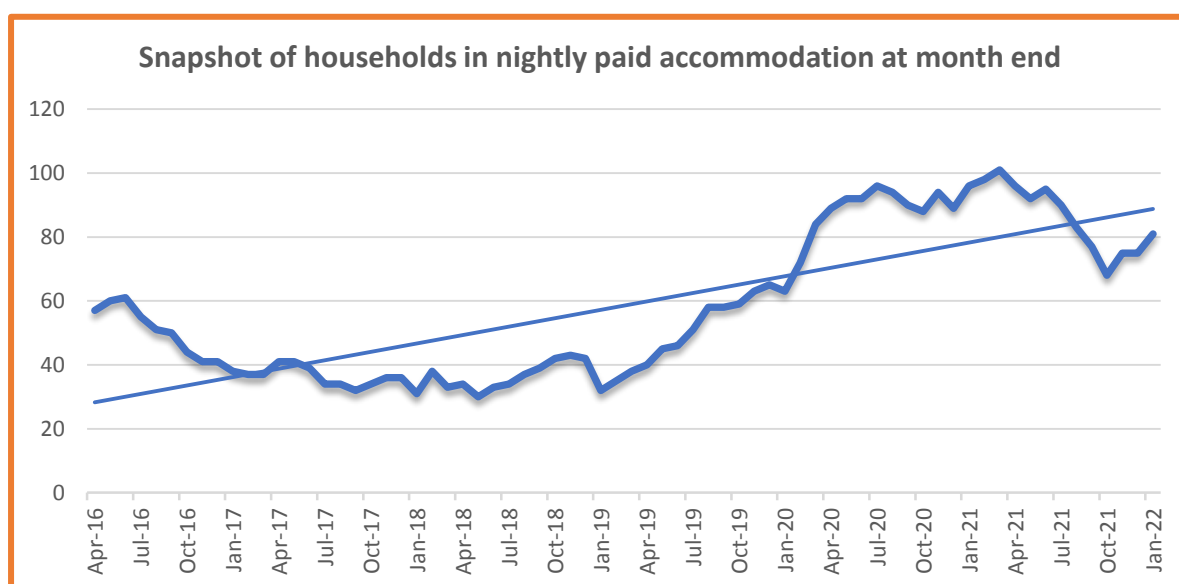
Nightly paid accommodation is only used in an emergency and then when there is no other interim or temporary accommodation available.

Due to the lack of availability of temporary accommodation within the borough interim/temporary accommodation is most likely to be privately-owned nightly paid accommodation located out of borough in areas such as Thornton Heath, Croydon, Wandsworth or Horley. Nightly paid accommodation could be a room in a hotel, a room in shared accommodation or a self-contained unit/property.

Self-contained properties are generally used for families with children & pregnant women. Nightly paid accommodation with shared use of bathroom and or cooking facilities may be used for single people, however most single people would also be offered a self-contained bedsit with cooking facilities and en-suite bathroom.

The use of this type of accommodation and where it is located out of borough may result in households experiencing difficulties in getting to their place of employment, their support networks, including GP and other health providers and getting their children to school.

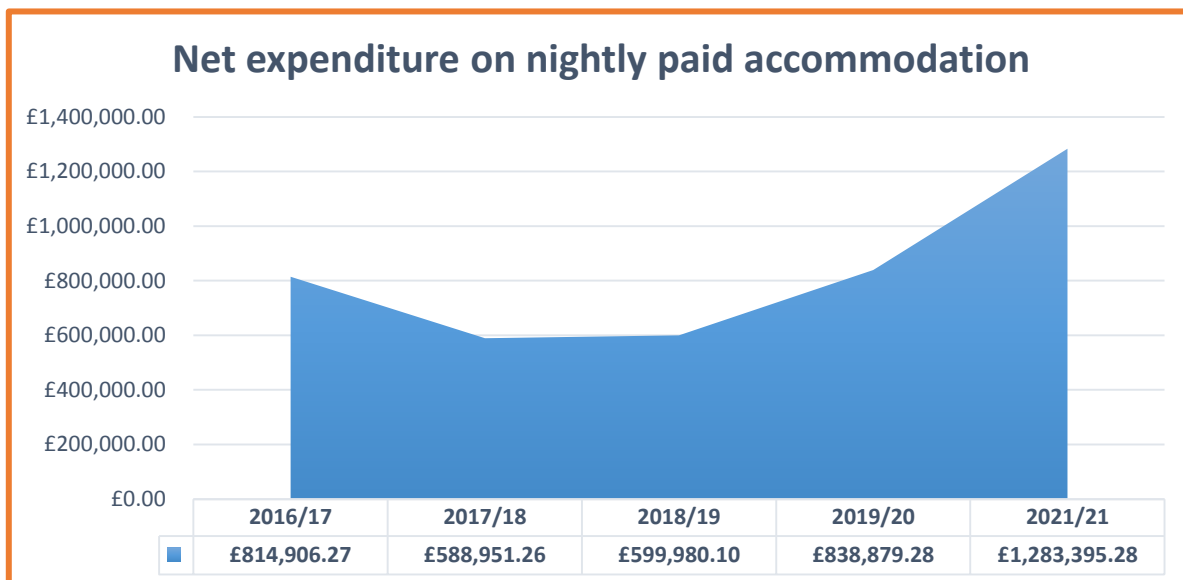
The chart below shows a snapshot of the number of households in nightly paid accommodation at month end since 2016. As this is a snapshot within any given month there will also be a number of households being placed in and moved out of nightly paid accommodation.



The biggest increase in demand for temporary accommodation is from single adults with multiple and complex needs. Often it is very difficult to find a housing solution for these households as Housing Association and private landlords are reluctant to accept them without adequate support. The majority of single adult households in temporary accommodation are placed in privately owned nightly paid accommodation outside of the borough. This demonstrates a need for the Council to secure more supported accommodation provision for this client group.

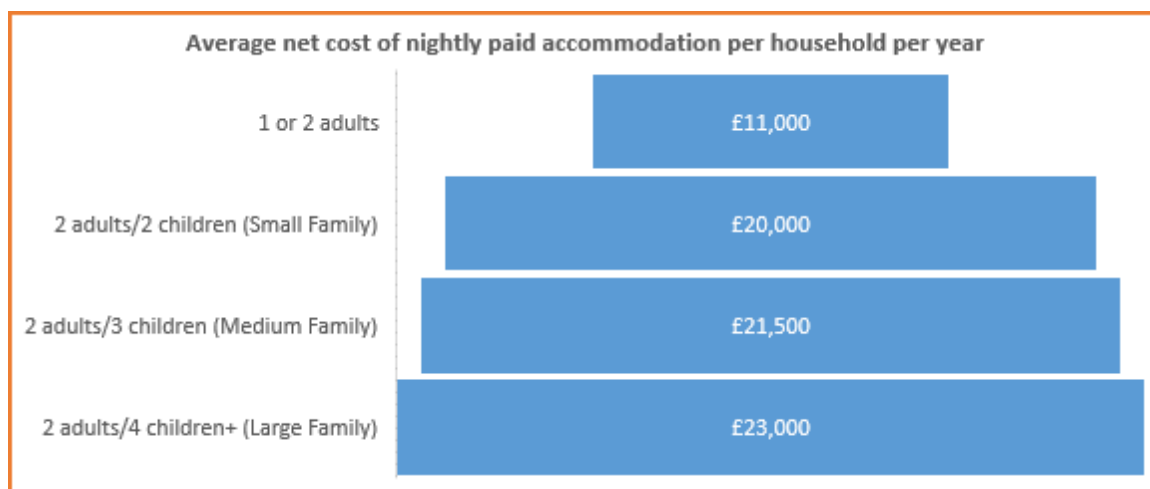
### Costs of temporary accommodation

The use of this nightly paid accommodation is expensive and the Council's net spending on providing nightly paid temporary accommodation has increased over the past 5 years as a result in the increase in homelessness.



This is also the case nationally. Figures released by the then Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (now DLUHC) show there were 96,060 households in temporary accommodation at the end of September 2021. This was a 1.5% increase on the number a year previously and is part of a long-term increase. Analysis of expenditure by local authorities over 2020/21 reportedly showed Councils spent at least £1.4 billion on temporary accommodation

The chart below shows the average net cost to the Council of nightly paid accommodation per year broken down into different size households.



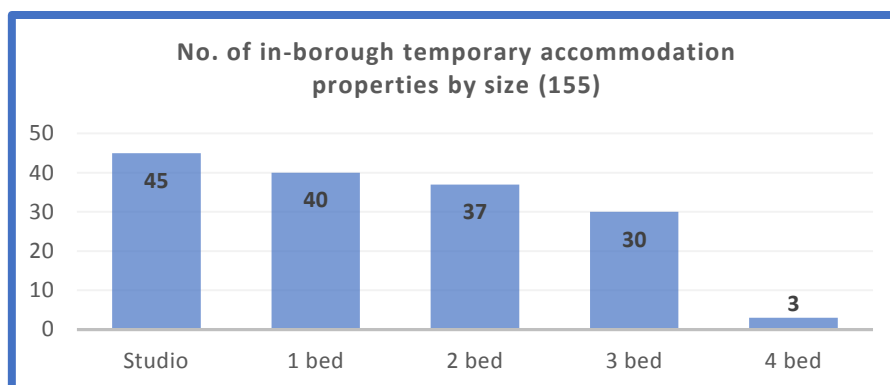
Temporary Accommodation costs have traditionally been paid from local government budgets. Housing Benefit assistance has remained capped at 90% of the January 2011 Local Housing Allowance Rate. On 1 April 2017, the removal of the Temporary Accommodation Management Fee Subsidy from the Housing Benefit subsidy saw an additional financial burden transferred from central government to local government budgets. To assist with this, from 2017, the loss of this subsidy was replaced by the Flexible Homelessness Support Grant (now called Homeless Prevention Grant (HPG)). However, there is no guarantee that this annual grant will be continued indefinitely and DLUHC now also expect it to be used to deliver homelessness prevention options.

As the majority of in-borough temporary accommodation is managed or owned by our Housing Association partners the Council is required to compensate them for the loss of the Temporary Accommodation Management Fee. In 2020/21 this spending was £306,276.92.



### In-borough temporary accommodation

In addition to nightly paid accommodation the Council has access to a portfolio of 155 temporary accommodation properties in the borough. The majority of these properties are owned &/or managed by our Housing Association partners; Rosebery Housing Association; Mount Green; PA and Transform Housing & Support. In addition, the Council owns 5 properties, leasing a further 11 properties and has Defoe Court with 14 units.



### Supply of temporary accommodation within the borough

Whilst the number of in-borough temporary accommodation properties available to the Council is 155, vacancies occur infrequently as there are limited options for homeless households to be moved on into either social housing or the private rented sector. In addition, the vacancies that do occur tend to be smaller studio or 1-bedroom properties and the Council is limited on the size of households who can occupy this type of temporary accommodation. These would tend to be used for single people/couples or small families with 1 child.

The table below shows the number and size of in-borough temporary accommodation vacancies since 2018/19.

Supply of Temporary Accommodation within the borough	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22 Q1-3
Studio property	15	16	11	18
1-bedroom property	10	5	10	5
2-bedroom property	5	4	9	9
3-bedroom property	6	6	3	6
4-bedroom property	0	0	0	1
<b>Total Temporary Accommodation vacancies per year</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>39</b>

### Property acquisition

To reduce the need to place households in expensive nightly paid temporary accommodation outside of the borough the Council has acquired 5 properties on the open market to use as temporary accommodation and has set up a Private Sector Leasing Scheme that currently manages 11 properties. In addition, the Council has worked with Sanctuary Housing to lease Defoe Court, which offers 14 units of emergency accommodation. In 2021 the Council was also successful in bidding for MHCLG funding to work with Transform Housing & Support to purchase 2 units of Housing First style supported accommodation for rough sleepers.

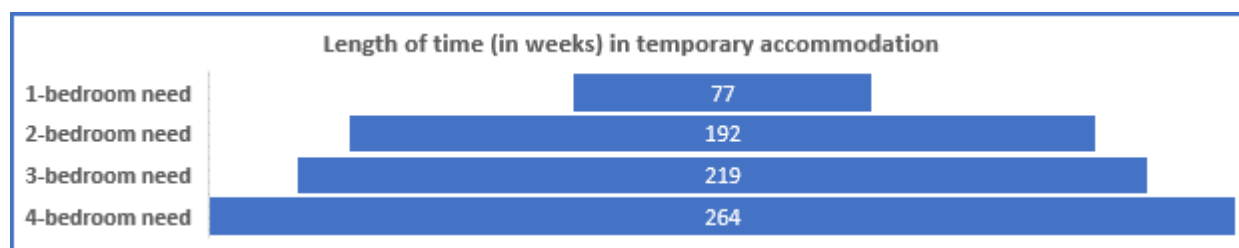
This all increases the provision of good quality temporary accommodation within the borough so that households are able to maintain their support and social networks and reduce any disruption with getting to their place of employment and their children to school.

## Length of time in temporary accommodation

It is recognised that it can take a long time for some households to move on from temporary accommodation. This is especially the case for households with dependent children. The average time a homeless household with children spends in temporary accommodation is 225 weeks or 4.3 years. It should be noted that whilst homeless households are in accommodation that is assessed as suitable many are often in accommodation that has a bedroom less than their assessed need.

The table below shows the average length of time (in weeks) a homeless household is likely to be in temporary accommodation before being offered permanent/settled social housing.

1-bedroom need	2-bedroom need	3-bedroom need	4-bedroom need
77 weeks	192 weeks	219 weeks	264 weeks



This figure is increasing, and the time spent by a household in temporary accommodation is affected by the following:

- The limited supply of affordable social housing to move on to so the Council can end/ discharge its homeless duty.
- Limited availability of affordable private rented accommodation
- The increased duty to provide temporary accommodation for some households for 56 days under the new Relief Duty introduced by the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017
- The time taken to investigate the homeless application and the decision on any housing duty that may or may not arise
- any rent arrears or housing related debt or history of antisocial behaviour delaying the household's further rehousing

The length of time households spend in in-borough temporary accommodation will significantly impact on other households placed in nightly paid accommodation and the costs associated with this. Due to the lack of larger sized temporary accommodation, larger families who need 3-bedroom plus properties are likely to spend a significant time in-nightly paid accommodation unless private rent accommodation can be found.

## 7. Supply and Demand of Affordable housing

### Demand - The Housing Needs Register

The Council is no longer a stock holding local authority, following the voluntary transfer of its housing to Rosebery Housing Association in 1994. Social housing is provided by a number of different housing associations and the Council will have nomination rights to a percentage of these housing association's vacancies.

There are approximately 2600 social housing properties in Epsom and Ewell. The percentage of social housing is at 8.07% and this is significantly lower than other areas in Surrey, such as Guildford which is 14.1%.

The Council maintains a register of households in need of social housing, with their priority assessed using a banding system as set out in the Council's Housing Allocation Policy. The Council is legally required to give certain categories of Housing Needs Register applications a reasonable preference, and homeless households are one of these categories.

A banding scheme ranks together applicants with different but equal housing need. Applicants will be placed in one of five bands ranging from A (urgent need) to E (lowest), which reflects their assessed housing need as set out in the Council’s Housing Allocation Policy.

The Housing Allocation Policy must balance a number of competing demands for housing. The Housing Needs Register is composed of Waiting list, Transfer and Homeless households and of different household groups including single people, couples, elderly persons, and families with children. Households are registered for accommodation in accordance with the Councils ‘Bedroom Standard’ based on their household size and type.

The Council operates a choice-based lettings (CBL) system where vacant housing association properties are advertised in a weekly cycle on Epsom & Ewell Home Choice website and registered applicants can ‘bid’ or show an interest in those that are suitable for their housing need. From a shortlist of those who have indicated an interest, the applicant in greatest assessed housing need in accordance with the Council’s Housing Allocation policy is then nominated to the housing association as a prospective tenant.

The vast majority of social housing properties available in the borough are now let on Affordable Rents and fixed term tenancies, rather than Social Rents. Affordable Rent properties have their rents set at a level of up to 80% of the market rent. These will be at a similar level to most private sector housing rents or the LHA rate. Households that are benefit capped will struggle to afford social housing that is let on Affordable Rent and this may rule out some homeless households being considered for these properties.

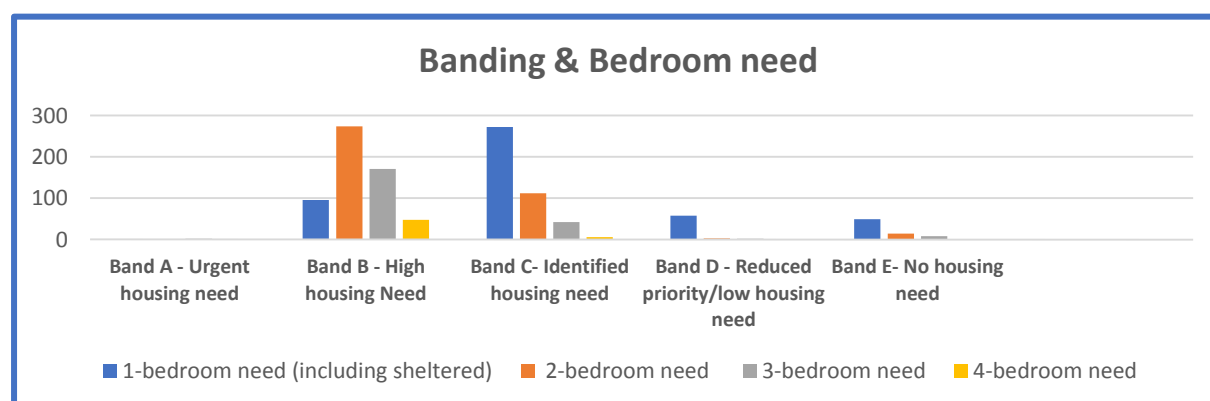
Social landlords are increasingly requesting prospective tenants to pay rent in advance and are carrying out affordable assessments before they will accept new tenants. This can sometimes mean that non-working households, or those in receipt of a low wage, may not meet the affordability criteria set by some landlords. This is particularly the case for those that are affected by the benefit cap.

The Housing Needs Register provides a good reflection of the current housing need within the borough. As at February 2022 there were 1159 housing applicants on the Council’s Housing Needs Register and they were placed in the following Bands A - E of housing need and identified as requiring the following sized accommodation.

The table & chart below shows a breakdown of all registered applicants on the Housing Needs Register and the corresponding registered bedroom size and assessed banding:

Size of property required	1-bedroom need (including sheltered)	2-bedroom need	3-bedroom need	4-bedroom need	Total
<b>Banding Need</b>					
Band A - Urgent housing need	0	0	2	1	<b>3</b>
Band B - High housing Need	96	274	171	48	<b>589</b>
Band C - Identified housing need	272	112	42	6	<b>432</b>
Band D - Reduced priority/low housing need	58	3	2	0	<b>63</b>
Band E - No housing need	49	14	8	1	<b>72</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>475</b>	<b>403</b>	<b>225</b>	<b>56*</b>	<b>1159</b>

*\*Of which 11 need a 5-7 bedroom property*



Single people and couples requiring 1 bedroom accommodation account for 40% of those on the Housing Needs Register, and families requiring 2 bedrooms make up 34.7%. However, households requiring 3 or 4+ bedroom accommodation will have the longest wait due to the very limited supply of this size accommodation. 51% of all applicants on the Housing Needs register have been assessed as having an Urgent or High housing need.

Making the best use of existing housing stock is an important element of meeting housing need. To encourage households, downsizers are placed in Band B, our main priority band, freeing up family sized homes for others.

The need for support housing for single homeless households is discussed section 10.

### Housing Allocations & Supply

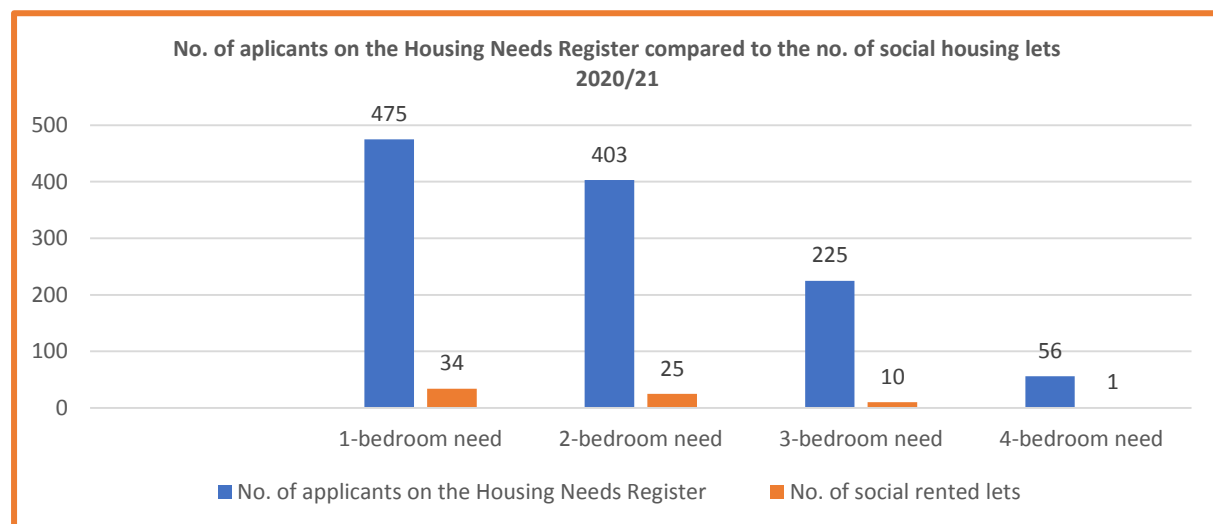
The high demand for and the very low supply of social rented housing is a major contributing factor of homelessness in the borough, especially for family sized accommodation. This is compounded as there are lower levels of social housing in the borough (8.07%), low numbers of properties becoming available for letting and a limited number of new build social rented properties being developed.

The table below gives information regarding the number and size of general needs social rent housing vacancies allocated over the last 7 years. A large proportion of these properties will be flats rather houses.

Property Size/Year	1-Bedroom	2-Bedroom	3-Bedroom	4-Bedroom	Sheltered	Total
2015/16	16	34	10	1	18	<b>79</b>
2016/17	30	31	25	5	23	<b>114</b>
2017/18	18	21	11	1	27	<b>78</b>
2018/19	35	39	21	8	24	<b>127</b>
2019/20	34	22	14	1	10	<b>81</b>
2020/21	29	23	10	1	26	<b>89</b>
2021/22 Q1-Q3	28	25	10	1	6	<b>70</b>

The 2019 Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) estimated that the overall net annual need for affordable housing is 349 units per annum. In terms of size, the largest categories of net need are for two-bedroomed units (45% of net need), and three-bedroomed units (29% of net need). The need for units with four or more bedrooms is lower (20%) but much higher than the proportion of all affordable stock of this size, therefore the wait is significantly longer.

However, in each of the last 3 years the actual number of social rented properties that became available was less than 90 pa. Over 50 % of the vacancies were 1-bedroom and sheltered properties, not family sized accommodation. The chart below gives a comparison of the number of applicants on the Housing Needs Register compared to the number of social housing lets for 2020/21.



This impacts both on homeless households but also other applicants on the Housing Needs Register in housing need. 51% of whom have been assessed as having an Urgent or High housing need.

For homeless households it means there are more households living in temporary accommodation and they will spend significantly longer in that temporary accommodation before they will be made an offer of social housing. The length of time homeless households spend in in-borough temporary accommodation will significantly impact on other households placed in nightly paid accommodation, how long they will be placed out of borough and the costs to the Council associated with this.

It is very clear that the demand for social housing completely outweighs the supply and this housing option can no longer be relied upon by homeless households, however it can be equally difficult for these households to access private rented accommodation.

## 8. Private Rented Sector

The private rented sector plays a vital role in the Council's strategy to prevent and relieve homelessness; from preventing homelessness from this tenure by mediation, and negotiations with landlords and tenants, through to rehoming households into the sector.

However, many of our clients are reluctant to consider this as a housing option, seeing it as having less security of tenure and unaffordable.

In addition, a buoyant rental market, high rent levels against restricted Housing Benefit/Universal Credit Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates means that securing private rented accommodation within borough and across Surrey is increasingly difficult and unaffordable for households on low incomes or benefits.

The Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rate is the maximum amount of assistance that households may receive towards their rent whilst in receipt of Housing Benefit /Universal Credit. This could be reduced for households affected by the Household Benefit Cap of £500 per week for out of work claimants. Households that are benefit capped struggle to find any form of housing within the borough that is affordable, ruling out private rental and even in some cases, social housing let on Affordable Rent.

The table below shows rental market data per calendar month (pcm) for Epsom in February 2022 and demonstrates the disparity between median market rents and LHA levels in the borough.

Property size	Median Market Rent (pcm)	Local Housing Allowance Rate (pcm)	Shortfall between the Median Market Rent & LHA (pcm)
1-room in a shared property	£725	£450	£275
1-bedroom – Epsom	£1110	£875	£235
2-bedroom – Epsom	£1350	£1100	£240
3-bedroom – Epsom	£1600	£1375	£225
4-bedroom – Epsom	£2550	£1735	£815

The median market rental price for a 2-bedroom property in the area is £1350 per calendar month, this is £240 pcm above the 2-bedroom Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rate for the area. For 4-bedroom properties this shortfall rises to £815 pcm. Any shortfall between the market rent and LHA would need to be met from an applicant's existing benefits. Any accommodation the Council arranges or provides to meet its homeless duties must be considered affordable.

In addition to the issue of market rents there is also the issue of low supply and high demand especially from working professionals. An online search for rental properties in Epsom & Ewell generated a list of only 22 2-bedroom properties and only 6, 3-bedroom properties available on the market to rent. The average rent of the 2-bedroom properties was £2069 pcm and for the 3-bedroom it was £2180 pcm. Only 1 property was within

the LHA rate. This snapshot undertaken in February 2022 highlights how extremely difficult it is to locate affordable private rented housing for those in need.

Many landlords are very reluctant to accept households in receipt of benefits as tenants. Landlords require high initial upfront payments for rent in advance, deposit and fees but the largest barrier to accessing housing is when a landlord requires a guarantor. Most guarantors are expected to earn at least 30 x the monthly rent per year or be a homeowner. Recently Agents have also started to request sealed bids for private rented properties. The situation is further exacerbated for households with debts or a history of rent arrears.

Although the Council operates a Rent Deposit Scheme to support low-income households with deposit or bonds and rent in advance, with these type of market conditions a cycle of generational homelessness within families will continue for those households who do not have parents or other family members to assist them into rented accommodation.

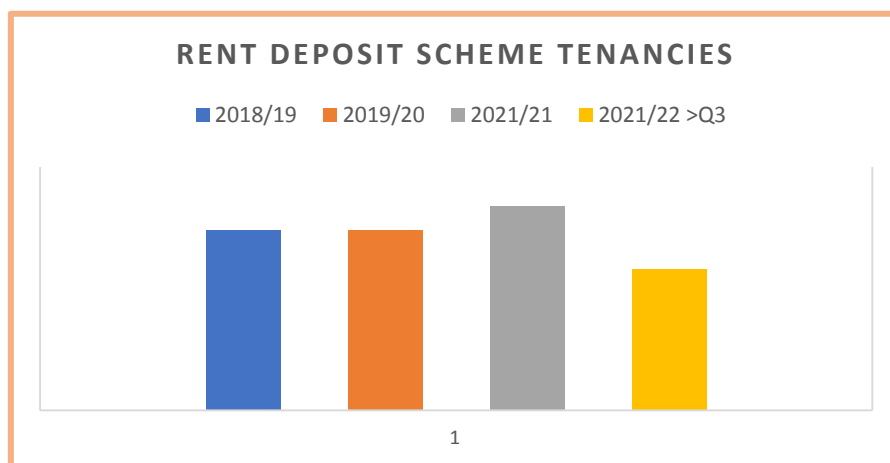
It should also be noted that the ending of a private rented assured shorthold tenancy has consistently been one of the highest reasons for homelessness within the borough and we are therefore aware that we need to target tenancy sustainment to reduce the number of households becoming homeless, although sustaining tenancies is becoming more complicated.

Although accessing and sustaining accommodation within the private rented sector is a challenge, in the absence of social housing, it is the main option we have in preventing or resolving a housing situation.

### Rent Deposit Scheme

One of the Council's main prevention measures is the Rent Deposit scheme. The Rent Deposit Scheme is where the Council assists people threatened with homelessness with a deposit, bond or rent in advance loan to help them rent a property in the private rented sector. The Rent Deposit Officer will liaise with private landlords or agents, assist with setting up the tenancy, organise the bond or deposit and will provide on-going tenancy sustainment to the landlord and tenant.

The chart below shows the number of homeless prevention tenancies set up through the Rent Deposit Scheme for both families and single people since 2018.



## 9. Rough Sleeping and single homelessness

Rough sleeping is the most visible form of homelessness.

Rough sleeping includes people sleeping, about to bed down (sitting on/in or standing next to their bedding) or actually bedded down in the open air (such as on the streets, in tents, doorways, parks, bus shelters or encampments). It also includes those in buildings or other places not designed for habitation (such as stairwells, barns, sheds, car parks, derelict boats, stations etc)

There are also homeless people who are not rough sleeping but do not have a permanent address.

These households are described as hidden homeless and are sometimes referred to as “sofa surfers”. Hidden homelessness includes those who are sofa-surfing, staying with relatives or friends on a very short-term basis or who need to move because they are living in insecure or overcrowded circumstances.

This “hidden homelessness” is significantly more prevalent than rough sleeping, but due to its nature is difficult to quantify and there is no reliable data on people who live this way however, numbers are thought to have increased significantly. Covid-19 “Everyone-In” exposed the issue of hidden single homelessness within the borough and we accommodated over 60 non-priority need people who were either rough sleeping or at risk of rough sleeping.

The Council has experienced an increase in rough sleeping and single homelessness over the last few years. In November each year, the Council, along with the other Surrey districts and boroughs, undertakes an annual rough sleeper street count and the table below shows the reported figures since 2018. In addition, during the Pandemic the Council has been required to provide the DLUHC with a monthly Rough Sleeper survey and in January 2022 6 rough sleepers were reported.

<b>DLUHC Annual Rough Sleeper Count</b>	<b>2018/19</b>	<b>2019/20</b>	<b>2020/21</b>	<b>2021/22</b>
	6	5	3	4

Where these counts give a snapshot of rough sleeping in the borough on a given night this does not represent a true reflection for the rest of the year. In addition, from March 2020, these figures should read in the context of the Everyone-In initiative.

During 2019/20 of the 424 homeless approaches, 231 were from single people, of which 45 had a history of rough sleeping as an identified support need. In 2020/21 of the 316 homeless approaches, 176 were single people, of which 31 were identified as having a history of rough sleeping as a support need.

Consistently over the last 4 years single homeless people have accounted for over 50% of the Council’s homeless approaches. Whilst the Council would have a duty to provide advice and assistance to help resolve their housing difficulty, for most of these people the Council would not have a duty to provide any emergency accommodation.

Having a history of rough sleeping was the 2nd most identified support need for single homeless people. Our experience is many of those sleeping rough or with a history of rough sleeping have multiple and complex needs with the predominant factors being poor mental health and substance misuse. Other characteristics are offending, low self-esteem, unemployment, chaotic behaviour, and some are difficult to engage.

<b>Statistical Information on single homelessness and rough sleeping in Epsom &amp; Ewell</b>								
Year	Homelessness approaches	Of which single person	Of which were found not to be in priority need	Identified Support Need				
				Former/current rough sleeper	Mental Health	History of Offending	Drug Dependency Issues	Alcohol Dependency issues
2019/20	434	231	217	45	64	16	17	16
2020/21	316	176	159	31	33	17	13	8
2021/22 >Qtr 3	314	162	124	18	37	8	5	2

Rough sleeping and the cost to the public purse is significant. Research (by the DCLG in 2015) suggested that each rough sleeper costs between £16,000 to £21,000 per annum compared to the average cost of an adult at £4,600 per annum.

#### **Housing options for rough sleepers and single homeless people with support needs**

Within the borough there is a limited supply of low-level supported accommodation with a total of 44 bed spaces. Vacancies occur infrequently and the Council does not have exclusive nomination rights to all these units. These providers are unable to take clients with more complex needs and there is a significant lack of

medium-high level supported accommodation for rough sleepers/single homeless people with multiple and complex needs.

There is a reluctance for general needs housing providers to accept nominations for rough sleepers/single homeless who have multiple and complex needs without the required support package or a proven history of maintaining a tenancy. Therefore, whilst in 2020/21 the Council received 29, 1- bedroom general needs housing association vacancies most of these would not have been suitable for this client group. This is often the same for temporary accommodation within the borough as the needs are considered too high.

There are also significant barriers for single people being able to access private rented accommodation, this includes landlords unwilling to take tenants in receipt of welfare benefits, under 35 single room LHA rate, shortfall between market rents levels and the LHA rate and the requirement for rent guarantors.

Therefore, this cohort remains in interim/emergency accommodation, often out of area, while work is undertaken to try to find appropriate supported accommodation. There is no specialist Mental Health provision for rough sleepers and Adult Social Care thresholds for medium/higher needs rough sleepers/single homeless are too high and they are not considered eligible for care & support. Consequently, Housing Services officers are left to manage people with multiple and complex needs without the support of other statutory agencies and often these placements will breakdown due to ASB or lack of appropriate support

### **Support for Rough Sleepers**

#### **East Surrey Outreach Support (eSOS)**

In order to support rough sleepers and single homeless people the Council commissions and funds the East Surrey Outreach Service (eSOS).

(eSOS) is an assertive outreach service for rough sleepers and those at risk of rough sleeping operated by Thames Reach and covers Reigate & Banstead, Mole Valley, Tandridge and Epsom & Ewell. As both an outreach and preventative service, eSOS helps people to escape the streets and provides support to people in at risk of losing their home, or those who are living in precarious situations such as sofa surfing, helping them to find more secure accommodation. eSOS offers: one-to-one assessments and support; individual resettlement or support plans; referrals to hostels and supported housing; support to help rough sleepers engage with services such as health, mental health, drug/alcohol or probation services and work with homeless people with complex needs to break the cycle of rough sleeping.

Through the RSI funded eSOS Navigator role we are also able to provide assessment beds so eSOS are able to undertake assessments and work with rough sleepers.

#### **Streetlink**

The public can alert the Council and eSOS to the presence of a rough sleeper through the [www.streetlink.org.uk](http://www.streetlink.org.uk). An outreach worker will aim to meet with the rough sleeper as soon as they are able.

#### **Rent Deposit Scheme for single homeless people**

The Council's Rent Deposit Scheme can assist some single homeless people to find and secure private rented accommodation. However, we are only able to facilitate access to the private rented sector for clients if we are satisfied that they are able to sustain a tenancy.

The Parashoot East Surrey Floating Support Service provides support for people who are at immediate risk of losing their home, who are homeless or need help settling into a new home. The service is funded by Surrey County Council Housing Related Support.

#### **SWEP**

Although there is no statutory duty to do so, Local authorities are encouraged to offer Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP) services to provide protection for people who are sleeping rough during particularly cold or inclement weather. The Council follows the guidance provided by Homeless Link and all



rough sleepers can access accommodation when feels like temperatures drop below freezing for 3 consecutive nights.

### **Cold Weather Fund**

Winter 2020/21 the Council also implemented the Cold Weather Fund (MHCLG funding) which enabled rough sleepers to be accommodated during the winter months beyond the provisions of SWEP to enable services to work with rough sleepers to provide support and assistance to them to move on to more settled accommodation.

### **Begging**

The borough has also seen an increase in begging in Epsom town centre over the last few years although this has been sporadic and not continuous. Much of this begging is organised and not always related to homeless people. A joint approach by the Council and the police was undertaken to stop begging that was considered opportunist and organised. Attempts to engage with those individuals who truly needed assistance with their housing have continued.

### **New Initiatives**

As part of the “Everyone-In” Next steps (NSAP) funding we employed a dedicated Single Person Homeless Support Officer on a one-year fixed term contract. This contract ended in February 2022, however the Council has applied for Rough Sleeper Initiative (RSI) funding to extend this post for a further 3 years. We are currently waiting on the outcome of this bid.

The Council received Government funding under the Homes England ‘Move-On’ fund in 2020/21 to enable two units of self-contained accommodation to be purchased to increase the availability of self-contained units. Working in conjunction with our Partner Transform Housing, the completion of these units is due in March 2022 and are being made available to provide move-on accommodation for single homeless people with a history of rough sleeping.

In September 2021 the Council bid for and was awarded Rough Sleeper Accommodation Programme (RSAP) funding and we are working with Transform Housing & Support to purchase 2 properties which will provide support accommodation on the Housing First model for rough sleepers with more complex needs.

The Housing Options team has recently started work with the charity Hope into Action who have purchased a 4-bedroom property in Epsom for vulnerable adults/single homeless people who need low level supported housing

### **Surrey Homeless MAG**

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on homeless people in Surrey, the Homeless Multi-Agency Group (MAG) was established to support the work happening in districts and boroughs in the county. This includes representation from housing, health, primary care, mental health, substance misuse, public health and criminal justice. While its initial focus has been the safe response to housing those who were homeless at the time of the outbreak, it is now established longer-term to work with local districts/boroughs to improve the multi-agency approach for homeless people in Surrey.

## **10. The Current Housing Options Service, existing homelessness prevention measures**

Successfully preventing and relieving homelessness has always been and remains the main aim and focus of the Council’s Housing Options Service.

Prevention actions include any activities aimed at preventing a household threatened with homelessness from becoming homeless. This would involve activities to enable an applicant to remain in their current home or find alternative accommodation to prevent them from becoming homeless. Relief duties are owed to households that are already homeless and require help to secure alternative accommodation.

This can take the form of advice and information, mediation services; proactive interventions, such as negotiating with landlords to enable people to retain their tenancies; assistance with debt; and targeted services at known risk points, such as those leaving care, hospital, prison or the armed forces.

The Council's provision of a high-quality Housing Options Service ensures there are a wide range of prevention measures, initiatives, and interventions available to tackle homelessness.

In order to map out existing services for the review, outlined below are some of the measures the Housing Options Service use to prevent and relieve homelessness: -

- All applicants will have a personalised Housing Options Interview. The Housing Options interviews will explore a full range of options with a person, carry out an assessment with the person to look into the circumstances that caused them to become homeless or threatened with homelessness and to establish their housing and support needs. A Personalised Housing Plan will then be agreed which will set out the actions (or 'reasonable steps') to be taken by the Council and the person to help them remain in their current accommodation or to find alternative accommodation.
- Case work interventions such as negotiations with landlords or parents to resolve behavioural or arrears problems to retain their accommodation.
- Pathway referrals to other housing providers, such as Transform Housing & Support; domestic abuse refuges; Forward Trust.
- Pathway referrals to appropriate support services (drug/alcohol, mental health, young persons, domestic abuse, ex-offenders, money advice, employment support, floating support, foodbank, CAB).
- The Rent Deposit Scheme assists homeless households to find and secure private rented accommodation and can help financially with deposits, bonds or rent in advance loans. The Rent Deposit Officer will liaise with private landlords or agents, assist with setting up the tenancy, organise the bond or cash deposit and will provide on-going tenancy sustainment to the landlord and tenant.
- Parashoot East Surrey Floating Support Service provides support for people who are at immediate risk of losing their home, who are homeless or need help settling into a new home.
- In order to support rough sleepers and single homeless people the Council commissions and funds the East Surrey Outreach Service (eSOS). (eSOS) is an assertive outreach service for rough sleepers and those at risk of rough sleeping operated by Thames Reach. Further information on this service can be found in section 9.
- Council commissions and funds the Employment, Training and Housing Options Service (ETHOS). The project is provided by Surrey Life Long Learning Partnership and it provides employment advice, CV writing, job clubs and basic numeracy, literacy, and digital skills. This is an important service to help people improve their incomes and pay their housing costs.
- Homelessness Prevention Fund - The Council adopts a 'spend to save' policy and the homelessness prevention fund is a part of this. This is funding available to assist clients with ad hoc situations that arise, which may be resolved through some small financial input. Where possible any monies spent from the fund are recouped through a repayment scheme with the client.
- Housing Options Officers will attend MARAC, MAPPa and CHARM monthly meetings.
- Domestic Abuse Sanctuary Scheme - Through a joint-working arrangement with the North Surrey Domestic Outreach Service, the Crime Reduction Officer and Rosebery Housing Association the Council facilitates a Sanctuary Scheme for survivors of domestic abuse so they are able to stay safely in their homes.
- Surrey Mobility Scheme – The Council has joint working arrangements with the other local authorities in Surrey under the Surrey Mobility Scheme, to assist survivors of domestic abuse to move within the county through reciprocal arrangements.

## **11. What the Homelessness Review is telling us - Key findings, local trends, and challenges**

### **Key Findings**

- Homeless approaches to the Housing Options Service have significantly increased since the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act and forecasting predictions show that this increase is likely to continue.
- Despite the rising demand, the Housing Options Team continues to successfully prevent and relieve homelessness, with a total 1089 cases since 2018.

- The majority of people who approach the Housing Options Service for assistance do so either before they are threatened with homelessness (at the triage stage) or within 56 days before becoming homeless (the prevention stage). However, this is not the case for single people who are more likely to approach the Council when they are actually homeless (at the relief stage).
- The 3 main causes of homelessness are:
  - Asked to leave by family and friends
  - Termination of Assured Shorthold tenancies
  - Domestic Abuse
- 75% of homeless applicants said they had additional support needs. The most prevailing support need for all clients was with their mental health. Amongst the single homeless population the most prevailing support needs were; mental health; a history of rough sleeping; physical ill health/disability; offending; and drug & alcohol dependency. For the other households, including those with children, this was debt/budgeting; physical ill health/disability; and domestic abuse.
- The ethnic origin of homeless households appears to largely reflect the demography of the borough.
- In December 2021 there were a total of 235 homeless households accommodated by the Council in either in-borough temporary accommodation (155) or nightly paid accommodation (80). Of these, 161 households had dependent children, with a total of 302 children.
- The average time a homeless household with children spends in temporary accommodation is 225 weeks or 4.3 years before being offered permanent/settled social housing.
- There are approximately 2600 social housing properties in Epsom and Ewell. The percentage of social housing is at 8.07% and this is significantly lower than other areas in Surrey, such as Guildford which is 14.1%.
- In February 2022 there were 1159 housing applicants on the Council's Housing Needs Register.
- 51% of all applicants on the Housing Needs register have been assessed as having an Urgent or High housing need.
- The 2019 Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) estimated that the overall net annual need for affordable housing is 349 units per annum.
- Less than 90 Housing Association social rented properties become available a year. Over 50 % of these vacancies are 1-bedroom and sheltered properties.
- Since 2018, 145 homeless prevention tenancies have been set up via Rent Deposit Scheme.
- Private rented sector landlords and letting agencies remain reluctant to let to households in receipt of benefits. The median market rent for a 2-bedroom property was £1350 pcm, 20 per cent higher than the Local Housing Allowance rate of £1100 (equating to a shortfall of over £2,880 per year). However, the average rent for a 2-bedroom property is actually £2069 pcm. This leaves the sector largely inaccessible to households on low incomes or in receipt of benefits.
- Consistently over the last 4 years single homeless people have accounted for over 50% of the Council's homeless approaches.
- In 2020/21 of the 316 homeless approaches 176 were single people, of which 31 were identified as having a history of rough sleeping as a support need.
- Under Everyone-In Epsom & Ewell Borough Council accommodated over 60 single people who were either rough sleeping or at risk of rough sleeping.

- A history of rough sleeping was the 2nd most identified support need for single homeless people. Many of those sleeping rough or with a history of rough sleeping have multiple and complex needs with the predominant factors being poor mental health and substance misuse. Other characteristics are offending, low self-esteem, unemployment, chaotic behaviour, and some are difficult to engage.
- Within the borough there is a limited supply of low-level supported accommodation and there is a significant lack of medium-high level supported accommodation for rough sleepers/single homeless people with multiple and complex needs.