

A Review of Homelessness in Walsall

January 2018

Commission by: Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council
Carried-out by: Neil Morland Housing Consultant Ltd



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About Walsall Council

Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council is a unitary local authority located in the English West Midlands. A first past the post system is used for electing 60 councillors, representing 20 wards. The Council is presently controlled by a coalition of the Labour Party and Liberal Democrats. The local authority area, formed in 1974, is one seven members of the West Midlands Combined Authority. The Council provides the whole range of services, typically offered separately by district and county councils, including housing, social care, children services and public health functions.

About Neil Morland Housing Consultant Ltd

Neil Morland founded his housing consultancy in 2011. He is recognised throughout Great Britain as an expert on homelessness and housing allocations. Previously, he was employed by the UK Government as a specialist advisor on homelessness. He also formerly held posts at a local housing authority, a social housing provider and a voluntary organisation.

Acknowledgement

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Disclaimer: All views and any errors contained in this report are the responsibility of the author. The views expressed should not be assumed to be those of Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council or any of the persons who contributed to this review.

Table of Contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMERY	3
1. INTRODUCTION	6
1.1. INTRODUCTION.....	6
1.2 DEFINITION OF HOMELESSNESS.....	6
1.3 METHODOLOGY.....	7
1.4 STRUCTURE OF THE REPORT	8
2. LEVELS OF HOMELESSNESS	10
2.1 CURRENT LEVELS OF HOMELESSNESS.....	10
2.2 FUTURE LEVELS OF HOMELESSNESS	18
2.3 CONCLUSIONS ABOUT THE LEVELS OF HOMELESSNESS	20
3. ACTIVITIES TO PREVENT HOMELESSNESS	21
3.1 EARLY HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION ACTIVITIES.....	21
3.2 PRE-CRISIS HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION ACTIVITIES.....	23
3.3 PREVENTING THE REOCCURRENCE OF HOMELESSNESS.....	27
3.4 CONCLUSIONS ABOUT ACTIVITIES TO PREVENT HOMELESSNESS	27
4. SECURING ACCOMMODATION	29
4.1 TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION	29
4.2 OTHER HOUSING OPTIONS.....	33
4.3 CONCLUSION ABOUT ACTIVITIES TO SECURE ACCOMMODATION.....	37
5. PROVIDING SUPPORT	38
5.1 SUPPORT WITH DUE TO EXCLUSION BY PARENTAL/OTHER FAMILY/FRIENDS.....	38
5.2 SUPPORT DUE TO BREAKDOWN OF RELATIONSHIP	40
5.3 SUPPORT DUE TO ARREARS OR LOSS/LEAVING ACCOMMODATION.....	41
5.4 THE GLEBE CENTRE AND OTHER SUPPORT.....	44
5.5 CONCLUSIONS ABOUT ACTIVITIES TO PROVIDE SUPPORT	45
6. RESOURCES	46
6.1 MONEY.....	46
6.2 PEOPLE.....	47
6.3 IT.....	47
6.4 CONCLUSIONS ABOUT RESOURCES FOR TACKLING HOMELESSNESS.....	48
7. CONSULTATION	49
7.1 SERVICE USER CONSULTATION.....	49
7.2 STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATION.....	54
8. FINDINGS	60
8.1 CONCLUSIONS.....	60
8.2 RECOMMENDATIONS.....	63
APPENDICES	65
APPENDIX ONE – RECORD OF CONTRIBUTORS	65
APPENDIX TWO – MAP OF STREET HOMELESSNESS SERVICES.....	66
APPENDIX THREE - MAP OF TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION PROVISION	67
APPENDIX FOUR – IMPACT OF YOUNG PERSONS’ HOMELESSNESS SERVICES	68
APPENDIX FIVE – HOMELESSNESS AND THE PRIVATE RENTED SECTOR.....	70

Executive summary

Levels of Homelessness – Current Picture

Homelessness acceptances in 2016/17 increased by 6% compared to levels in 2012/13. The overwhelming majority homeless applications (81%), resulted in the Walsall Council accepting the main homelessness (housing) duty. The number of people who are experiencing street homeless in the Walsall has increased by two-thirds during the past five years. The local levels of youth homelessness have risen by 47% since 2012/13. In Walsall, young black women with dependent children are disproportionately more likely to experience homelessness than older white single men. Increasing childhood poverty rates along with local higher than average rates of unemployment means it's reasonable to forecast further growth in the levels of homelessness.

Levels of Homelessness – Conclusions

Improvement to the collection, analysis and reporting of data about single, street and hidden homelessness needs to be made. Better data collection and reporting is needed about key groups that are risk of homelessness. Current levels of homelessness in Walsall exceed national rates. However, there could be some inconsistency of data collection. Future levels of all forms homelessness are likely to increase.

Preventing Homelessness – Current Picture

From April 2018, the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 will extend the Council's duties to persons who are homelessness, or threatened with homelessness. Recent links have been established to improve the assistance provided to people who would be homeless upon leaving a secure estate. All young people leaving the care of the local authority are provided with detailed housing options advice. Walsall has adopted an Armed Forces Covenant, which ensures veterans are prioritised for re-housing. A range of services are offered to victims of domestic abuse, keeping victims and their children safe. Walsall Council and local NHS Trusts do not have a joint approach to preventing homelessness at the point of discharge from hospital. There is no specific information and advice for vulnerable adults who are more likely to become homeless. There are pro-active prevention activities for young people at risk of parental exclusion, including those aged 16/17 years old. Walsall Council's homelessness service helps almost two-thirds of people remain in existing accommodation, with just over one-third being helped to obtain alternative accommodation.

Preventing Homelessness – Conclusions

The extension of duties, via the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, owed to persons who are homeless or threatened with homelessness, will require a comprehensive range of activities in place to prevent homelessness. An improved system of evidencing the outcomes from homelessness prevention activities needs to be put in place. The local authority and criminal justice agencies should establish a pathway that guarantees everyone leaving prison with somewhere to live. The Council has an exemplary range of homelessness prevention activities for care leavers. A better understanding is needed of what, if anything, could be done better to prevent homelessness for armed forces personnel. Preventing homelessness prior to discharge from hospital must be transformed and should comply with practices promoted by the Department of Health. The excellent activities to prevent homelessness due to domestic abuse should be promoted as an example of good practice. Activities to prevent vulnerable adults from becoming homeless need specific interventions for those most at risk of homelessness (e.g. adults experiencing mental ill health). Activities to prevent other persons at risk of homeless, need to be developed. These activities will benefit from further development of the partnership with public health and the police, supported by the local authority. The local housing authority's homelessness service has historically excelled at the pre-crisis prevention of homelessness. The reasons for why

performance has fallen recently needs fully understanding, so outcomes can be increased back up to peak levels.

Securing accommodation – Current Picture

Walsall Council has four times the amount local authority stock for use as temporary accommodation compared to the national average. An increasing number of people who are entitled to temporary accommodation, are choosing to make their own temporary accommodation arrangements. Walsall Council has recorded no positive actions to relieve homelessness during the past five years. The number of households registered for social housing in Walsall between 2013 to 2016, almost double, current levels remain (63%) below what they were in 2012. A winter night-shelter, supported accommodation for adults with complex support needs, refuge for women escaping domestic abuse and a Housing First pilot are all commissioned by the Council.

Securing accommodation – Conclusions

Voids and length of stay in temporary accommodation need to be reduced. The use of temporary accommodation has increased. The local authority should dispose of the existing buildings, with sale proceeds being used procure accommodation or lease from social and/or private landlords. There needs to be a better understanding of the drivers behind the increase in the number of people who arrange their own temporary accommodation. The absence of a common housing register and allocations policy hinders transparency and consistency as to how lettings are made. The current the local housing authority allocations policy needs to be revised. The current provision of supported accommodation needs comprehensively auditing and recommissioning to better reflect what works.

Providing Support – Current Picture

Parents, other relatives or friends no longer willing or able to accommodate, is the main reasons for why people become homelessness in Walsall. Homelessness occurring due to non-violent as well as violent breakdown of a relationship with a partner is the second main cause of homelessness. A range of voluntary organisations are commissioned to offer support, however their capacity to do so is limited by the funding made available to them. Between 2012/13 – 2016/17, homelessness due to mortgage arrears has been fallen. Social housing rent arrears as a reason for homelessness has neither increased nor decreased during the same period of time. Rent arrears at private sector dwellings have fallen during the past five years. Refugees becoming homeless, following acceptances of their claim for asylum, has never been a significant cause of homelessness locally. Day services are available to people who are experiencing multiple and complex needs, with 370 people using the service over a 12-month period.

Providing Support – Conclusions

There is a comprehensive range of support available for people who are aged 16 to 25 years, who need support due to becoming homeless following eviction by parents, other relatives or friends. Violent breakdown of relationships as one of the main causes of homelessness. Funding for youth homelessness services and domestic abuse services need to protected from any cutbacks. Social landlords make an invaluable contribution to support people with rent arrears. An independent review of outcomes being achieved for public health and housing, should be commissioned to explore the effectiveness of practice and value for money of The Glebe Centre. Separate arrangements for commissioning and contract management of homelessness services provided by voluntary organisations, by various departments of the local authority, doesn't foster consistent practice, nor allow the sharing of intelligence.

Resources – Current Picture

Walsall Council invests substantial sums of its own money into activities that carried out by voluntary organisations to tackle homelessness. Walsall Council is responsible for funding

the homelessness duties it is obliged by law obliges to discharge. £1.4m funding has been awarded by the UK Government to local housing authority for April 2016 – March 2020. Walsall Council's homelessness service has almost 40 people employed to administer the duties prescribed in law. Walsall Council has reached an agreement for IT software company Civica, to supply the Abrisas Housing Needs System

Resources - Conclusions

The Council must protect homelessness services from funding cutbacks, if the aims of the Homelessness Strategy are to be accomplished. Achievements from expenditure of the UK Government homelessness funding awards must better evidenced. Current funding levels will need to be at least maintained, and ideally increased by the local authority. Current staffing levels are adequate, but new duties mean more staff might be required and divisions of responsibilities reviewed. The updated IT software system will prove to be invaluable, the Council should procure the whole Abrisas system to create the maximum efficiency.

Consultation

The views of service users and stakeholders solicited during this review were consistent in many ways. However, there was a difference of opinion about the best to support a person to recover from being homeless, and also how funding should be prioritised in the future.

An overwhelming number of stakeholders and service users believe that homelessness levels have increased during the past five years. The large rise in the levels of rough sleeping reported for 2016, explains why most people had this view.

The majority service users and stakeholders agreed that social rented housing is the best housing option for people who are homeless. Given that securing social rented housing is still the main way that homelessness is prevented or relieved, this perhaps isn't surprising.

Stakeholders and service users hold a similar view that personalised support to live independently is crucial to help people exit homelessness. However, stakeholders gave a lot more priority to resolving debts and nurturing talents, than compared to service users who considered these factors to be a much lower priority. Service users gave much more priority to the housing aspect of supporting people who had been homeless, compared to stakeholders, whom gave much equal priority to all the actors. This suggests that stakeholder awareness of what works in to prevent and relieve homelessness, differs somewhat from those who have had lived experience of homelessness. There is a case for bridging the gap between professional understanding of works to tackle homelessness, against the know-how of service users.

Service users and stakeholder opinions differed how homelessness funding should be spent. More accommodation was the priority for service users, with preventing homelessness being least priority. Whereas for stakeholders, preventing homelessness was the most important consideration and more accommodation being the lowest priority. The conception of prevention is common throughout public policy, so this might explain why stakeholders viewed this as a high priority. This suggests there is a need to inform potential service users of the benefits of preventing homelessness.

1. Introduction

1.1. Introduction

This review considers all of the activities being carried out to tackle homelessness in the local authority district of Walsall. This encompasses services the Council's delivers, plus also those provided by public authorities, voluntary organisations and other persons.

The decision by Walsall Council to appoint an independent consultant to carry out this homelessness review ensured impartiality and transparency.

The aim of this homelessness review has been to identify if the activities for tackling homelessness in Walsall, are effective, of a quality standard, and offer value for money.

The ongoing reforms to welfare benefits, plus the imminent commencement of new homelessness legislation, are important contextual factors to this review. Changes to welfare benefits entitlements, and the methods used to pay claimants, has had a direct adverse effect on the national levels of homelessness, the National Audit Office has reported¹. The impending enactment of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 will bring about the most significant change to homelessness in 40 years, significantly improving the rights of people who are at risk of homelessness.

The ambition for this Homelessness Review, is identify key priorities for tackling homelessness in Walsall, which can be carried forward to form a new homelessness strategy for the borough.

1.2 Definition of homelessness

The legal definition of homelessness can be found in section 174, part 7 of the Housing Act 1996. A person is homeless if s/he has no accommodation for which:

- They have a right to occupy accommodation
- Are able to access
- Is suitable to occupy (e.g. due to it being unaffordable, unfit, overcrowded, being victim of domestic abuse, or another special reason)
- Is available for the whole household

The law defines a person being threatened with homelessness, if they will not have any accommodation within 28 days (this will be amended upwards to 56 days from April 2018).

There is considered to be four forms of homelessness². A person might experience only one of these forms, but could encounter a couple or all of them:

- statutory homelessness - persons owed a duty by a local housing authority
- single homelessness - persons living in supported housing (including hostels, refuges and also supported lodgings), usually commissioned by a local authority
- street homelessness - persons sleeping rough, places not designed for habitation
- hidden homelessness - persons accommodated in insecure arrangements often with relatives or friends, but just as often with people not previously known to them.

The UK Government has defined street homelessness, as 'people sleeping, or bedded down, in the open air (such as on the streets, or in doorways, parks or bus. shelters); people in

¹ National Audit Office (2017), Homelessness, London, The Comptroller and Auditor General

² Suzanne Fitzpatrick (2005), 'Explaining homelessness: a critical realistic perspective', Housing & Society, 22(1): pp.1-17

buildings or other places not designed for habitation (such as. barns, sheds, car parks, cars, derelict boats, stations, or 'bashes')³.

1.3 Methodology

Our approach to carrying out this homelessness review complies with the obligations explained in the Homelessness Act 2002. The law requires that review must be carried out at least every five years. This review covers the period of 2012/13 - 2016/17.

The local authority required this review to:

- Map out the current provision of services for our rough sleepers
- Map out the current provision of Temporary Accommodation
- Assess the impact of young persons' homeless services
- Consider the levels of homelessness or potential homelessness due to customers being served Section 21 notices

Detailed information about each matter is threaded throughout this report, which has then been collected together in an easy read summary, which is appended to this report.

An essential part of this Review is to consider the impact of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, and what service gaps this may create. It analyses the potential future impact on the levels of homelessness presentations and subsequent prevention work, plus provides recommendations to inform a how homelessness services may need to change and adapt to meet these new duties.

When undertaking this homelessness review, we assessed the levels and patterns of homelessness, plus identified any gaps in knowledge and services.

The core activities underpinning the steps to produce the review were identifying:

1. Homelessness prevention actions
2. Accommodation for people who are homeless
3. Support for people who are, or have been, homeless

Throughout the duration of the review, we worked closely with the housing, adult care and children services operated by the local authority, plus voluntary sector/commissioned providers. We gathered information and evidence from these services that have contributed to the review.

Local social housing providers co-operated with the review. We sought to understand how social landlords have embedded homelessness prevention work and tenancy sustainment into their businesses.

Throughout the duration of the review, we sought to build a strong relationship between departments and agencies. We were especially keen to ensure involvement from the voluntary sector, along with co-operation from a wide-range of public authorities. The involvement of commissioners of housing support services was crucial. We undertook consultation with public authorities (e.g. health authorities, the police) and voluntary organisations (e.g. support providers). We also spoke with people who have lived experience of homelessness, to get their views about what works, possible barriers to services, plus any suggestions for improvements.

When carrying out this review, we took into account the local authority's own allocations scheme and tenancy strategy, plus regional housing strategies.

³ Department for Communities & Local Government (2010), 'Evaluating the extent of rough sleeping', London, UK Government

The review audited the local:

- Levels and likely future levels of homelessness
- Activities carried out for preventing homelessness, securing accommodation and providing support
- Resources available for carrying out the above activities

The review focuses on those who have previously been homeless, are homeless at the time of the review, and might be homeless in the future. All forms of homelessness were considered as part of the review, including statutory, single, street and hidden homelessness.

To ascertain the current levels of homelessness, plus predict what levels might be in the future, we accessed records and statistics held the local authority. This included homelessness case records and estimates of people sleeping rough. We also sought to obtain intelligence from, for example, social landlords, advice agencies, the National Offender Management Service, adult social care and children services. To help forecast future levels of homelessness, we drew up profiles of those who have experienced homelessness, alongside considering local labour and housing market factors.

Primary research was carried-out with public authorities and voluntary organisations. Quantitative data was sought from a wide range of local public authorities and voluntary organisations. However, only the local housing authority was able to supply any statistics on pre-crisis homelessness prevention outcomes. Subsequently, qualitative data was collected from local public authorities and voluntary organisations activities to prevent homelessness

When considering the activities being carried out for tackling homelessness, we considered services of all the various agencies and organisations, across all sectors, which are contributing towards preventing homelessness, supplying accommodation, and/or providing support. This included an emphasis on the supply of accommodation available, the steps being taken to increase the supply, while also taking in to account the demand for housing.

Our interrogation of resources available to tackle homelessness, looked at those available to the local authority, but also to other public authorities, voluntary organisations, and others. For this report, are not the purely financial, but include infrastructure (e.g. employee) and physical (e.g. IT) resources.

The results of the review, will be used to inform a new homelessness strategy for the locality. The strategy will have specific objectives for:

- Preventing homelessness
- Securing suitable accommodation for those who are, or may become homeless
- Providing support to those who are or used to be homeless, to prevent them from becoming homeless again

A range of recommendations have been identified for the local authority, along with any other organisation involved with tackling homelessness. Specific conclusions have been included for people whose risk of becoming homeless is more likely.

1.4 Structure of the report

Chapter two reviews the current and future likely levels of homelessness. Chapter three review the activities for preventing homelessness. Chapter four reviews activities for securing accommodation for people who are homeless. Chapter five reviews the activities for supporting people who are, or might be, or have been homeless. Chapter six reviews the

resources available to carry out the aforementioned activities. Chapter seven sets out the conclusions and recommendations from the review.

2. Levels of Homelessness

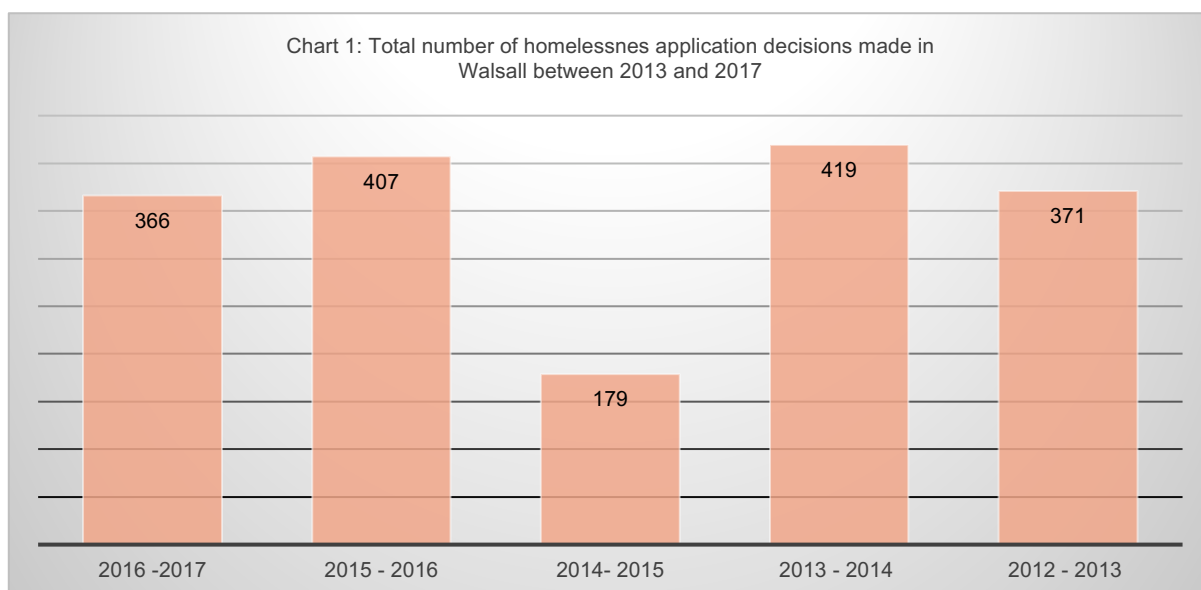
Data was sought from a wide range of local public authorities and voluntary organisations. Walsall Council was able to supply statistics on the current levels of homelessness. Black Country Women's Aid supplied data on the levels of domestic abuse. Authoritative sources, such as Office for National Statistics, were used to forecast future levels of homelessness.

Walsall Council collects a significant amount of statistics on statutory homelessness, plus some intelligence on street homelessness. However, there is an absence of reliable data on the levels street homelessness from voluntary organisations (unlike in other local authority areas, such as Birmingham). There is no coordinated collection of statistics on single homelessness or hidden homelessness from either public authorities or voluntary organisations. While this is not uncommon in respect of hidden homelessness, many areas have centralised data collection systems on single homelessness, based on previous monitoring regimes formerly overseen by the UK Government for the now defunct Supporting People programme. Criminal justice agencies monitor the number of offenders who leave prison with no fixed abode, while this data is shared with national government, local authorities do not benefit from having this intelligence shared with them.

2.1 Current levels of homelessness

The number of people whom make an application to local housing authority for homelessness assistance fluctuated in recent years, but remains almost the same today as it was five years ago. The reduction in levels during 2014/15, is due to data collection errors.

The chart below shows that homelessness applications in 2016/17, reduced by 2% compared those in 2012/13, reduced by 13% compared to when levels increased to a high 2013/14, but increased by 52% when levels fell to a low in 2014/15.



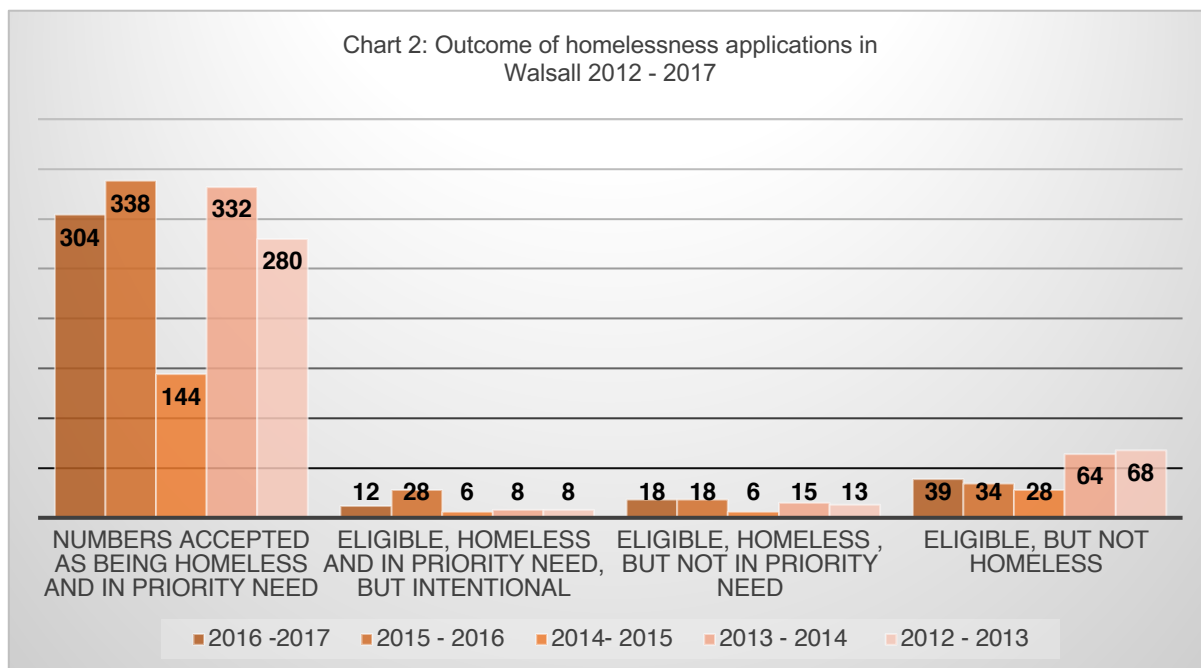
Source: UK Government Homelessness Statistics⁴

The overwhelming majority homeless applications resulted in the local housing authority accepting the main homelessness (housing) duty, as prescribed section 193(2) of part 7 of the Housing Act 1996, this being to secure suitable accommodation.

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-homelessness>

Chart 2 shows that the rate of acceptances mirrors the trend of homeless applications. A decision of not homeless is the second most common outcome, followed by not in priority need, and then intentionally homeless.

Taking 2016/17 as a typical year, 10% of applicants are declared as being not homeless, 4% are determined as being homeless, but not having a priority need for accommodation, 3% are declared to be intentionally homeless, and 81% are owed the main homelessness duty. Four-fifths of applicants were owed the main housing duty, but one-tenth were found to be not homeless or threatened with homelessness. Those being either not in priority need or intentionally homeless equated to almost the same amount, and collectively less than those who were not homeless.



Source: UK Government Homelessness Statistics⁵

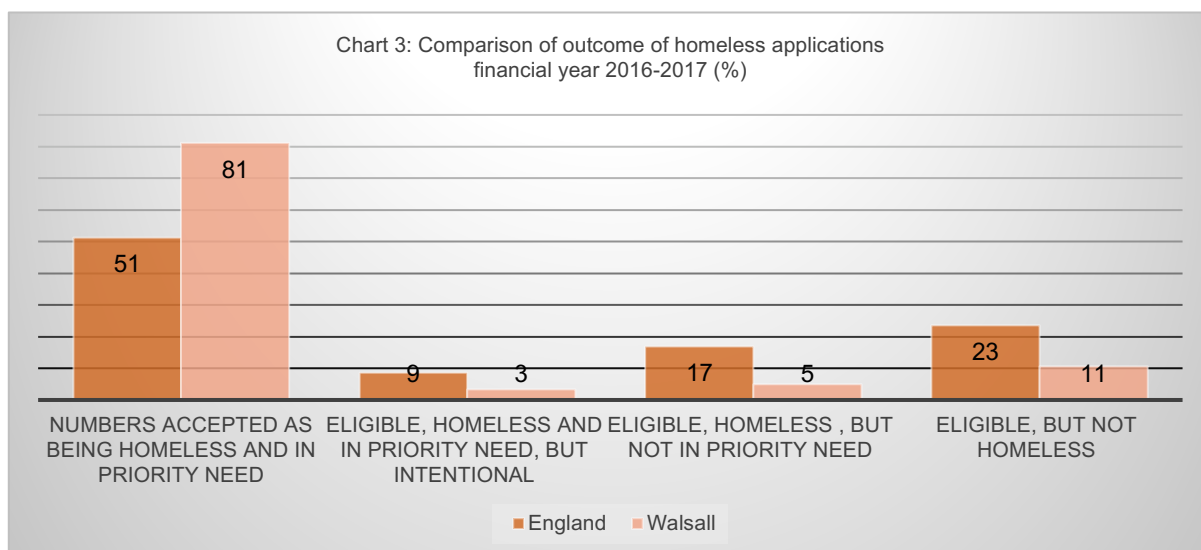
When Walsall is compared to England, the outcomes of homeless applications are identical. The majority of people are owed the main duty, followed by decisions of not homeless, not in priority need and then internally homeless. By a difference of one-third, people in Walsall are more likely to be owed the main duty than compared to England as a whole. The opposite is true of the other outcomes, with rates in Walsall being lower than those for the whole of England. Half the amount of people declared to be not homeless locally, compared to the whole of England. Almost three-quarters fewer people were declared not in priority need locally, compared to the whole of England. Two-thirds fewer people were determined to be intentionally homeless compared to the whole of England.

Compared to England, more people in Walsall benefit from the statutory safety net, being offered suitable accommodation by the local housing. What is unclear is the reason for this difference. However, it could be due to locally there being higher levels of poverty, or more adverse labour/housing market factors, all of which are recognised as being the main causes of homelessness in the UK⁶. Whilst another explanation could be the rationality or legality of the decision-making process of Walsall Council, with employees practising in a non-judgmental manner and ensuring people are able to properly explain their circumstances.

⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-homelessness>

⁶ Glen Bramley & Suzanne Fitzpatrick (July 2017), 'Homelessness in the UK: who is most at risk', Housing Studies Journal, pp1-21

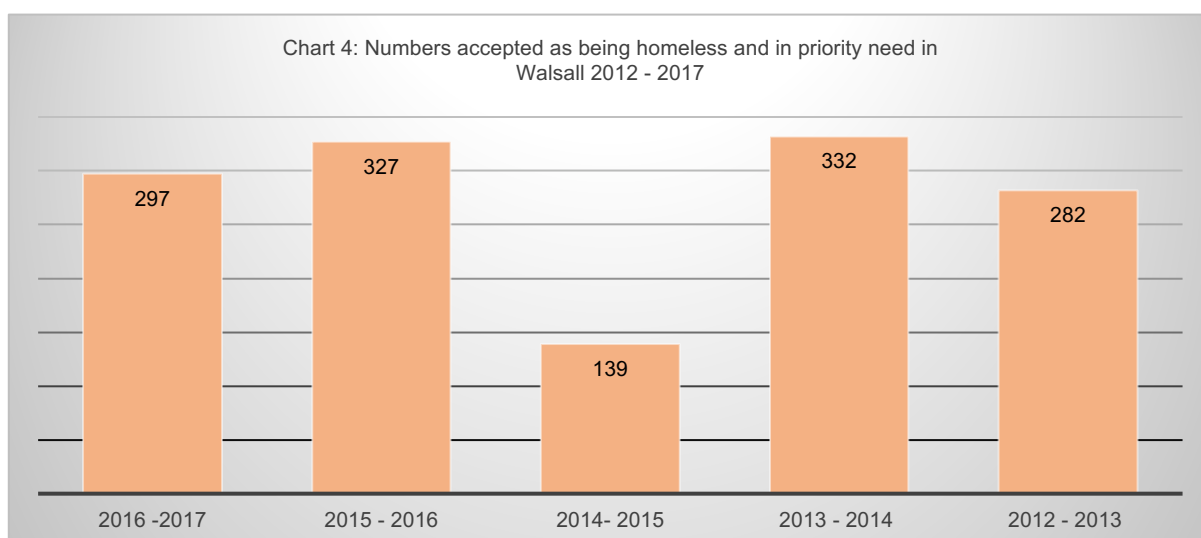
Chart 3 shows that 81% of applications in Walsall resulted in a decision that the main duty is owed, compared to 51% for England, a difference of one-third. 11% of applications in Walsall result in a 'not homeless decision', compared to 23% for England, a difference of one-half. 5% of applications in Walsall result in a decision of not in priority need, compared to 17% for England. A difference of almost three-quarters. 3% of applications in Walsall result in an 'intentional homeless decision', compared to 9% for England, a difference of two-thirds.



Source: UK Government Homelessness Statistics⁷

The number of people to whom the local housing authority has accepted the main homelessness (housing) duty, varied during the past five years, but remains almost the same today as it was five years ago. The reduction in levels during 2014/15, is due to data collection errors.

Chart 4 shows that homelessness acceptances in 2016/17 increased by 6% compared to levels in 2012/13, reduced by 11% compared to when levels peaked in 2013/14, but have increased by 54% compared to when levels fell to a low in 2014/15.



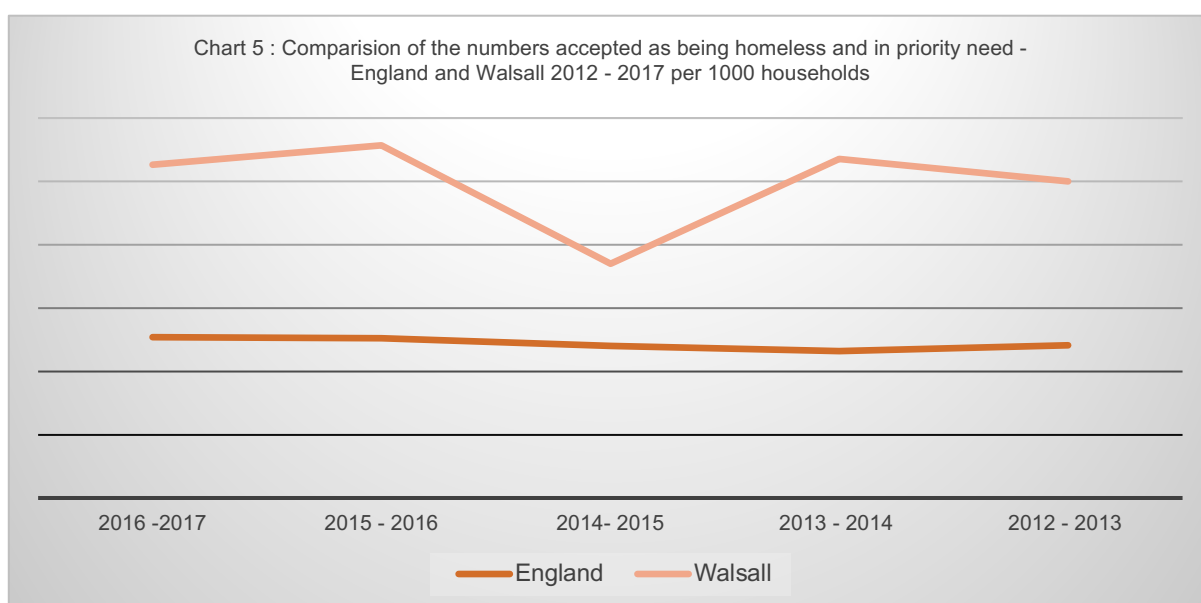
Source: UK Government Homelessness Statistics⁸

⁷ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-homelessness>

⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-homelessness>

When compared to England, the levels of homelessness acceptances in Walsall differ somewhat. Comparing homelessness per 1000 households allows for a fair benchmarking of local and national activity. The long-term trend is more consistent across England than it is for Walsall. Furthermore, relative levels of homelessness remain higher in Walsall than they do for England as a whole

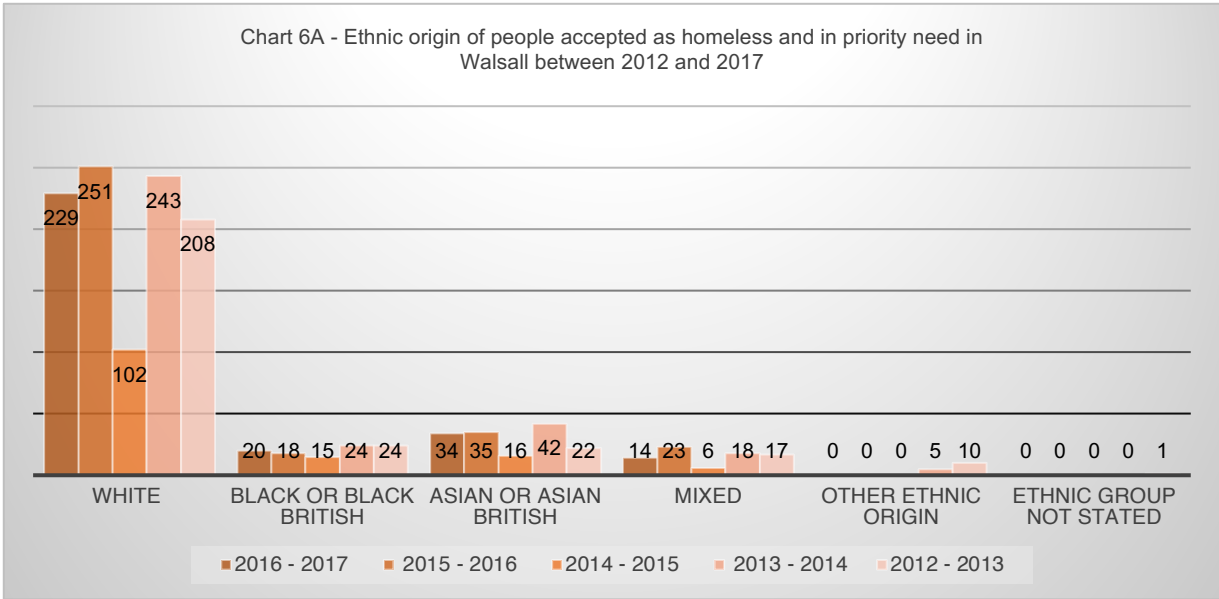
Chart 5 shows the difference between acceptance levels were widest in 2014/15, when national rates were more than 50% higher. However typically, the reverse has been the case throughout the past five years, where levels have been higher locally by between 7% - 24%. Over the five past years, homelessness per 1000 households increased in Walsall from 2.59 upwards to a 3.05, with levels reducing down to 2.72 in the past year. In comparison, across England, levels have increased from 2.41 upwards to a peak of 2.54 in the past year. Current rate of homelessness in England (at the highest for five years), are lower now than rates in Walsall five years ago and also presently.



Source: UK Government Homelessness Statistics⁹

Just over three-quarters (77%) of people accepted by the local authority as being owed the main housing (homelessness) duty, were of a white ethnic origin. The remaining one-quarter (23%), were from black or other minority ethnic origins. Compared to the overall population of Walsall, for which 81% are of a white ethnic origin and 19% are from black or other minority ethnic origins, the persons of the latter type of ethnic origin are disproportionately higher likelihood of homelessness.

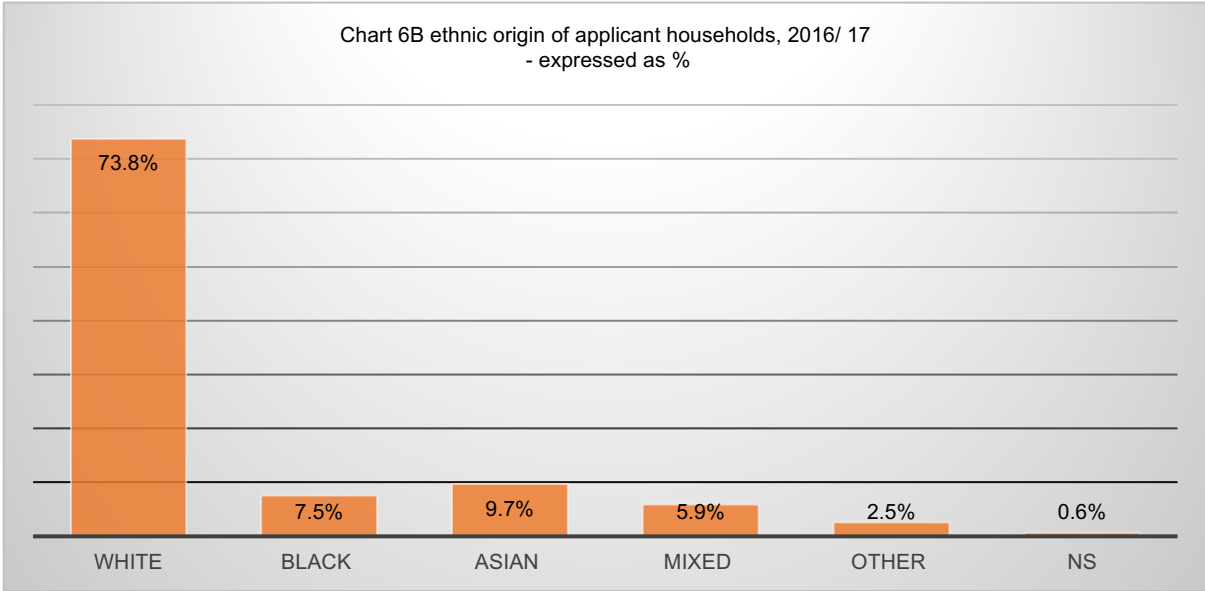
⁹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-homelessness>



Source: UK Government Homelessness Statistics¹⁰

Chart 6A shows that persons of a white and Asian or Asian British ethnic origin being homeless have increased (by 10% and 36% respectively) during the past five years, where persons from black or black British, mixed, or other ethnic origin have reduced (by 17%, 18% and 100%) during the same time-period.

Taking 2016/17 as a typical year, chart 6B shows that almost three quarters of applicant households are of a white ethnic origin, and almost one-tenth are of an Asian ethnic origin. Overall, persons of a black or other minority ethnic origin equate to about one-quarter of all applicants. Meaning persons of this characteristic are more likely to become homeless.

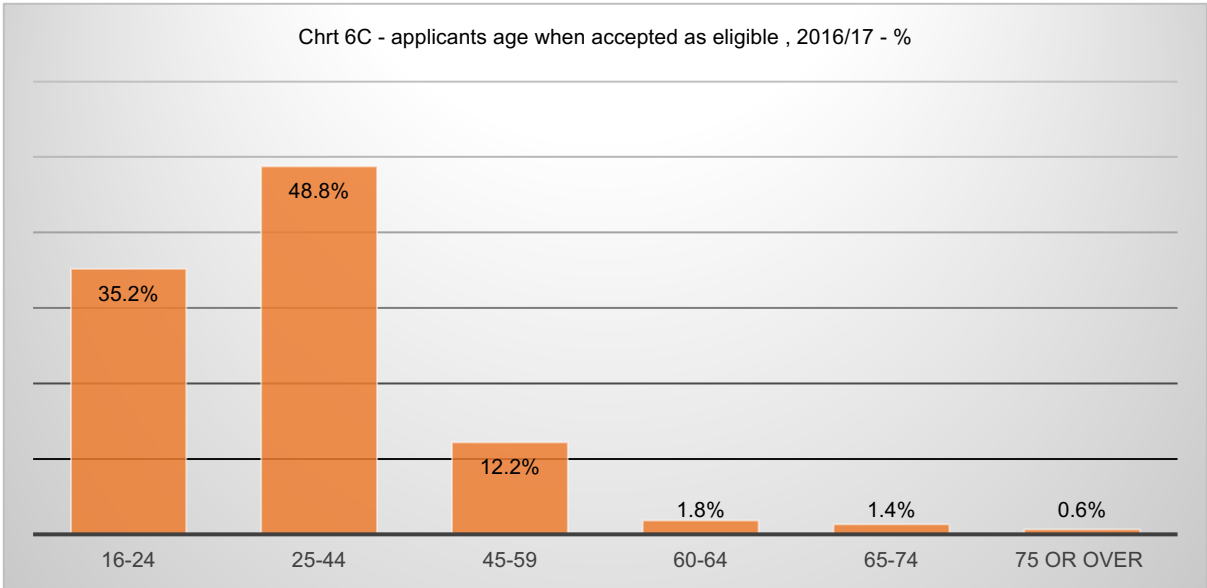


Source: UK Government Homelessness Statistics¹¹

Taking 2016/17 as a typical year, chart 6C shows that almost half of all applicants to whom a duty is accepted, are aged 25 – 44 years of age, just over one-third being aged 16-24, just over one-tenth are aged 45-59. Those aged 60 years and older equal about 4%.

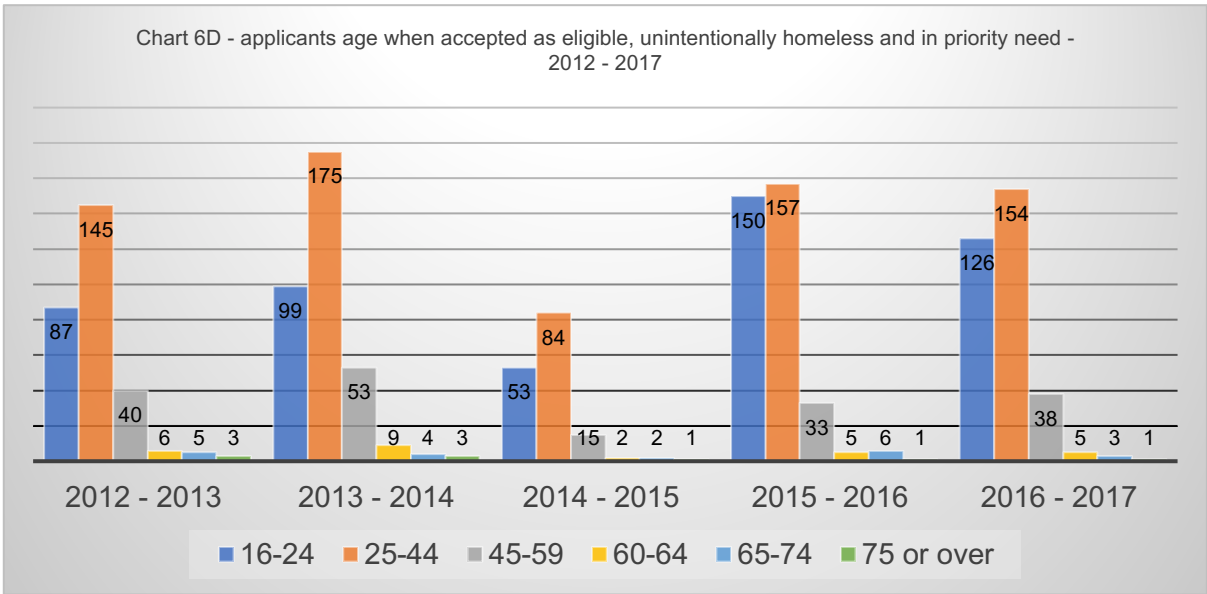
¹⁰ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-homelessness>

¹¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-homelessness>



Source: UK Government Homelessness Statistics¹²

Chart 6D shows that during the past five years those aged 25-44 have increased by 6% and those aged 16-24 have increased by 47%, (falling in the past 12 months by 16%). There was a significant increase in the levels of youth homelessness by 65% between 2014/15 and 2015/16, although this can partially be attributed to data recording errors.

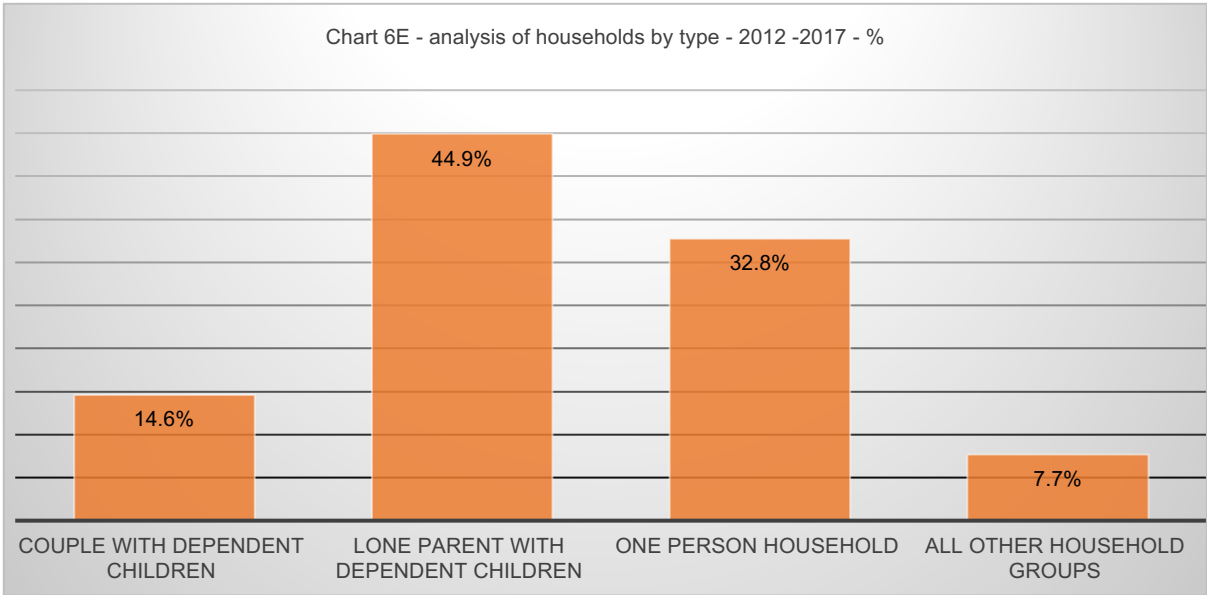


Source: UK Government Homelessness Statistics¹³

Chart 6E shows applicant households consisting of a lone parent with dependent children, is the most common household formation, this is followed by one-person households, and then couples with children (a small number of other household formation also are recorded). It is worth noting that there are almost four-times more lone parent households with dependent children than there are couples with dependent children.

¹² <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-homelessness>

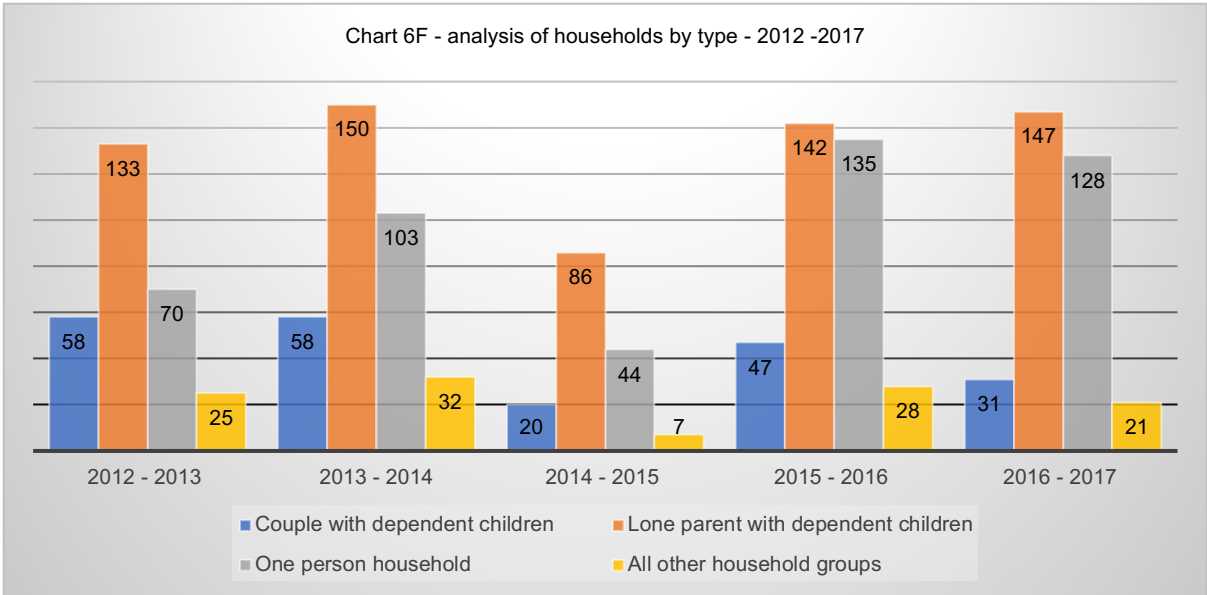
¹³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-homelessness>



Source: UK Government Homelessness Statistics¹⁴

During 2016/17, 94.2% of lone parents with dependent children were female, and 5.7% were male lone parents with dependent children. 54.7% of one-person households were female, and 45.2% were male. This confirms that, in Walsall, women are more likely to experience homelessness than men.

Chart 6F shows the number of households with dependent children being homeless or threatened with homelessness has reduced by 47% between 2012/13 – 2016/17. During the same period, lone parent households have increased by 10%, one-person households have increased by 46%, all other household groups (e.g. couple with no dependent children) have reduced by 16%. It is worth noting that the levels of one-person households becoming homeless has almost doubled during the past five years.

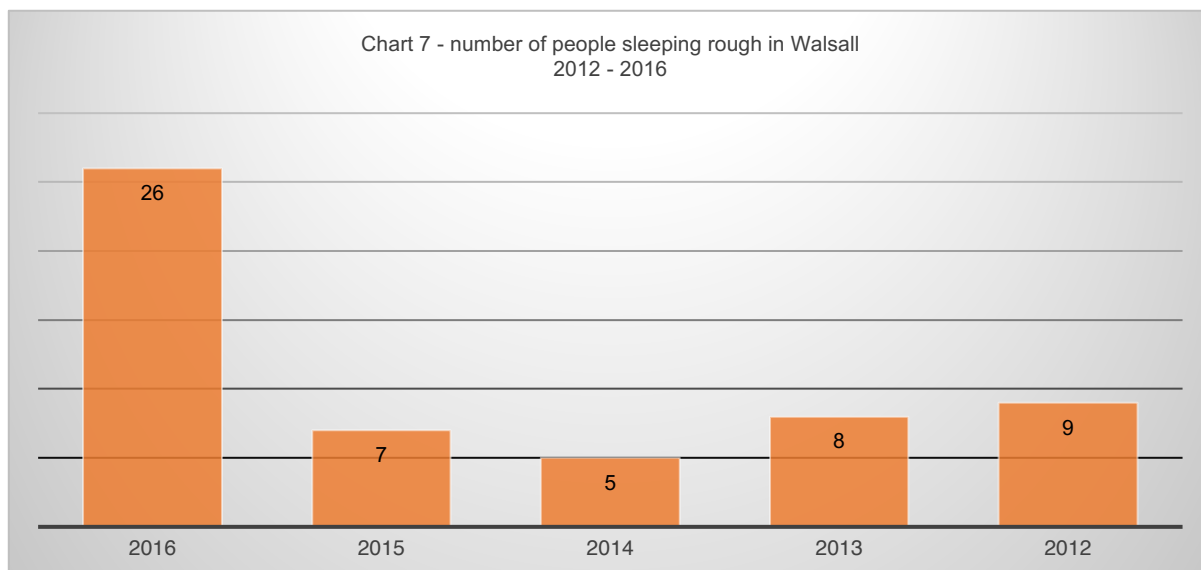


Source: UK Government Homelessness Statistics¹⁵

The number of people who are experiencing street homeless in the local area has increased by two-thirds during the past five years. Levels remained fairly static though-out the period

¹⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-homelessness>
¹⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-homelessness>

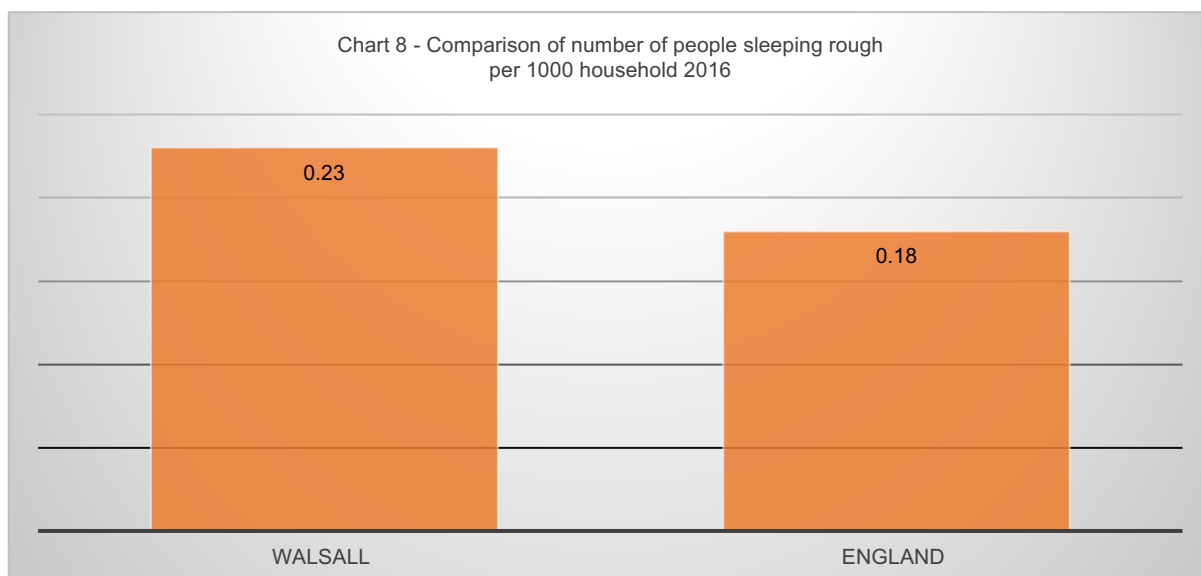
shown in the graph, with a reduction of 45% being recorded for the first three years. A significant increase was recorded between 2015 and 2016, with levels of people sleeping rough, jumping by 74%.



Source: UK Government Homelessness Statistics¹⁶

When the number of people sleeping rough in Walsall is compared to levels for the whole of England (per 1000 households) there is a difference of 0.5 (22%), with locally there being a higher rate of street homelessness compared to nationally.

This difference can be explained by the fact homelessness in England is concentrated in post-industrial towns and cities (along with seaports and seaside towns, northern cities and some London boroughs), with there being much less of a concentration in affluent rural and suburban areas of England¹⁷ (up to 10x lower between the two types of areas).



Source: UK Government Homelessness Statistics¹⁸

¹⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-homelessness>

¹⁷ Suzanne Fitzpatrick; Hal Pawson; Glen Bramley; Steve Wilcox, Beth Watts (2017); The Homelessness Monitor 2017, London, Crisis UK

¹⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-homelessness>

Black Country Women's Aid collect a comprehensive array of data on the levels of domestic abuse, for which they are contractually obliged to submitted to the local authority. Data for April 2016 – March 2017 shows:

- 1,123 referrals (of which 537 were high risk)
- 98.2% were female
- 66% were of a white ethnic origin
- 18.2% of all referrals came from one electoral ward
- the main reasons for referral is physical abuse, followed by emotional/psychological abuse
- MASH is the main source of referrals (14.5%)
- 4% of referrals were pregnant women
- 93% of referrals were offered a service

As with the local authority' own statistics, person of a black or other minority ethnic origin are significantly more likely to be a victim of domestic abuse.

2.2 Future Levels of Homelessness

Research¹⁹ published in 2017 shows that the primary cause of homelessness is childhood poverty. This closely followed by the secondary causes, labour and housing market factors. To forecast future levels of homelessness, we have taken account of trends shown in homelessness statistics analysed in section 2.1 of this chapter, plus used other sources of data relating to the main causes, to create an as accurate forecast as is possible. Data held by Walsall Council shows there are high levels of children coming into care, typically due to issues such as neglect at home, poor housing conditions and domestic abuse within the family.

Latest child poverty figures (2016) state that 3.9 million children are living in poverty. Housing and childcare are the two primary factors that have been identified as putting pressure on family budgets²⁰. Figures published by the UK Government state that the percentage of children living in poverty increased (1%) from 2015 to 2016 and this put them at the same levels as those seen in 2009/2010. Children are more likely, compared to the overall population, to be living in low income households²¹.

Welfare reforms introduced prior to 2013 (e.g. the under-occupation deduction, the overall benefit cap, etc) has resulted in typical incomes of a Walsall claimant reducing by £375.96 per year. As a result of the overall benefit cap being reduced further in 2016, locally incomes will fall by a further £277.68 per year. Once Universal Credit has been rolled-out across Walsall, it's expected that incomes will fall by a further £670.28 per year. The cumulative impact will be a loss of £1,323.92 per year. Looking ahead to 2020, its forecast that the average household will be worse off by £2,289.56 per year²².

When compared with both the West Midlands and Great Britain, Walsall has a larger percentage of the population defined as unemployed (see chart 9 below). In addition to this Walsall has a population with fewer people of working age. It also has the lowest levels of those classified as economically active. Walsall also has a higher percentage of households defined as workless. The area also has a lower job density than either the West Midlands and Great Britain²³.

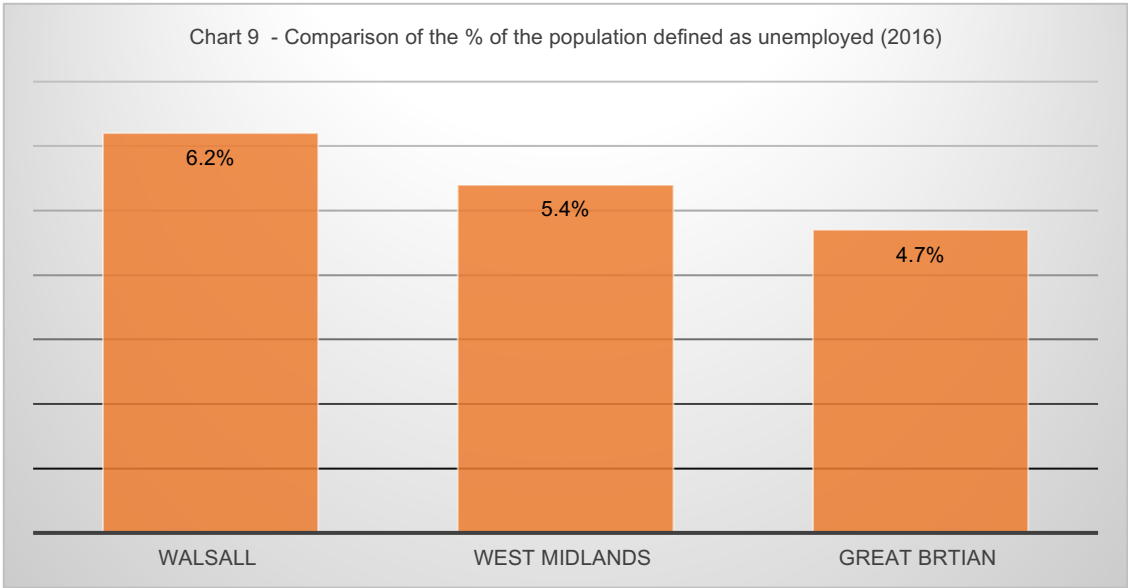
¹⁹ Professor Glen Bramley & Professor Suzanne Fitzpatrick (July 2017), 'Homelessness in the UK: who is most at risk', *Housing Studies Journal*, pp1-21

²⁰ <http://www.cpag.org.uk/child-poverty-facts-and-figures>

²¹ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/600091/households-below-average-income-1994-1995-2015-2016.pdf

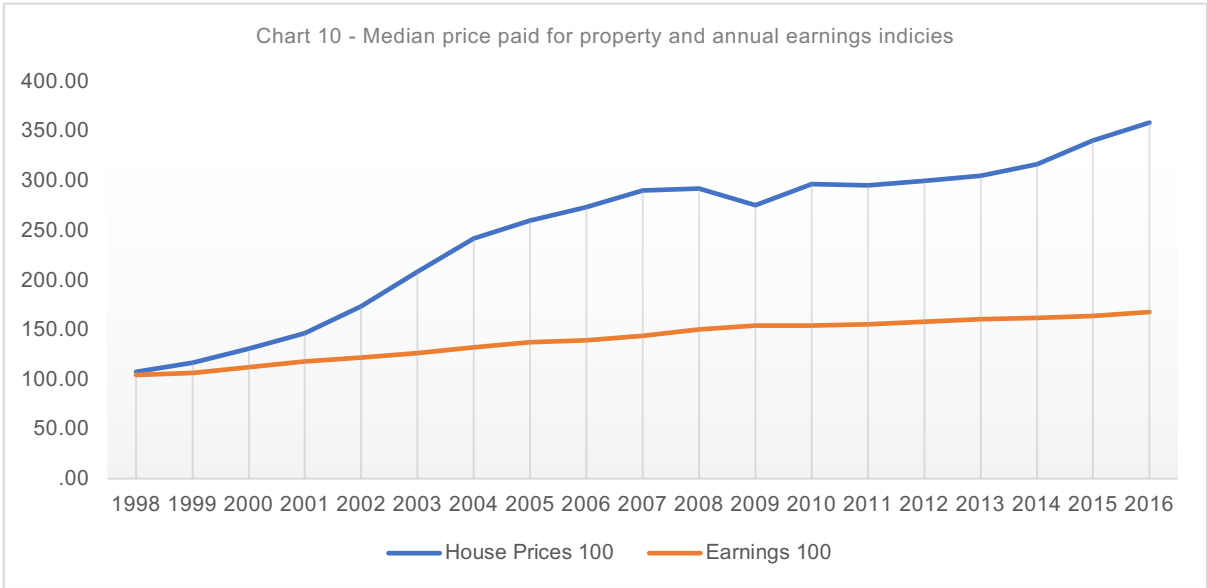
²² Policy in Practice (2016), The Cumulative Impact of Welfare Reform in Walsall,

²³ <https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/reports/lmp/la/1946157191/report.aspx?town=walsall>



Source: Office of National Statistics²⁴

In Walsall, house prices have accelerated significantly above earnings. In 2000 the affordability ratio was 3.5 times earnings and in 2016 this had increased to 5.4 times earnings. The average house price in the West Midlands Combined Authority Area is £180,551, an increase of 7.7% when compared with last year²⁵. Private rental prices have also seen an increase of 2.5% in England and West Midlands itself has seen a rise of 2.1%²⁶.



Source: Office of National Statistics²⁷

²⁴ <https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/reports/lmp/la/1946157191/report.aspx?town=walsall>

²⁵

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/housing/bulletins/housingaffordabilityinenglandandwales/1997to2016>

²⁶ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/inflationandpriceindices/bulletins/indexofprivatehousingrentalprices/oct2016>

²⁷

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/housing/bulletins/housingaffordabilityinenglandandwales/1997to2016>

2.3 Conclusions about the levels of homelessness

While there is excellent recording of the levels of statutory homelessness, much improvement could be made to the collection, analysis and reporting of data about single, street and hidden homelessness. Any Public body that has to report on homelessness to national governmental bodies, could also share this data with the local housing authority.

Excellent data is collected and reported on domestic abuse, this approach could be adopted with other voluntary organisations funded to help people at risk of homelessness, such as offenders, care leavers, people leaving hospital, and vulnerable adults.

Current levels of statutory homelessness and street homelessness in Walsall, by all official measures, exceed national rates. The local levels of youth homelessness have risen by 47%. In Walsall, women are more likely to experience homelessness than men. During the past five years, levels have increased both locally and nationally, however this trend is more inconsistent at borough levels compared to the nationwide picture. There could be some inconsistency of data collection by the local authority. Public bodies and voluntary organisations could do more to gather and share intelligence on the levels of homelessness.

Future levels of all forms of homelessness are likely to increase. Primarily this is due to increasing childhood poverty rates. A secondary driver for a predicted increase, is the local higher than average rates of unemployment and persons who are not of a working age. This is linked to local house prices rising faster earnings. These factors, alongside increases in homelessness during the past five years, means it's reasonable to forecast further growth in the levels of homelessness. It is predicted that the levels of hidden homelessness are thirteen times higher than street homelessness, with young people, people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual and/or transgender, and people escaping domestic abuse being more likely to experience this form of homelessness²⁸. More could be done with data held by local and national public authorities, to identify people likely to be at risk of any form of homelessness, by for example by characteristic and/or electoral ward area.

²⁸ *London Assembly Housing Committee (September 2017), Hidden homelessness in London*

3. Activities to Prevent Homelessness

The chapter considers activities carried out in Walsall by public authorities and voluntary organisations to prevent homelessness.

There are three strands of homelessness prevention activity²⁹, these have been used to inform the focus of this review:

1. early prevention – those most at risk are identified and services provided to prevent problems escalating
2. pre-crisis prevention – advice services, mediation or negotiation with landlords to avoid the imminent loss of a home
3. preventing recurring homelessness – tenancy sustainment services are provided to address other support needs

Homelessness legislation³⁰ requires that local housing authorities to help people who are threatened with homelessness, in order to prevent them from becoming homeless. Duties to those who are homelessness are triggered 28 days prior to a person losing their accommodation. The extent of help provided is currently affected by whether a person has a priority need for accommodation, and if they are intentionally homeless. The UK Government has encouraged local authorities to prevent everyone from becoming homeless³¹, but they are not legally obliged to do so. From April 2018, statute will be amended, guaranteeing all persons threatened with homelessness the same entitlement to the assistance, with that help becoming available at an earlier stage³².

3.1 Early Homelessness Prevention Activities

Early homelessness prevention activities focus on those most at risk of homelessness. By providing targeted services at an early stage, homelessness can be stopped from occurring. Homelessness legislation³³ recognises six types of characteristics, when a person has a heightened risk of homelessness. This review has concentrated on those identified in law, plus common experiences of adults who are homeless.

There is an absence of quantitative evidence to demonstrate outcomes being achieved from early homelessness prevention activities. However qualitative evidence was plentiful.

Homelessness prevention activities for people leaving secure estates (e.g. prison or young offender institutes) are poor but have a great potential to improve. Recent links have been established between the Walsall Council and the Community Rehabilitation Company for Staffordshire and the West Midlands (SWMCRC). This organisation, has recently formed a housing and welfare team, to help adult offenders with low or no support needs to obtain accommodation prior to release from prison. An example of help provided includes housing options and rights advice, referrals to local authorities for homelessness assistance, plus applications for housing to social and private landlords. The SWMCRC, together with other criminal justice agencies, are seeking to develop a joint working protocol to improve the assistance provided to people who would be homeless upon leaving a secure estate.

Homelessness prevention activities for care leavers are well established. Walsall Council has robust intelligence on the characteristics of who is coming into care and the reasons for doing so. The team responsible for care leavers, work with the homelessness service for a smooth transition from leaving care into accommodation in the community. The foundation for this, is a joint working protocol between the two sections of the local authority. All care

²⁹ Hal Pawson, Gina Netto, Colin Jones, Fiona Wager, Cathie Fancy, Delia Lomax (2007), Evaluating Homelessness Prevention, London, Department for Communities & Local Government

³⁰ Housing Act 1996, Part 7, sections 195 - 196

³¹ Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (2005), Sustainable Communities: settled homes, changing lives, London, UK Government

³² Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, Clauses 1 - 3

³³ Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, Clause 2

leavers are provided with a detailed guide explaining their housing options. Care leavers are helped to obtain accommodation from social and private landlords. Care leavers are afforded a reasonable preference in the local housing allocations scheme (along with those operated by social landlords), featuring in the highest of four bands operated via the scheme. Walsall Council has developed a number of accommodation options for young people, including those leaving care, which are currently being reviewed by the local authority, these include:

- Walsall Housing Group provide shared tenancies scheme where young people including care leavers can share a flat
- YMCA Black Country provide a supported lodgings and emergency night-stop scheme for young people aged 16-24
- St Basil's provide accommodation and support for young people with complex needs

Homelessness prevention activities for former members of regular armed forces are unknown. No specific activities are known to be carried locally, with the extent of people becoming homelessness due this reason being unknown. It is worth noting there is no Armed Forces base located in Walsall. Nevertheless, the local authority has adopted an Armed Forces Covenant, which includes a commitment from local social housing providers to prioritise armed forces personnel when allocating social housing.

Homelessness prevention activities for victims of domestic abuse are excellent. A comprehensive range of provision is operated by Black Country Women's Aid, which is commissioned by Walsall Council. A range of services are offered from the Cedar Centre, including the nationally recognised Independent Domestic Violence Advice service, which helps keep victims and their children safe. Alongside this a programme to help perpetrators to change their behaviour. Typically, a family is supported for 16 weeks, getting help to access a GP, improve the safety of their property or access refuge accommodation and much more. 90% of people report their overall situation improves after receiving support from Black Country Women's Aid.

Homelessness prevention activities for people leaving hospital are poor. There hasn't been a project set-up to promote a partnership approach to discharging homeless people from hospital. Joint protocols and pathways have not been embedded between Walsall Council and the Walsall Healthcare NHS Trust. There isn't a standard method of identifying patients accessing hospital who are at risk of homelessness at the point of discharge. Therefore, outcomes for homeless people are unknown, but expected to be unsatisfactory.

Homelessness prevention activities for vulnerable adults could be substantially improved. It's important to acknowledge that Walsall Council commission a range of care and support from a mixture of providers for vulnerable adults with a wide array of characteristics. This provision helps to promote wellbeing and prevent care needs from escalating, it's safe to assume this also prevents homelessness occurring from some people whom without such provision might otherwise experience one or more forms of homelessness. However, there are no specific provisions to prevent reduce or delay the social care needs of people who are more likely to be at risk of homelessness, such as persons experiencing anxiety and/or depression, or being admitted into hospital due to a mental health issue, attempted suicide, or engage in deliberate self-harm³⁴. There is no specific information and advice for vulnerable adults who are more likely to become homeless, nor is there any integrated partnership working agreements.

The extent and prevalence of homelessness prevention activities for other persons likely to become homeless are unclear. There are no apparent homelessness prevention initiatives

³⁴ Suzanne Fitzpatrick, Sarah Johnsen, Michael White (2011), 'Multiple Exclusion Homelessness in the UK: Key Patterns and Intersections', *Social Policy & Society*, 10(4), p501-512

for people who undergo common experiences of homeless adults, such as high alcohol consumption, street drinking, use of hard drugs, begging, injecting drugs, being charged with a violent criminal offence, abuse of solvents/gas/glue, engaging in sex work, being a victim of a sexual assault³⁵. Policy making around these matters are beyond the responsibility of the Council, instead being either jointly or separately, the role of public health and/or community safety officials. Their efforts to prevent homelessness are either not captured properly, are unknown, or possibly nothing is in place.

However, where Walsall Council does excel is with early prevention activities for young people at risk of parental exclusion, especially those aged 16/17 years. The Council's Early Help service provides support to families, not in the social care system, to resolve problems that need more than one agency to respond. The work of this service is carried-out using an asset-based needs assessment tool, which fosters outcome focused action plans. The Council's Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub is aligned to the work of the Early Help Team, plus the IVDA service commissioned from Black Country Women's Aid, operating on a locality-based model across the local authority area. This is backed-up by a dedicated service for those people who are on the edge of going into the care of the local authority, to work with young people and their families.

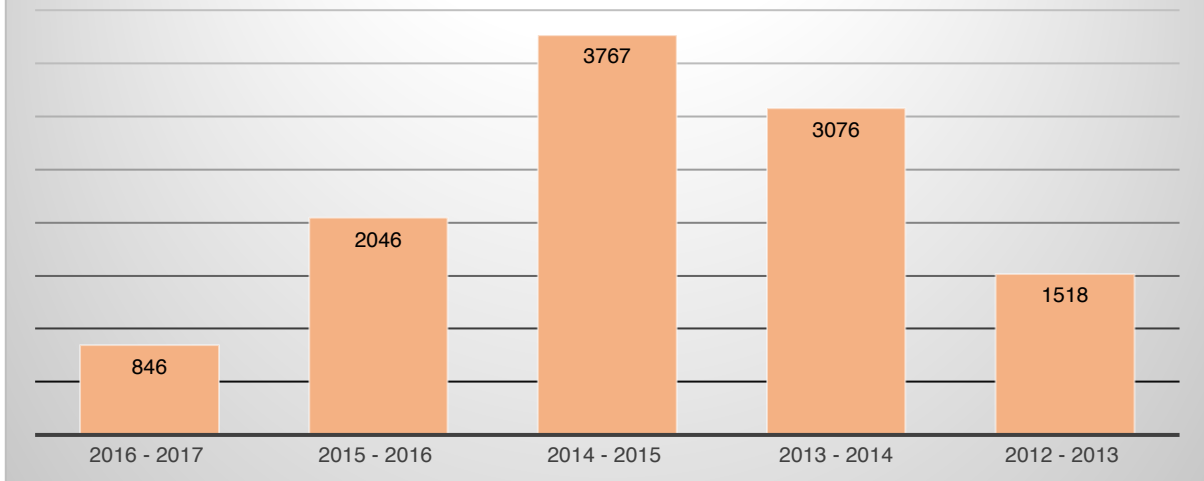
3.2 Pre-Crisis Homelessness Prevention Activities

Pre-crisis homelessness prevention activities are primarily carried out by Walsall Council's homelessness officers, sometimes with assistance from colleagues at other public authorities.

Local positive pre-crisis action to prevent homelessness is presently at a record low, having risen to a significant high. There are a number of reasons why this sharp rise and fall might have occurred, including reforms to welfare benefits alongside a reduction in public sector funding, prohibiting the ability to prevent homelessness. It is known that in 2014/15, there was some data collection errors. There is a possibility that fewer people now require help to prevent them from becoming homeless. It should be noted that there were identified data collection errors in 2016/17, which significantly under-recorded prevention activity, specifically through Walsall Council's use of discretionary housing payments (DHP) of housing benefit to help individuals remain in the private rented sector, or make a planned move, who may otherwise become homeless. The prevention figure for 2016/17 should have read as 2803 (1,759 to remain and 324 to move).

³⁵ Professor Suzanne Fitzpatrick, Dr Sarah Johnsen, Dr Michael White (2011), 'Multiple Exclusion Homelessness in the UK: Key Patterns and Intersections', *Social Policy & Society*, 10(4), p501-512

Chart 11 - number of cases where positive action was successful in preventing homelessness in Walsall between 2012 - 2016



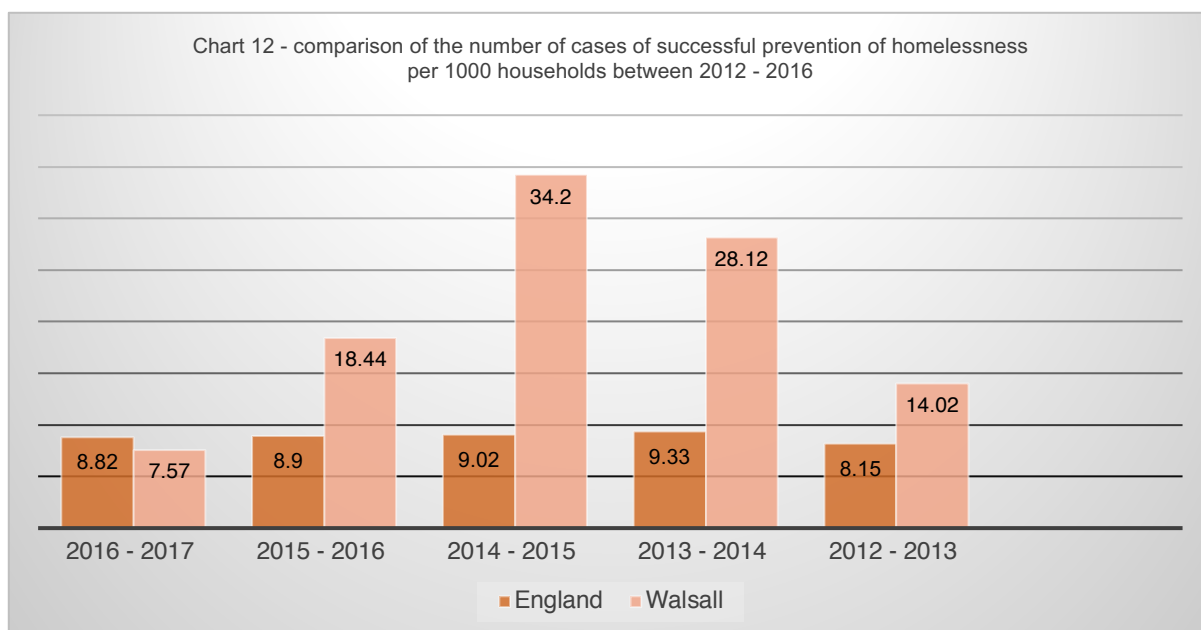
Source: UK Government Homelessness Statistics³⁶

The level of positive pre-crisis actions to prevention homelessness peaked in 2014/15 at 3,767, an increase of 2,249 (60%) from 2012/13. Subsequently, levels have reduced by 2,921 (78%) up the most recent year on record, 2016/17, but as noted this is due to a data recording error and should read 2083 which is a similar level to the previous year.

Until recently, the relative rate of pre-crisis prevention activity has been significantly higher than compared to the national picture. However, this situation may appear that it has started to reverse, however if we consider the 2083 figure that should have been recorded for 2016/17 then Walsall prevention activity still remains significantly above the national picture. While national rates of prevention activity have remained fairly static over the past five years, locally, the rate of activity has sharply increased and decreased during the same period.

The reason for the local trend is unclear, but a number of factors could have influenced this pattern, including; consequences of welfare reform, reduction in public sector spending, or inconsistency in data recording. The possibility that fewer people require help to prevent themselves from becoming homelessness should be acknowledged, but given the broader trends showing a rise in homelessness, and predictions that this will continue, it seems unlikely. The main reasons for these apparent trends were data collection errors as already noted.

³⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-homelessness>



Source: UK Government Homelessness Statistics³⁷

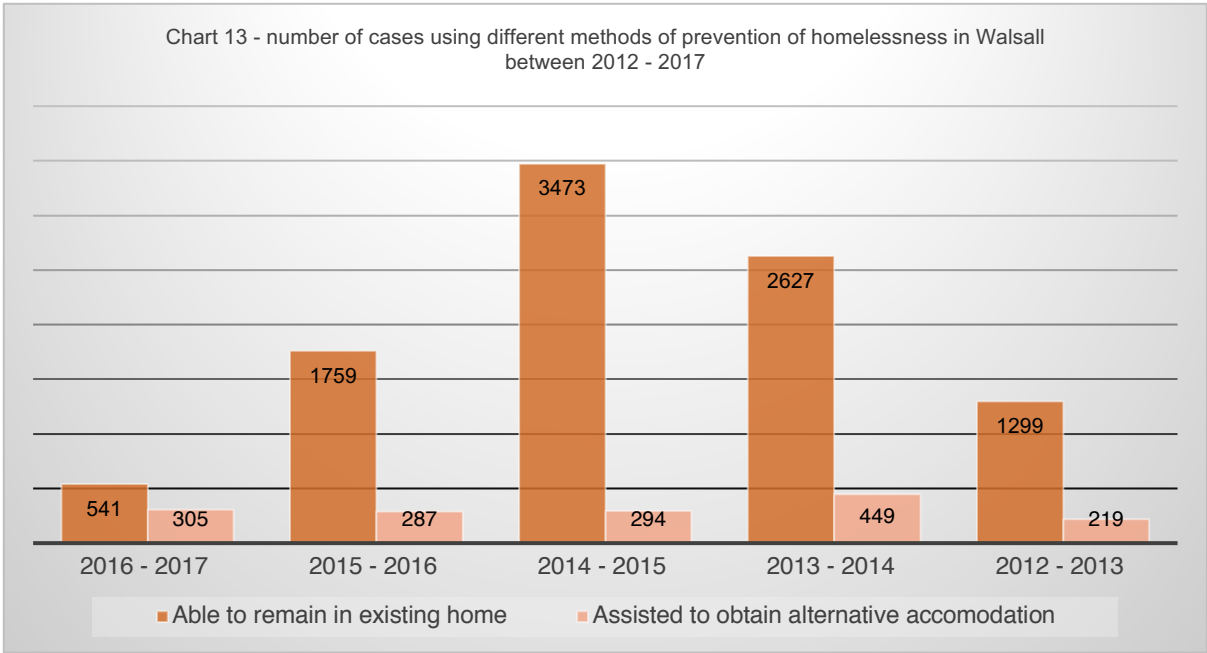
Pre-crisis homelessness prevention activity can be divided into two broad practices. One is to help people threatened with homelessness to remain in their existing accommodation, where this is not possible or safe to do so, another option is to help someone to obtain alternative accommodation. Typical actions to help people remain in existing accommodation include: resolving housing benefit problems, providing assistance to ensure someone will remain in accommodation in the private or social rented sector, and debt advice. Common actions to help people obtain alternative accommodation include: securing an offer of social housing, securing private rented sector accommodation (with or without a landlord incentive), or any form of hostel or house of multiple occupation.

Walsall Council's Housing Benefit Administrators make an invaluable contribution towards preventing homelessness. Examples are: the informal fast-tracking of claims of help with housing costs for tenants of private landlords, arranging for claims to be paid directly to social and private landlords. However, it is the administration of Discretionary Housing Payments that especially makes a difference. Locally, this budget is being used to full effect. Housing benefit administrators are ensuring that people in receipt of welfare to help for pay for housing costs, are able to get a temporary top-up to usual amount they are entitled to, which avoids them getting in rent arrears when there is an unexpected fall in income or rise in rental charges. This makes an invaluable contribution towards the prevention of homelessness, by allowing some to remain in their current house, or make a planned move to somewhere more affordable.

Walsall has always significantly relied on helping people to remain in existing accommodation. This makes good sense from an individual's perspective as it not only protects their wellbeing, but also benefits their personal and economic circumstances.

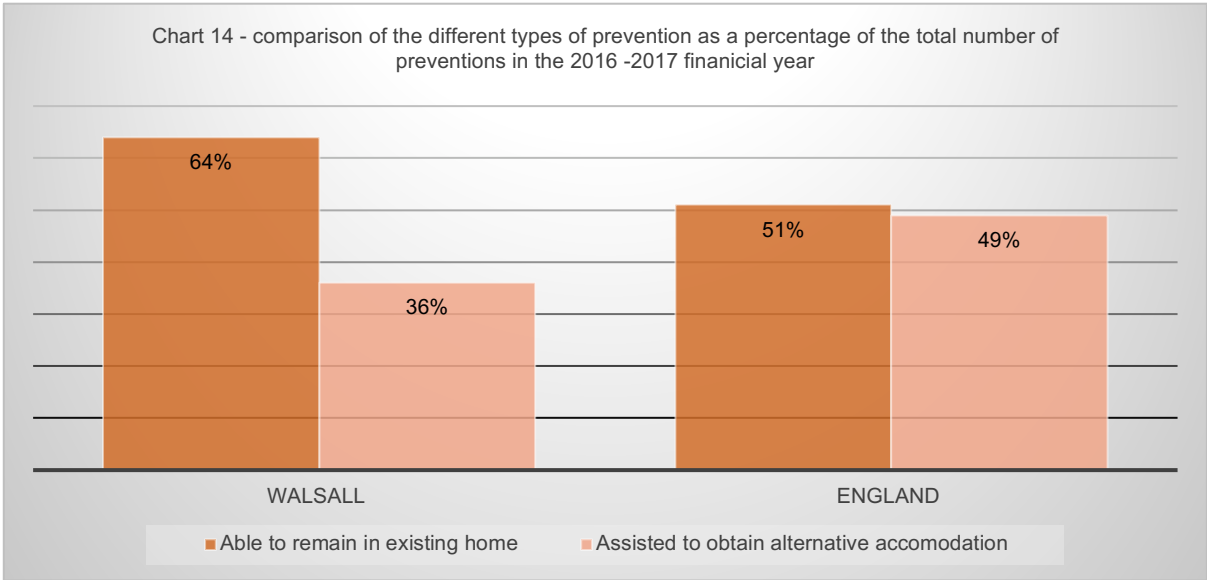
Chart 13 shows, that at the most extreme, people were nine times more likely to be helped to remain in their existing home, compared to being helped to obtain alternative accommodation. Data for the most recent year shows outcomes for each are almost equal. As noted, this is due to data collection errors not including DHP information in 2016/17, there was actually 1759 people helped to remain in their own home, which is the same as 2015/16.

³⁷ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-homelessness>



Source: UK Government Homelessness Statistics³⁸

Walsall compared to England has helped more people to remain in existing accommodation. Chart 14 shows that locally, almost two-thirds of people remain in existing accommodation, with just over one-third being helped to obtain alternative accommodation. Nationally, there is almost an equal split between the main method of pre-crisis homelessness prevention. There is no apparent reason for the difference in local and national outcomes, however influencing factors could be rates of poverty, labour and housing market factors.



Source: UK Government Homelessness Statistics³⁹

In most years (3 out of the 5 years analysed) the majority of cases were resolved by providing other assistance to remain in private or social rented housing (such as informal negotiation with landlords). However, in 2014 -2015 successful prevention was achieved for the majority households by resolving housing benefit problems.

³⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-homelessness>
³⁹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-homelessness>

It is apparent that Walsall Council carryout many activities to prevent homelessness, which are commonplace throughout England (see list below), however this success isn't being recorded locally.

Action to help remain in existing accommodation includes:

- Mediation in cases of parental threatened exclusion
- Conciliation and home visits cases of parental threatened exclusion
- Financial payments from a homelessness prevention fund
- Debt advice
- Resolving rent or service charge arrears in private or social rented sector
- Sanctuary scheme measures for victims of domestic abuse
- Crisis interventions (e.g. emergency support)
- Negotiation or legal advocacy to remain in private rented sector accommodation
- Mortgage arrears interventions or mortgage rescue

Action to prevent homelessness, by helping people to obtain alternative accommodation is being captured. From 2012/13 to 2016/17, the majority of cases (45%) were found accommodation in social housing as housing register nomination to social housing provider (category 7).

Table 1: Homelessness Relief Activities, Walsall, 2012/13 – 2016/17

Activity	%
1. Hostel or House of Multiple Occupation with or without support	9.4
2. PRS accommodation with landlord incentive scheme	5.5
3. PRS accommodation without landlord scheme	14.7
4. Accommodation with friends or relatives	0.4
5. Supported accommodation	11.6
6. Social housing - management move of existing social housing tenant	0.5
7. Social housing – housing register nomination to social housing provider	45.3
8. Social housing - negotiation with social housing provider outside nomination arrangements	9.9
9. Low cost home ownership scheme or low-cost market housing solution	0.1
10. Other	2.8

Source: Walsall Council P1E statistics (updated 2016 – 2017)

3.3 Preventing the reoccurrence of homelessness

Preventing the reoccurrence of homelessness, is typically carried out by a mixture of public authorities and voluntary organisations. This might involve providing information, advice and assistance about economic, social, housing, or legal matters. There is no local verifiable statistical evidence on the volume of activity being carried out, nor the outcomes being achieved. However, there is plenty of anecdotal material that has been considered as part of this review. An in-depth evaluation of this can be found in section 5 of this document. Section 5 reviews the activities being carried out to support people at risk, who are, or have been homeless.

3.4 Conclusions about activities to prevent homelessness

The extension of duties owed to persons who are threatened with homelessness from April 2018, means that the local authority will have to ensure there are a comprehensive range of activities in place to prevent homelessness.

An improved system of evidencing outcomes from homelessness prevention activities, needs to be put in place. Efforts made by public authorities and voluntary organisations all need to be recognised.

Efforts to improve homelessness prevention activities for people leaving secure estates should be encouraged. Sufficient time and commitment needs to be made by both the local authority and criminal justice agencies to establish a pathway that guarantees nobody leaves prison with no fixed abode. Walsall Council carryout an exemplary range of homelessness prevention activities for care leavers, these practices and protocols agreed between housing and children services should be promoted as good practice. A better understanding is needed of what, if anything, could be done better to prevent homelessness for armed forces personnel. Preventing homelessness prior to discharge from hospital should comply with practices promoted by the Department of Health, a short-life joint working group should be established between the local authority housing services and local NHS bodies to transform local procedures. Activities to prevent homelessness due to domestic abuse are excellent, outcomes achieved from commissioned services should be shared. Activities to prevent vulnerable adults from becoming homeless need attention. Specific interventions for those most at risk of homelessness (e.g. adults experiencing mental ill health) need to developed, along the lines of those agreed between the local children services authority and the local housing authority. Likewise, activities to prevent other persons more likely to become homeless, such people with a substance dependency, committing criminal offences, or involved in sex work, all need to be developed, with primary responsibility being taken by public health and police officials, supported by the Walsall Council.

The local housing authority's homelessness service has historically excelled at the pre-crisis prevention of homelessness. The strong joint working between the local authority homelessness and housing benefit service should be acknowledged as a critical success factor. The reasons for why performance appears to have fallen recently relates to data recording errors, not an actual reduction in the number of people assisted.

Policies, procedures, process charts and paperwork templates for the whole array of prevention schemes, will all need to be reviewed and updated as required as part of preparation for enactment of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.

Conclusions about activities to prevent the reoccurrence of homelessness can be found in section 5 of this report.

4. Securing Accommodation

This chapter of the report reviews the activities being carried out to help people who are homeless, to secure accommodation. The usage of local authority temporary accommodation is first considered, followed by the wider range of housing options available.

Homelessness legislation⁴⁰ requires local housing authorities to help people who are homeless. Duties to those who are homeless are triggered subject to a person being homeless and eligible for assistance as defined in law. The extent of help provided is currently affected by whether someone has a priority need for accommodation, or if they are intentionally homeless. Currently local housing authorities are encouraged to relieve homelessness for everyone, but are not legally obliged to do so⁴¹. From April 2018, the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, guarantees all persons who are homeless an entitlement to assistance to relieve their homelessness, with help becoming available for up to 56 days⁴². If a person remains homeless after two months, a local housing authority will be obliged to secure accommodation for anyone who has a priority need for accommodation. However, only those who are not intentionally homeless will be offered accommodation for as long as they need it, with everyone else being given accommodation for only a limited period (e.g. a couple of weeks or a couple of months, depending on the person's circumstances).

4.1 Temporary accommodation

Walsall Council own and manage a portfolio of temporary accommodation. The stock is concentrated in a small number of sites throughout the local authority area, but mostly on the periphery of the town centre. The accommodation was built post-second world war, originally as general needs social housing. Some of the homes are on the ground floor, but many are above it. There is a large number of two-bedroom flats, but also a substantial number of three-bedroom and some one-bedroom properties. There is a total of 90 units (one of which is used as a crash-pad, when young people need accommodation in an emergency).

Taking 02 November 2017 as a typical day, analysis of the occupants of temporary accommodation on this date revealed 11 units (12%) were void. While most properties had become void within the past month, one had been empty for three months. Reasons for properties remaining void included:

- new carpets being required in two properties
- a washing machine being needed
- asbestos being present
- fumigation required
- new bathroom required
- balcony needing attention
- cleaning of property required.

On the same date, 16 households had been living in temporary accommodation since 2016, and further two households had been staying since 2015 and another one household since 2014. These 19 units account for 21% of the entire temporary accommodation portfolio. Had these households been able to move-on, the need to use of more costly forms of temporary accommodation (e.g. bed and breakfast hotels) could be avoided.

Chart 15 (below) shows an overall increase in the number of households (which can constitute any arrangement from a single person to a couple with one or more dependent children) for which Walsall Council has secured temporary accommodation. Levels reduced for the three years from 2012/13 to 2014/15 by 40%, then subsequently increased and have

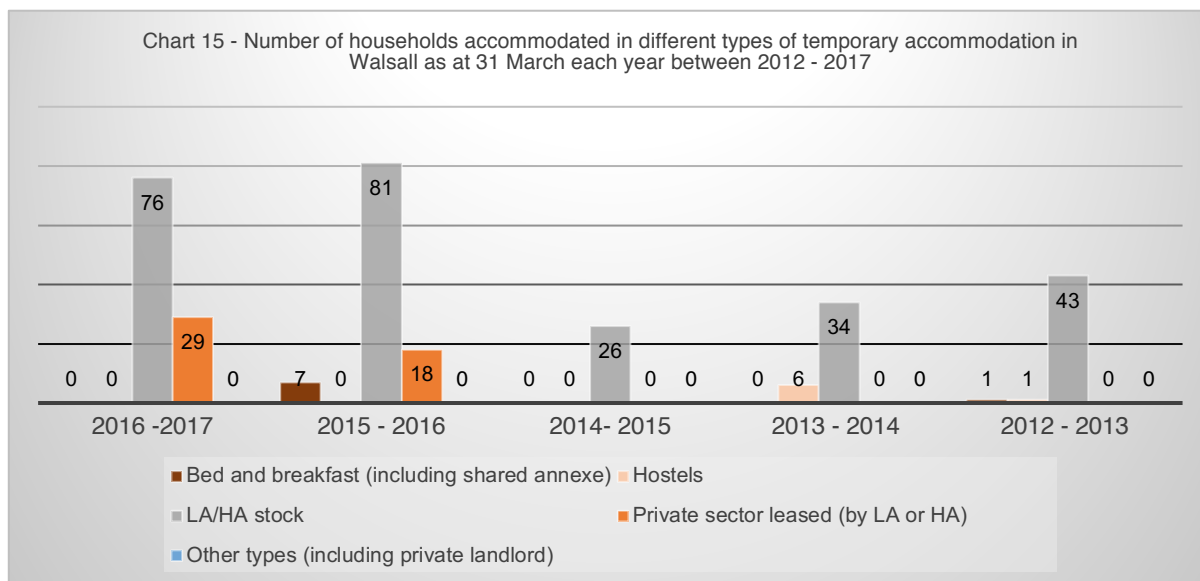
⁴⁰ Housing Act 1996, Part 7, sections 195 - 196

⁴¹ Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (2005), Sustainable Communities: settled homes, changing lives, London, UK Government

⁴² Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, Clauses 1 - 3

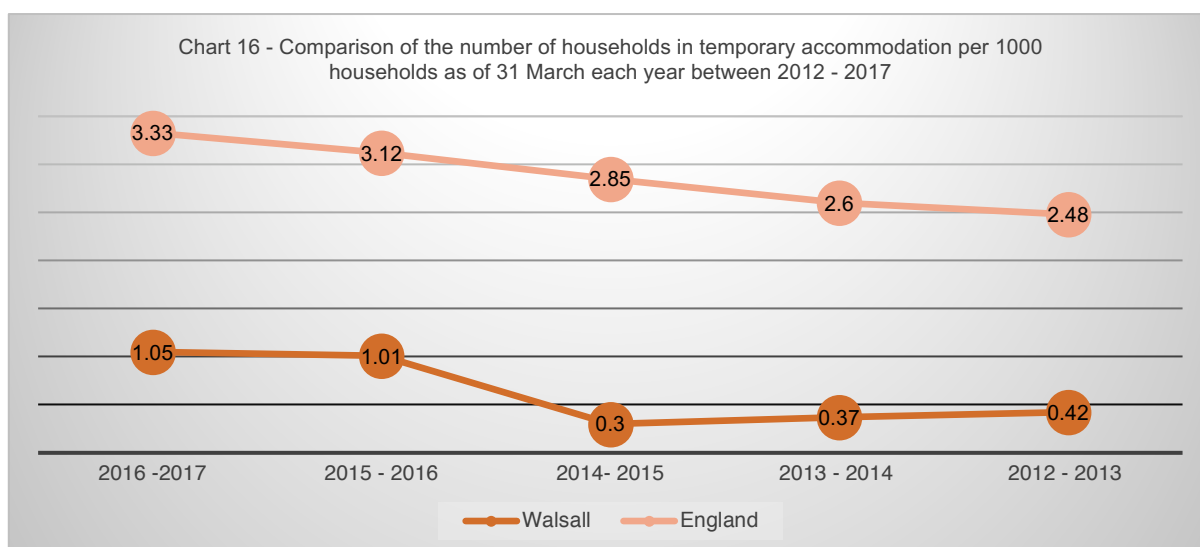
remained almost unchanged. The reason for the rapid increase, from 26 households 2014/15 to 106 households 2015/16, a rise of 76%, is uncertain. Factors such as welfare reform, or broader labour and housing market factors will almost certainly be a causative factor.

Walsall Council primarily uses its own stock as temporary accommodation for those who are homeless. In recent years, as levels have risen, the local authority has begun to lease accommodation. The increase from 2014/15 to 2015/16 was so high, that for the only time in the past five years, Walsall Council resorted to using bed and breakfast hotels as a form of temporary accommodation. Some limited use of hostel accommodation has also been used, but not for more than one year.



Source: UK Government Homelessness Statistics⁴³

Although the number of people living in temporary accommodation has increased locally, so have rates nationally. The rate of temporary accommodation usage, together with scale of increase is far higher across England as whole, than compared to Walsall.



Source: UK Government Homelessness Statistics⁴⁴

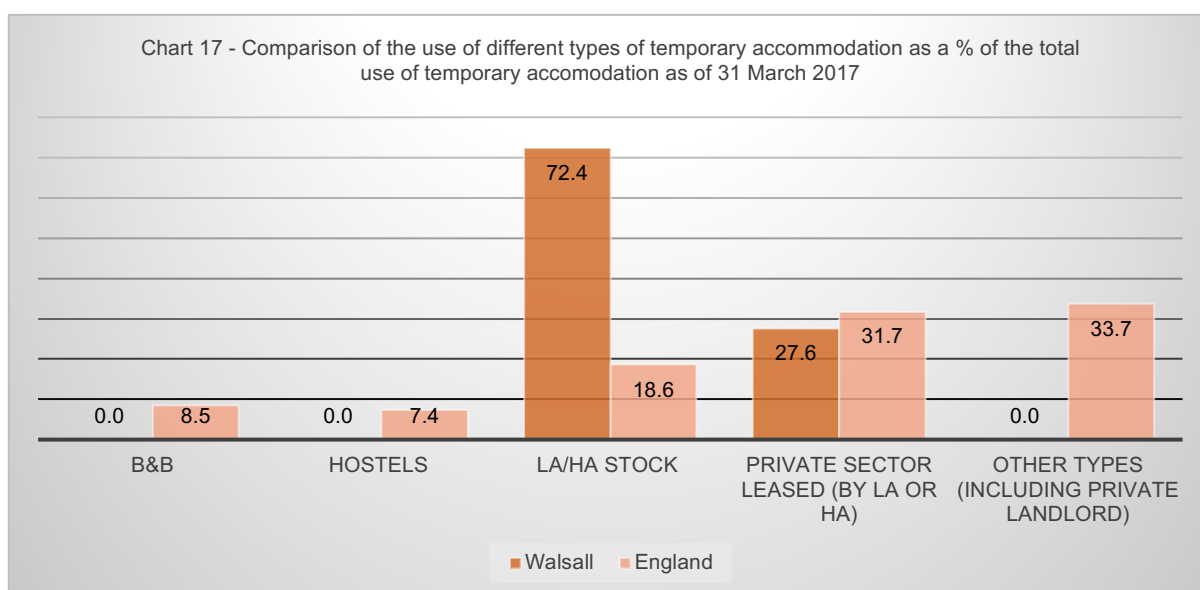
⁴³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-homelessness>

⁴⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-homelessness>

The relative rate of temporary accommodation usage for England is three-times what it is for Walsall. Rates in England will be more adversely affected by housing market factors, than compared to Walsall.

The use of own stock for temporary accommodation is significantly higher locally than compared to the national picture. Walsall has four times the amount local authority stock for use as temporary accommodation, compared to the national average. The portion of stock leased from private rented sector landlords is almost equal locally and nationally. However, the use of other types of temporary accommodation (e.g. managed and let directly by private landlords) across the country is the main form temporary accommodation, and yet is not used at all in borough. Likewise, there is some use of bed and breakfast accommodation, along with hostels, nationally but none locally.

Walsall Council using its own stock has both advantages and disadvantages. The advantages include: exclusive control of allocating the accommodation, plus being sole beneficiary of any profits from rental incomes. However, the disadvantages, include being singularly responsible for response repairs and planned maintenance. The temporary accommodation stock being concentrated on three sites risks creating ghettos of homelessness in specific areas of the borough. Relying on fixed units of temporary accommodation doesn't easily allow for the changing needs of households requiring temporary accommodation, whereas a dispersed stock can be managed in a more dynamically. The location, type and number of bedrooms any given unit of temporary accommodation might have, is easier to re-organise as demands fluctuate when it is dispersed. It is for these reason that the majority of local authorities across England used a dispersed stock of temporary accommodation, and typically on lease (or via some other arrangement) from a social or private landlord.



Source: UK Government Homelessness Statistics⁴⁵

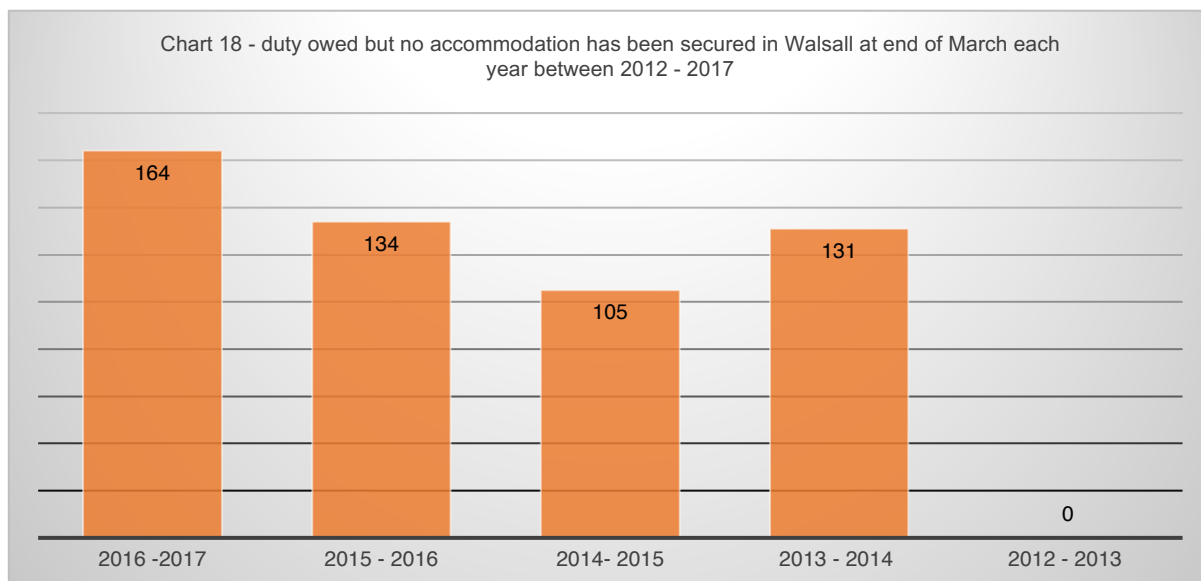
An increasing number of people who are entitled to temporary accommodation, are instead choosing to make their own arrangements instead of accepting an offer from Walsall Council. This situation can arise when someone's accommodation has been declared unsuitable (e.g. due to affordability, fitness or overcrowding), or their right to occupy has been withdrawn. However, the local authority (with full agreement from the individual applying for homelessness assistance), reaches an agreement that the person will remain in

⁴⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-homelessness>

occupation of their existing accommodation for an interim period, or they choose to source their own alternative temporary accommodation (e.g. with family or friends).

Chart 18 shows the cases where a duty is owed but no accommodation was secured, increased by 36% from 2014/15 to 2016/17. Previously, this arrangement had not occurred at all in 2012/13, following which the number of people in this situation dramatically increased.

There is no specific intelligence behind this rising trend. Welfare reforms, reducing in local government spending, change in employee practices, or inaccuracies in data recording could all be behind these changes.



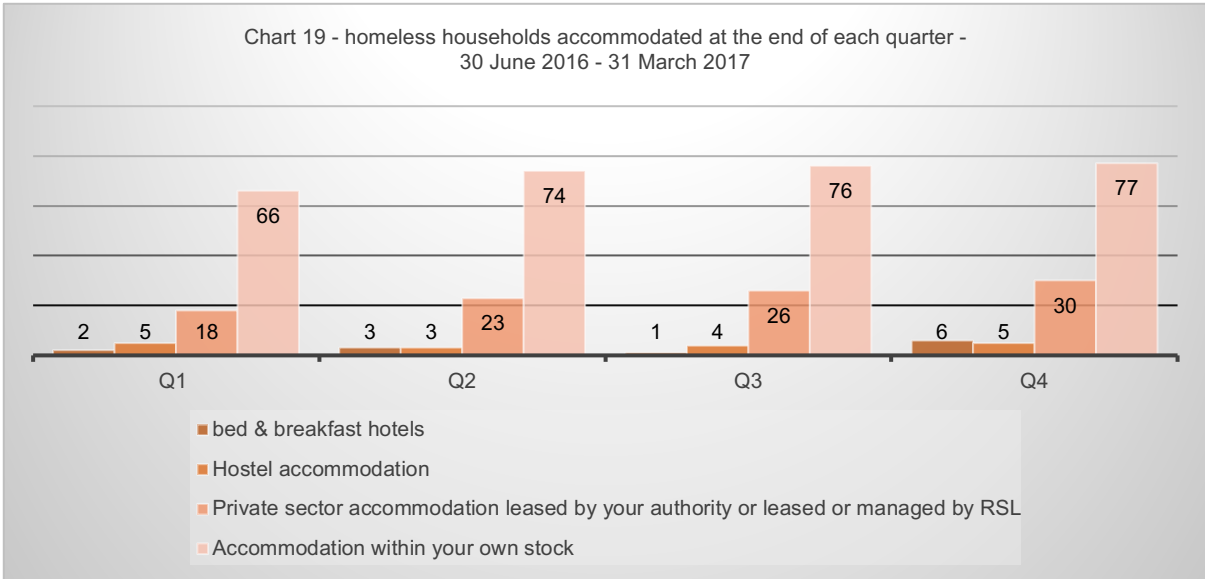
Source: UK Government Homelessness Statistics⁴⁶

Walsall Council isn't currently making use of a power available to bring the main housing (homelessness) duty to an end by making an offer of suitable private rented sector accommodation. Adopting the use of this power will increase the housing options available to a person in temporary accommodation (whether arranged by the local housing authority or by applicant themselves), meaning people will be able to move into settled accommodation more quickly. Offering private rented sector accommodation as an option, creates opportunities for someone to move to localities in the borough where social housing is in short supply. It also releases units of temporary accommodation more quickly, increasing the availability of temporary accommodation, reducing the need to use less preferred forms of temporary accommodation (such as bed and breakfast hotels).

During 2016-2017 the majority of homeless households were accommodated within own stock and significant smaller number were accommodated in private sector accommodation leased by Walsall Council or leased/managed by social housing providers.

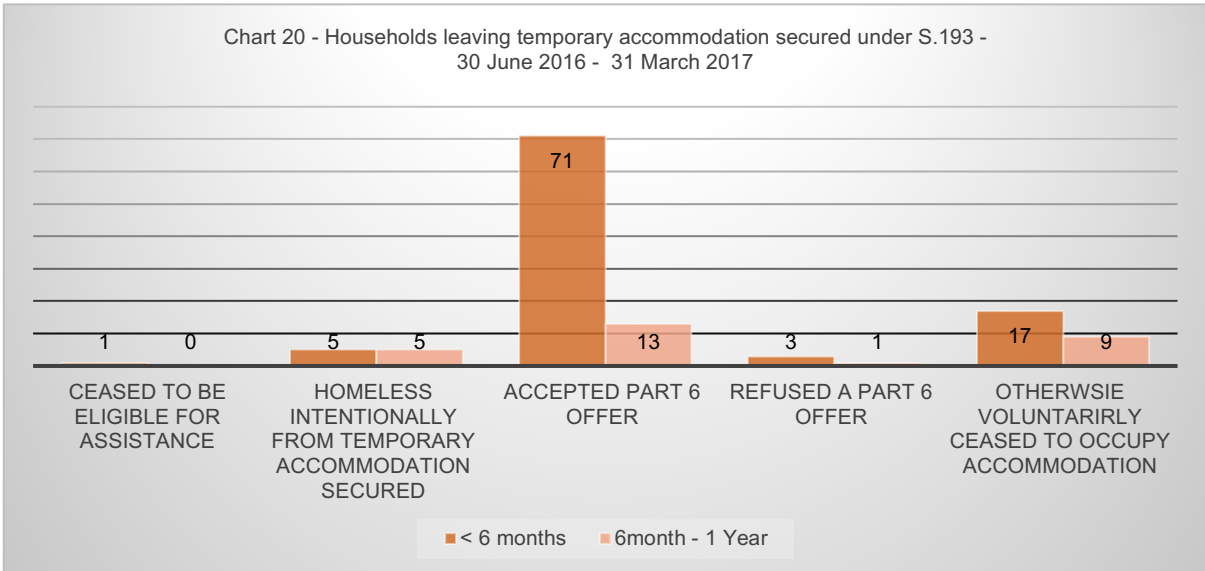
Over the period 2016-2017 the vast majority of cases fall into the 1 year or less category, there has only been 10 cases beyond two years across all of the categories. The majority of households accepted an offer of accommodation with a social housing provider via a nomination from Walsall Council's housing register.

⁴⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-homelessness>



Source: UK Government Homelessness Statistics⁴⁷

Analysis of temporary accommodation occupancy shows that, a small but significant, number of families remain in temporary accommodation longer than is typical, due to requiring four-bedroom properties. The sale of properties through right-to-buy (and right to acquire) initiatives, in addition to low numbers of new social housing dwellings being built, means homes of this size in the borough from social housing providers are scarce. A programme of building new affordable homes to rent would ease this situation.



Source: UK Government Homelessness Statistics⁴⁸

4.2 Other Housing Options

Unlike the national picture, locally there is no statistical evidence to show that Walsall Council is helping to relieve homelessness. While there is no obligation for local housing authorities to help people who they do not owe a duty towards, this practice has been encouraged by the UK Government for more than a decade⁴⁹.

⁴⁷ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-homelessness>

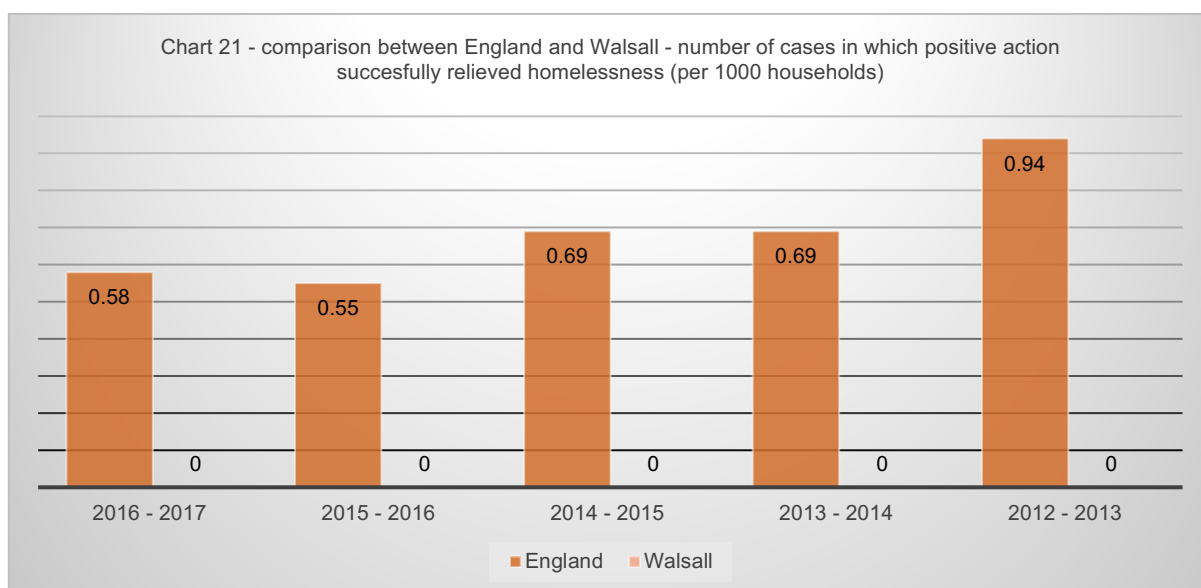
⁴⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-homelessness>

⁴⁹ Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (2005), Sustainable Communities: settled homes, changing lives, London, UK Government

Typical actions taken to relieve homelessness are to obtain social or private rented housing, nationally these outcomes account for more than half of all cases where homelessness is relieved. For example, an allocation of social rented housing to a housing register applicant that was homeless, counts as homelessness being relived (provided casework activity accomplished this outcome).

During the past five years, the scale of successful relief casework activity has reduced across England, by 42% from 2012/13 to 2015/16. This reduction has occurred at the same time homelessness acceptances have increased (by 33%), plus successful casework activity to prevent homelessness has increased (29%).

It is strongly likely that a reduction in the activity is due to broader housing market factors, along with welfare reforms, and a reduction in public sector spending. There is also a possibility of data recording errors, both locally and nationally.



Source: UK Government Homelessness Statistics⁵⁰

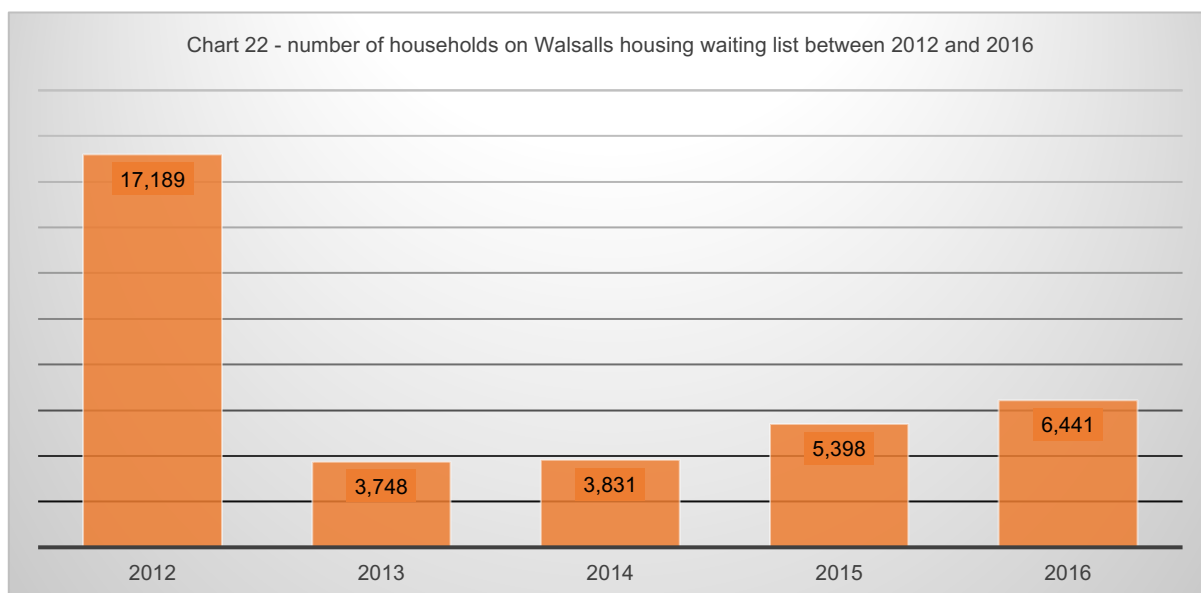
All local housing authorities must allow people to make an application for social housing, and publish an allocations policy, irrespective of whether or not any particular council has transferred its housing stock. Local housing authorities have an option of operating a common housing register and/or common allocations policy with one or more social landlord. Furthermore, every local housing authority must clearly state if they will offer applicants a choice of any homes available to let.

Walsall Council transferred its housing stock a decade ago, with the vast majority of homes going over to Walsall Housing Group, a new social landlord specifically formed for the purpose of taking on the ownership and management of the Council's properties.

Walsall Council published its most recent housing allocations policy in 2010. This document explains the criteria applicants have to satisfy, to be eligible and qualify to join the local authority's housing register. Those with the most urgent need for re-housing, who've been on the waiting list for the longest, will be prioritised first for any properties available to let. Other social landlords that have stock in the area, operate their own housing registers and allocations policies. A common housing register and policy between the local housing authority and social landlords was considered, but no final agreement was reached.

⁵⁰ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-homelessness>

The number of households registered for social housing in Walsall reduced significantly, 79%, between 2012 to 2013. The largest stock holding social housing provider, Walsall Housing Group, did a comprehensive data cleanse of its housing waiting list, which explains why the numbers reduced significantly from 2012 to 2013. From 2013 to 2016, levels have almost double, increasing by 42%. However current levels remain just over 10,000 (63%) below what they were in 2012. It is reasonable to assume that levels have increased for the past four years due to broader labour and housing market factors, but equally welfare reforms, will have influenced the number of people seeking to register for social housing.



Source: UK Government Rents, Lettings and Tenancies Statistics⁵¹

Data from the regulator of social housing providers, the Homes & Communities Agency (HCA), expands on the statistics published by the UK Government. However, there is a discrepancy between the two data-sets, concerning the total number of households on local waiting lists. Furthermore, at the time of writing this report, data on lettings hadn't been published for 2016/17.

The HCA data shows the number of households registered increased by 42% (4,582) from 2012/13 to 2015/16. However, during the same period lettings increased by only 6% (90). This consequence of this is that more people are waiting longer for an allocation of social housing. Whereas in 2012/13, there was 2.4 applicants for every letting, by 2015/16 this has almost doubled to 4 applicants for every letting. Reasons for why the number of lettings isn't increasing at the same rate as registrations, will be due to a lower number of properties becoming void. Commonly, the reason for fewer void properties, is because people live longer and are more likely to receive care and support in their own home (rather than having to move in to a residential establishment). Furthermore, the overall volume of properties available to let will be reduced by some tenants exercising the right to buy (or acquire) their property.

Lettings to households who are owed the main homelessness duty (s.193(2)) have remained fairly static throughout the time series. In 2012/13, one of every five lettings were made to homeless households, this ratio remained the same in 2015/16.

Stock holding social landlord's carryout management moves for tenants who need to move on grounds of hardship, thereby preventing homelessness, however these cases would never appear on allocations and lettings statistics.

⁵¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-rents-lettings-and-tenancies>

Typically, Walsall Council is able to make a nomination for an applicant from their own housing register for 25- 50% of all voids a social landlord has, with the remainder being allocated via their own allocations schemes.

Alongside social rented housing, the other common housing secured for people who are homeless, is supported housing.

A severe weather emergency provision night-shelter has operated during the winter months for many years. This facility has previously been run from a number of locations, including more recently the Glebe Centre, a local day centre for people who are homeless (more information about this service can be found in chapter five of this document). YMCA Black Country Group are the providers of this accommodation, which will be operating from a separate building for winter season of 2017/18, and will operate as a fully functioning night-shelter for a period of 3 months. This is a multi-faith initiative, led by volunteers. The night shelter is Walsall Council's non-statutory response to whenever there is a period of severe weather, helping to prevent deaths of people who are sleeping rough during the winter. During the winter period of 2016/17, there was a total of 26 beds available on any given night. The most people that stayed on any specific night, was 23, with an average of 15 persons per night (when open). Residents aren't charged to stay. The night-shelter is scheduled to operate again from December 2017 – February 2018.

Wilbraham Court provides supported accommodation for men and women who have complex and multiple needs and are also homeless. The majority of the units are commissioned by the Walsall Council. There are 22 units commissioned, of which 9 (plus an emergency bed-space) are in the core of the building, with a further 12 clustered in a separate block nearby. This accommodation and support is operated by an independent local voluntary organisation. Referrals come via health services and Walsall Council's homelessness service, following which a needs assessment takes place and a personalised plan is formulated. People are typically resident from 6 months to 2 years, but on average for a 12-month period. Each person has their own bedroom and shares kitchen, communal lounge and bathroom with two other people. Residents are assisted with three meals per day. Accommodation is provided in a mixture of flats and houses across a single site, with an office onsite. Employees are expected to have a level 2 qualification in health and social care. Support is provided to residents, which includes life-skills to prepare them for independent living, with links made to other services that can provide assistance with health matters, including addictions. Resettlement support has been provided post move-on through a commissioned contract, however recent changes have meant that the resettlement support service is now provided in-house.

A pilot of new provision of accommodation and support, operated to Housing First principles, has been agreed, commissioned by Walsall Council. The Accord Group successfully won the competitive tender exercise to carry-out the trial. The scheme is expected to go live before the end of this year. Simultaneously, the UK Government has announced a Housing First approach to be piloted across three regions including the West Midlands Combined Authority area.

A women's refuge is funded by Walsall Council, with accommodation and support being provided by Caldmore Housing, a division of the Accord Housing Group. Women are assisted during their stay at the refuge and for a short period after moving-on, with matters such as safety, finding accommodation, establishing support networks, legal issues, improving health and wellbeing, managing money, childcare, finding work and/or returning to learning, plus empowerment and self-esteem issues.

4.3 Conclusion about activities to secure accommodation

The existing portfolio of temporary accommodation could better managed. Targets should be set to reduce the amount of time a property is void. A performance management regime needs to be adopted to reduce the length of stay in temporary accommodation. The usage of temporary accommodation has been increasing, with levels of homelessness expected to rise further, there will be an ongoing additional demand for temporary accommodation. Despite entering into leasing arrangements, to grow the portfolio of temporary accommodation, it has been necessary to use bed and breakfast accommodation to accommodate homeless households. Walsall Council is more reliant on use of its own stock for provision of temporary accommodation, than is typically the case in other local authority areas. This temporary accommodation is concentrated in four buildings across three sites. While this arrangement has been satisfactory to-date, looking ahead the location, type, number of bedrooms and rental cost will increasingly become a problem for the local authority and the households occupying the accommodation. This is due to changes in the funding rules of temporary accommodation being implemented by the DWP. A coherent and sustainable strategy for procuring and allocating temporary accommodation is required. This should seek to dispose of the existing buildings, with sale proceeds being used to procure dispersed dwellings and/or lease accommodation from social and/or private landlords.

There needs to be a better understanding of the drivers behind the increase in the number of people who arrange their own temporary accommodation. Is this associated with the issues set-out above, the current temporary accommodation portfolio, or it is to do with a practice adopted by the workforce. Analysis is needed to understand how long people remain 'homeless at home', and whether more could be done to prevent or relieve their homelessness.

The recording and reporting on social housing allocations and lettings, made by all social landlords that own homes in the areas, has too many inconsistencies and inaccuracies. The absence of a common housing register and joint allocations policy hinders greater transparency and consistency as to how lettings are made. The current local housing authority allocations policy hasn't been revised to reflect the numerous changes that have occurred to primary and secondary legislation, since its publication. Nor does the document best enable the local authority to respond to the forthcoming changes to homelessness statute, arising from the enactment of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.

The current provision of supported accommodation needs updating. The present arrangements are not personalised enough, too institutional and fail to foster integration with the wider community. The fact that the emergency accommodation isn't available all year, and that people don't have a room of their own is not in line with modern standards of hostel provision. An over reliance on hostel type provision is out-of-step with the principles of Housing First, the now commonly accepted method for providing accommodation and support to vulnerable people who are homeless with multiple and complex needs. The two preliminary Housing First schemes, provide a welcome opportunity to test how the principles of Housing First can be applied in the local area. A formal evaluation that captures what works, would help to inform future commissioning strategies.

5. Providing Support

This chapter reviews the support provided to people who are homeless, or have been homeless.

Presently local housing authorities are not obligated to carry-out an assessment or formulate a plan for people who are homeless. However, following the enactment of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, a new duty will be in force, requiring councils to undertake such a process for every person who is homeless and eligible (as defined by law) for assistance due to being homeless or threatened with homelessness. People will have a right to expect plans that are revised as needs or circumstances change. Local authorities will be required to discharge this duty for up to a continuous period of 56 days.

Currently people experiencing homelessness might receive an assessment of their needs from various public authorities (e.g. adult social care) or voluntary organisations (e.g. housing support providers). The conclusions of these assessments are used to formulate a package of support, sometimes offered in response to a legal duty (e.g. arising from the Care Act 2014), or in accordance with contractual requirements laid down between a local authority commissioner and service provider.

The reasons why people become homeless offer an indication as to the support people require. Walsall Council collects some information on these factors, which has been analysed for the purpose of this review.

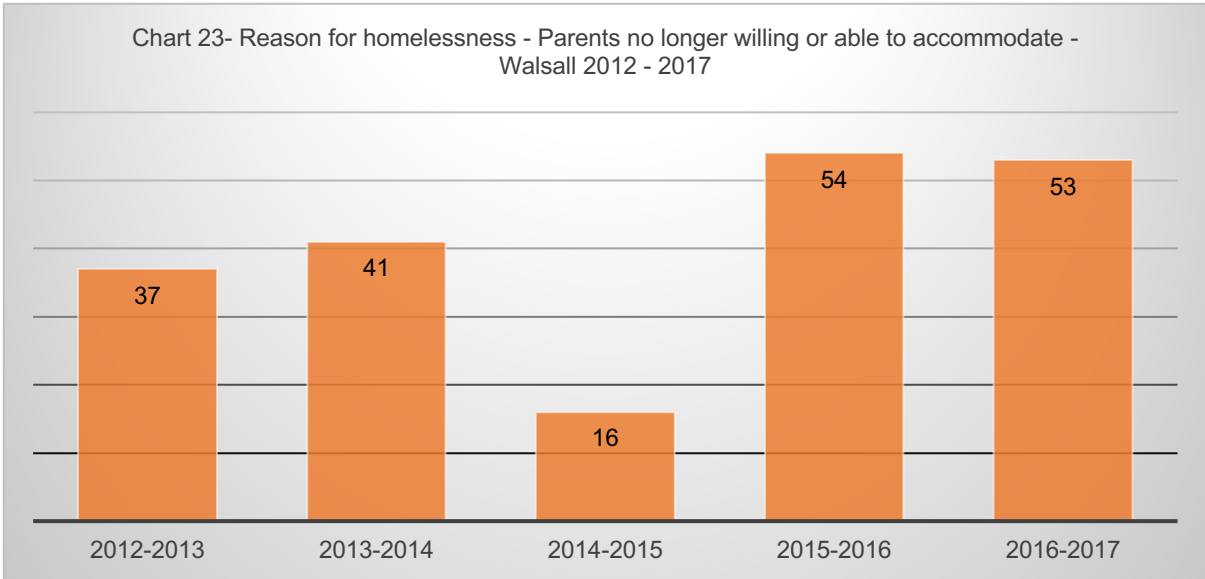
5.1 Support due to exclusion by parental/other family/friends

Parents no longer willing or able to accommodate is one of the main reasons for why people become homelessness in Walsall. The number of people affected by this issue was at low during 2014/15, increasing by 71% in the following year to a high. Levels have not followed any specific trend.

The cohort of people that are homeless due to this reason can age from 16 upwards, but typically are under the age of 25 years. There are specific youth homelessness accommodation support schemes available in Walsall, operated under the banner Rewriting Futures, provided by St Basils (a Birmingham based voluntary organisation). Support provided includes:

- Intensive support for young homeless people who are not in education, employment or training
- Training on life skills and independent living
- Private rental scheme and landlord service

The funding for this scheme is time-limited, meaning the capacity for this service to assist people has an upper threshold, which has already been reached.

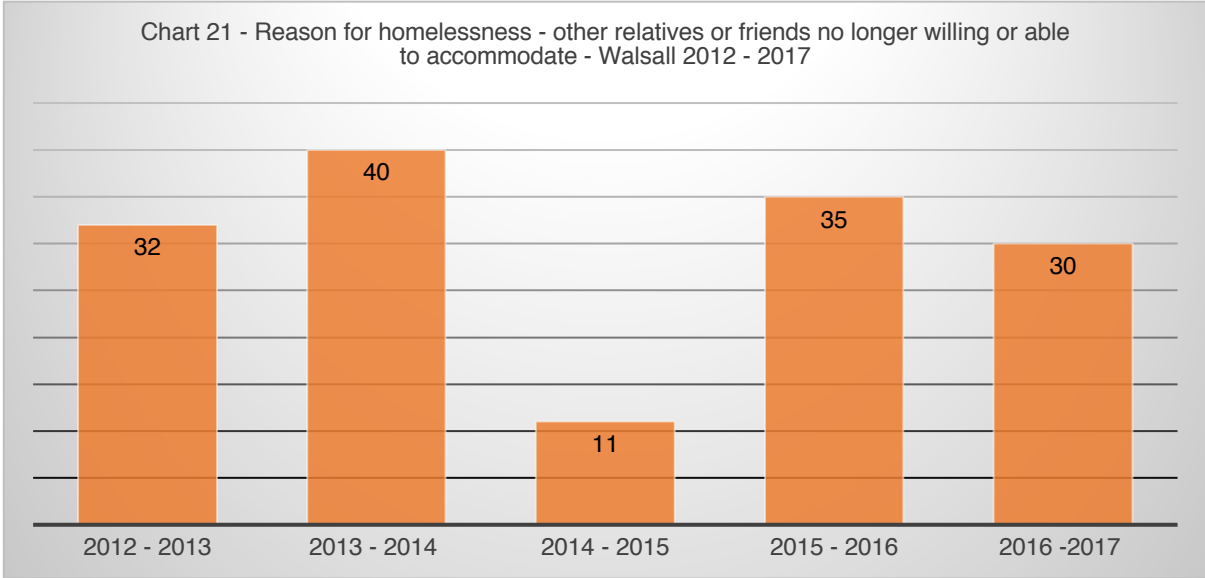


Source: Walsall Council P1E statistics (updated 2016-2017)

Children aged 16 or 17 years of age who are homeless receive care and support from Walsall Council’s Children Services. The local authority does an excellent job of promoting the choices available to someone who is homeless or at risk homeless at aged 16 or 17. The right to choose between being a looked after child, or to be supported as a child in need, is explained comprehensively and concisely. The scope of support and accommodation associated with each option is set-out in the form of a leaflet aimed at young people, so they can make an informed choice. This programme of assistance is preceded by an array of initiatives to help preventing homelessness for children aged 16 or 17, which is reviewed in detail in chapter 3 of this report.

The overall trend of people becoming homeless due to other relatives (e.g. not parents) or friends no longer willing or able to accommodate, follows the same trajectory as that for parents no longer willing or able to accommodate.

Levels reduced from a high of 40 in 2013/14 by 72% to a low of 11 in 2014/15, only to rise by 69% to a high of 35 in 2015/16. The reasons for this fluctuation are unclear, data recording errors cannot be discounted.

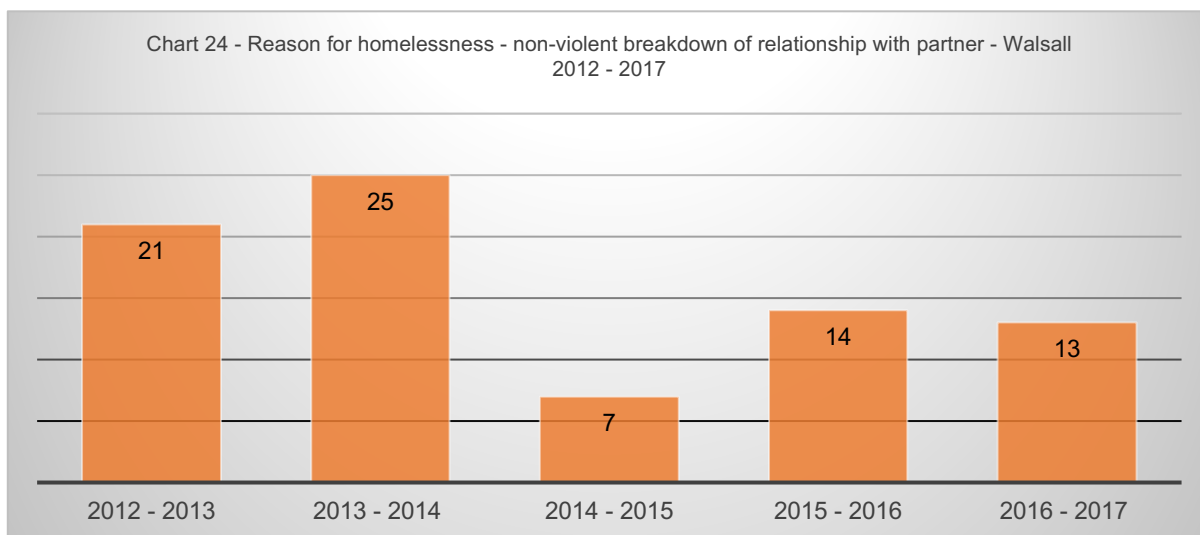


Source: Walsall Council P1E statistics (updated 2016-2017)

People aged between 16-25 typically become homeless due to this reason. The package of support available from St Basils and Walsall Council (both Children Services and Homelessness Services), previously mentioned above, is also offered to young people becoming homeless due to this reason.

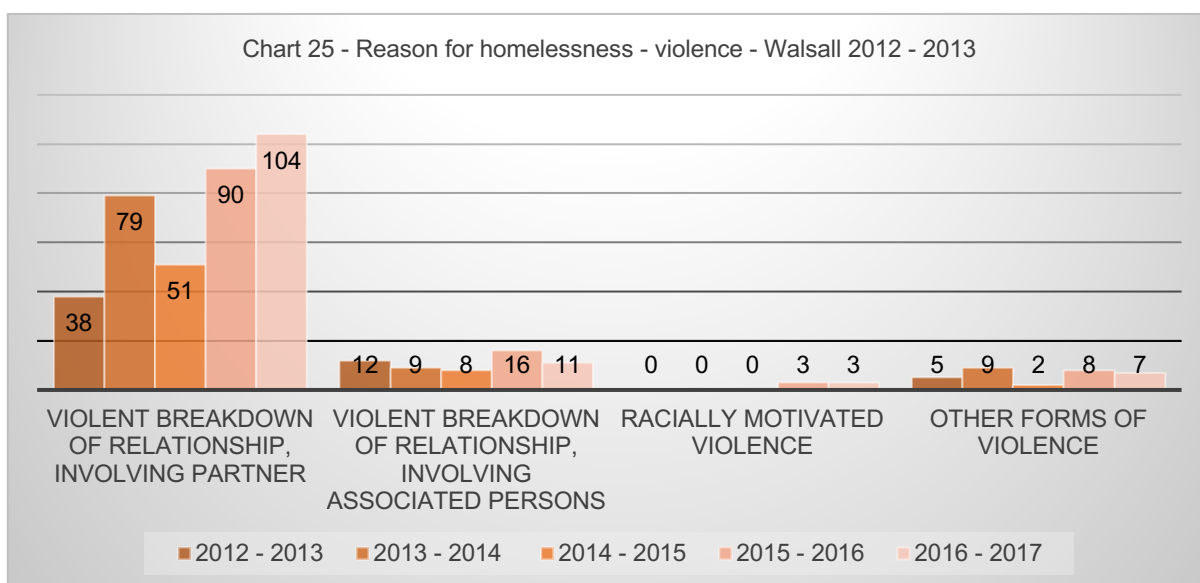
5.2 Support due to breakdown of relationship

Homelessness can occur due to non-violent, as well as violent, breakdown of a relationship with a partner. Over the past five years, levels peaked in 2013/14, then reduced by 72% to a low in 2014/15, to then climb again by 50% from 2015/16.



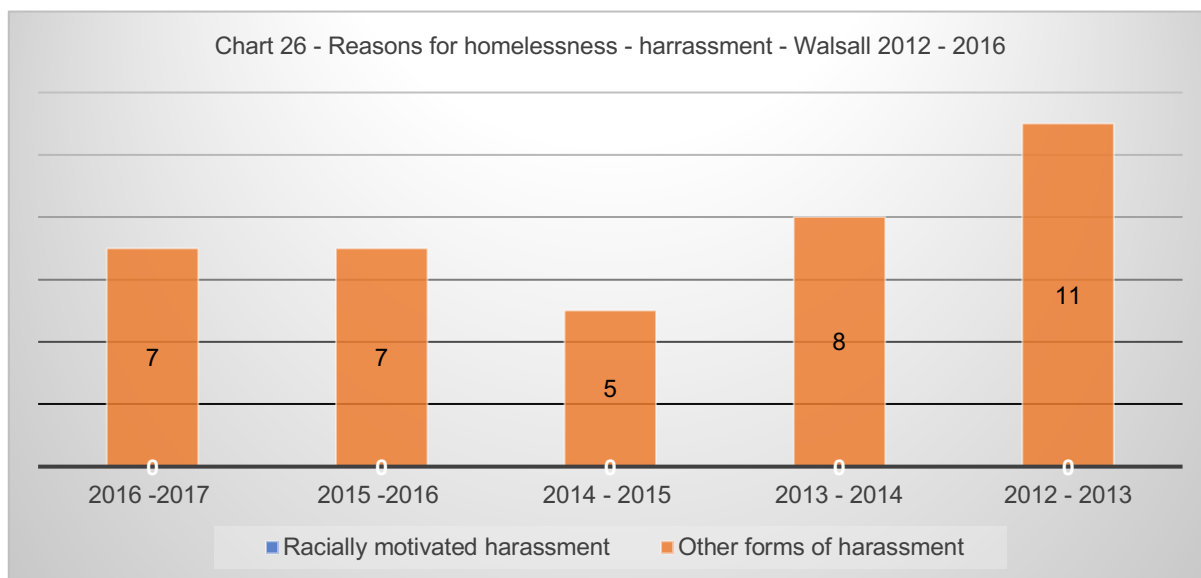
Source: Walsall Council P1E statistics (updated 2016 -2017)

Equally, domestic or racially motivated violence instigated by a partner, or other associated persons, can cause homelessness. Homelessness caused by a violent breakdown of relationship involving a partner was a main cause of homelessness in Walsall in the most recent year (2016/17). Compared to five years ago, levels are presently 38% higher, but 33% below a peak in 2015/16. An array of accommodation and support is commissioned by the local housing authority and children services, provided by Accord Group and Women's Aid Black Country. This provision was explored in chapters three and four of this report.



Source: Walsall Council P1E statistics (updated 2016 -2017)

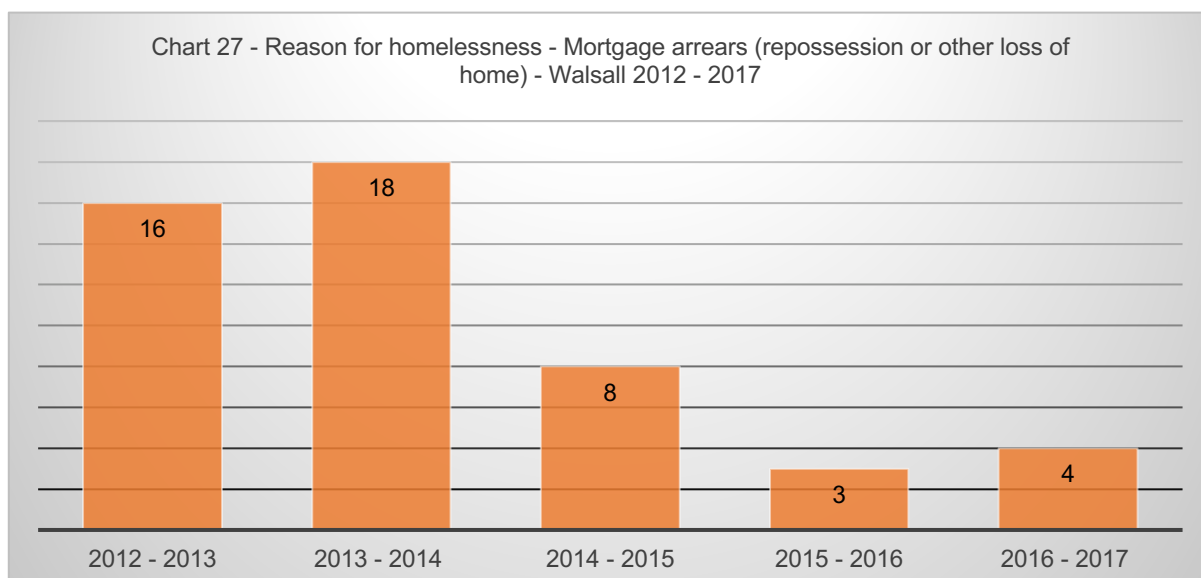
Homelessness caused by a violent breakdown of relationship, and other forms of violence, involving associated persons has reduced to 66% and 40% respectively. However racially motivated violence as a cause of homelessness has increased by 100%. This trend isn't apparent in occurrences of homelessness due to harassment, with there being no recorded cases of homelessness due racial factors during the past five years. Homelessness due to other forms of harassment has remained fairly static between 2012/13 to 2016/17, reducing by only 37%.



Source: Walsall Council P1E statistics (updated 2016 – 2017)

5.3 Support due to arrears or loss/leaving accommodation

Mortgage arrears have been falling in the past five years. This has been due in-part to low interest rates, along with more stringent lending practices that mean fewer people qualify for a mortgage and when they do a larger deposit is required. Regulations require that mortgage lenders attempt to apply a number of measures to assist people who are struggling to pay their housing costs, such as arranging for a period of interest only repayments. The number of households becoming homeless due to mortgage arrears reduced by 89%, from a high of 18 in 2013/14 to a low of 2 in 2016/17.



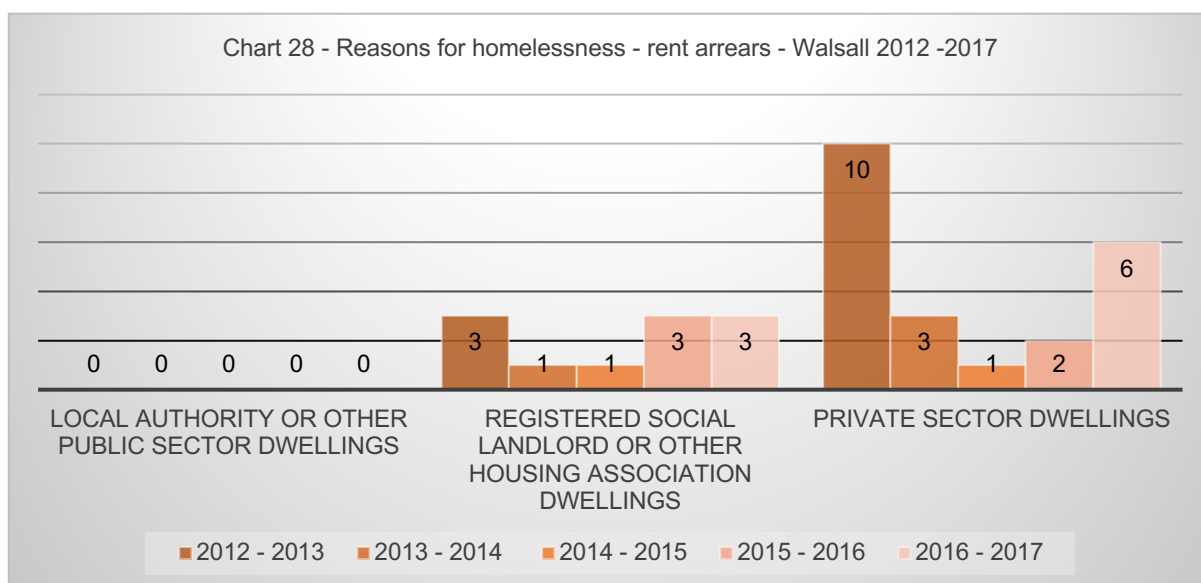
Source: Walsall Council P1E statistics (updated 2016 -2017)

Rent arrears as a reason for homelessness from social rented housing, has neither increased nor decreased during the past five years. All social landlords that have stock in the Walsall area have an array of measures that help tenants to avoid getting behind with paying their housing costs.

The Longhurst Group has adopted a pre-tenancy process, which involves an affordability matrix, this has resulted in tenancies being more successful. The affordability matrix has subsequently evolved into a sustainability matrix, which looks at what support a tenant might need across all issues. One example of support offered, is from an in-house money advisor, who on average helps 400 tenants save typically £1000 each. Another example of support provided is a house-to-home project. This initiative involves one new flat being kept empty for new tenants to learn about furnishing their property, and explore tenant responsibilities and rights. This arrangement is now a standard part of all tenancy offers. Additionally, early liaison with tenants who are at risk if eviction, have helped to reduce the number of people losing their home due to arrears. Employees from the Longhurst Group liaise with Walsall Council outside of formal protocols, making contact prior to serving a notice to quit.

The Accord Group is the second largest social landlord holding stock in Walsall, with approximately 4,000 homes. Accord provides support to tenants, this includes a pre-tenancy workshop, financial advice from a dedicated advisor and employment coaching. A small hardship fund can be used on a discretionary basis to help tenants with matters that might otherwise result in them losing their home. Anyone who accumulates rent arrears receives a home visit where an assessment of their finances is carried-out. Walsall Council receives notification prior to an eviction notice being served.

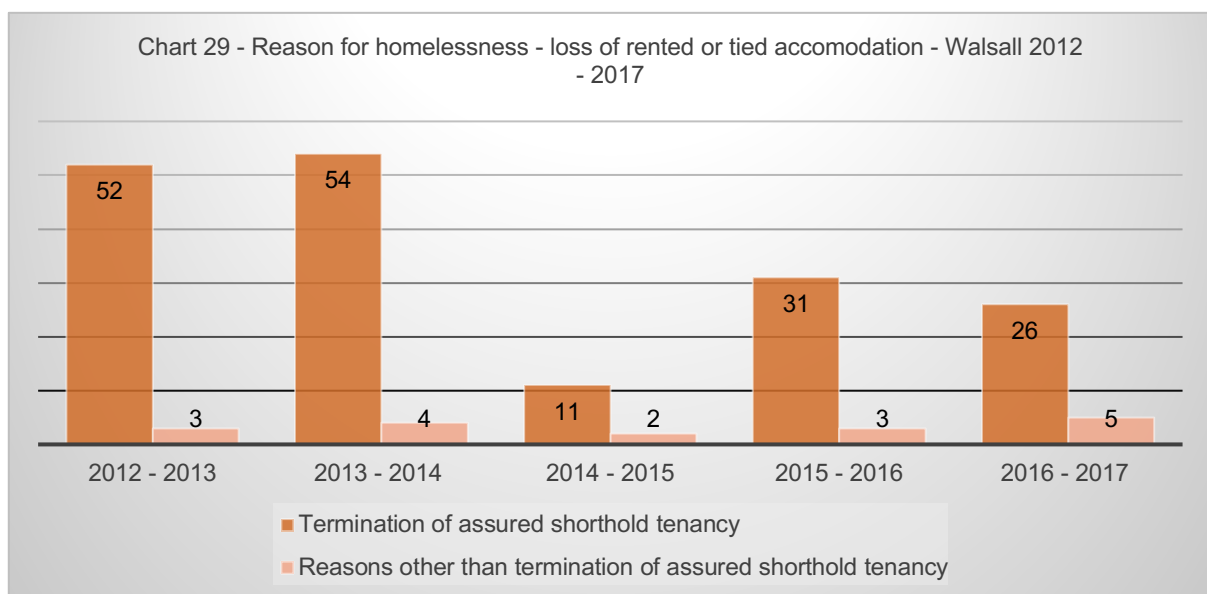
The social landlord with the largest volume of residential homes is Walsall Housing Group (WHG), with just over 19,000 properties. WHG purposefully has a low eviction rate, typically 85 per year. While rent arrears are a common reason for eviction, anti-social behaviour is also frequent cause. WHG takes a positive approach to tackling debt, this is demonstrated by the employment of both money and welfare advisors, to assist tenants prior to any crisis arising. A joint project with Walsall Council has been established to identifying tenants who claim housing benefit who are more at risk of getting in debt due to welfare reforms. WHG operate a programme that helps to 'shift' tenants' behaviour, to ensure paying rent is a priority, one outcome is that 60% of tenants now pay by direct debit.



Source: Walsall Council P1E statistics (updated 2016 – 2017)

WHG pre-eviction protocol involves notifying not just the local housing authority's homelessness service, but also children services when there are dependent children living the household. Chart 27 shows rent arrears on social rented dwellings have fallen one-third, from 3 in 2012/13 to 2 in 2016/17.

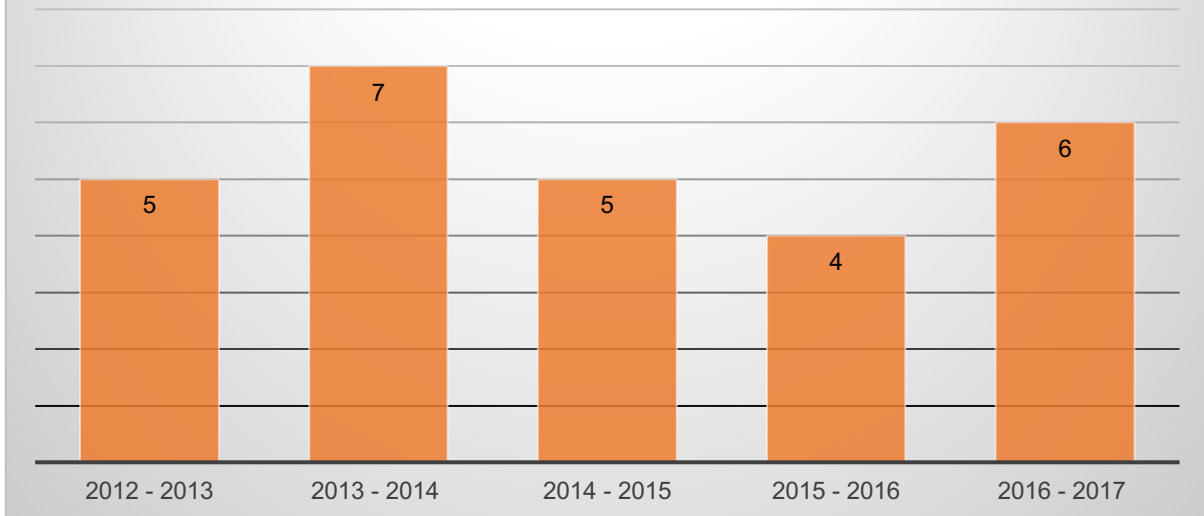
Rent arrears at private sector dwellings have fallen over the past five years by 70% from 10 in 2012/13 to 3 in 2016/17. Homelessness due to loss of rented or tied accommodation has also fallen. Termination of assured shorthold tenancy (the main national cause of homelessness) has reduced by 70% from 52 in 2012/13 to 16 in 2016/17. Other reasons, for example, accommodation that is linked to employment expiring, has never been statistically high. These local trends are contrary to the national situation, where termination of assured shorthold tenancy is now the main cause of homelessness, equating to one-third of cases. As more people who claim welfare assistance to pay for their housing costs, are transferred to Universal Credit, there is a strong likelihood there'll be an increase in the number of people becoming homeless due to loss of rented accommodation.



Source: Walsall Council P1E statistics (updated 2016 -2017)

Refugees becoming homeless, following acceptances of their claim for asylum, has never been a significant cause of homelessness locally. This is because the fewer asylum seekers in Walsall compared to elsewhere, but also because while awaiting a decision on their claim for asylum, people are obtaining advice in preparation for when they need to move-on from accommodation provided on behalf of the UK Government's Home Office. Chart 28 shows that during the past five years, levels have fallen by 60% from 5 in 2012/13 to 2 in 2016/17.

Chart 30 - Reason for homelessness - Required to leave National Asylum Support Service accommodation - Walsall 2012 - 2017



Source: Walsall Council P1E statistics (updated 2016 – 2017)

5.4 The Glebe Centre and other support

The Glebe Centre, located at the United Reform Church and operated by YMCA Black Country Group (YMCABC), offers day services to people who are experiencing multiple and complex needs. Historically funded via charitable donations, Walsall Council's Public Health commissioners have been the principle funders for this service in recent years.

The service operates an open-door policy, whereby anyone can attend to get clothes, food and housing advice from 10am until 2pm Monday to Friday. Faith groups from across the local area provided drop-in services outside these times. These are not commissioned by the local authority. Common factors people require support with include; homelessness, but also might be mental ill health, drugs, alcohol, and unemployment. A range of structured activities have begun to take place in the afternoon, facilitated by internal and external employees, art workshops, employability classes, and women groups are all offered. The take-up and impact of these are unknown.

Specific health provision includes a nurse who provides treatment for tuberculosis, plus administers influenza vaccinations. A fully equipped health suite has recently been installed, with the expectation that chiropody and dental services will be provided in future. Registration with a GP is reported to still be a problem for some people, however GP outreach service is to be available one day a week while the night-shelter is open.

A mixture of paid and voluntary workers run the service. YMCABC report that the cost of operating the service exceeds income received, resulting in a reliance on substantial amount of donations being made by public. Numerous fundraising campaigns are carried out by staff and volunteers of the Glebe to publicise what is needed (e.g. at the time of writing this report, a washing machine for the centred was required). The members of staff running the service carryout an initial assessment of needs and formulate a support plan. Typically, 30 – 50 people might use the centre on any given day, with approximately 370 people using over a 12-month period. Levels of people using the centre during the summer usually drop. About 10-15% of people using the centre are thought to be European migrants.

Users of the centre attend for a mixture of reasons, some to relieve social isolation, others to meet basic needs, or to make use of the sexual health and needle exchange clinics. Some people have been using the centre repeatedly over many years. A more structured approach

is being introduced alongside the open access facilities in an attempt to gain better outcomes.

Additionally, work has started with some services users, to prepare them for moving into accommodation that is being procured as part of the new Housing First pilot. There is a wealth of authoritative evidence that shows Housing First achieves better outcome for commissioners and service users alike⁵².

5.5 Conclusions about activities to provide support

Exclusion by parental/other family/friends is the second main cause of homelessness in Walsall. However, there is a comprehensive and range of support available for people who are aged 16 to 25 years, who are more likely to become homeless due to this reason. This high-quality provision is primarily commissioned by Housing and Children Services and operated by St Basil's, in collaboration with social landlords. Walsall Council should be congratulated for ensuring satisfactory funding has been made available for these initiatives. The local authority, along with voluntary organisations, have made good use of obtaining national grant funding

Violent breakdown of relationships the main cause of homelessness. The local housing authority continues to fund a refuge, alongside a range of community-based provisions funded by the local children services authority. Whilst levels are below a peak, they are higher now than compared to five years ago. Continued funding at current levels for domestic abuse services will be required for the foreseeable future. Whilst a relatively low number of people become homeless due to racial violence, the fact that this is higher now than five years ago should be looked at further.

Social landlords make an invaluable contribution to support people with rent arrears. There are plenty of good practice across the four main social housing providers operating in the local authority area.

The Glebe Centre offers plenty of support to vulnerable people who are disadvantaged. There is significant public support for the work carried out the Glebe Centre, as demonstrated by the number of donations and persons who volunteer. An independent review of outcomes being achieved for public health and housing, should be commissioned to explore the effectiveness of practice and value for money of this day-time facility

⁵² Joanne Bretherton and Nicolas Pleace (2015), *Housing First in England; An Evaluation of Nine Services*, York, University of York

6. Resources

This chapter reviews the resources available to carry out activities to tackle homelessness. For the purpose of this review, resources being considered are the money, people and IT available to the local housing authority.

6.1 Money

The local housing authority invests substantial sums of its own money into activities that are carried out by voluntary organisations to tackle homelessness. This money is administered by numerous directorates throughout the local authority, including Money, Home Job, Children Services and Public Health. Schemes benefiting from this investment have been referred to throughout the previous chapters of this report, including:

- Accord Group
 - Women's Refuge
 - Housing First Pilot
- Citizens Advice Walsall
- St Basil's supported housing for young people
- Walsall Housing Group
 - Supported Housing for Care Leavers
- Wilbraham Court
 - supported housing for adults with complex needs
- Women's Aid Black Country
 - domestic abuse services
- YMCA Black Country Group
 - Glebe Centre
 - Night-shelter
 - Supported lodgings and Nightstop

Walsall Council is responsible for funding the homelessness duties the law obliges it to discharge. The Homelessness Service carries out an array of activities, including providing housing advice homelessness prevention and advice, delivering the local homelessness strategy, commissioning and monitoring homelessness services and taking homelessness, plus procuring and administering temporary accommodation.

£1,452,733 funding has been awarded by the UK Government to local housing authority for the duration of the current spending period (April 2016 – March 2020), an average of £363,182.25 per year. The funding has been allocated in the following way:

- £476,956.00 Homelessness Prevention Grant (2016/17 - 2019/2020)
- £623,790.14 Flexible Homelessness Support Grant, (2017/18 - 2018/19, a further allocation for 2019/20 will be announced in due course).
- £351,987.00 Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 New Burden Grant.

The local housing authority has received a Homelessness Prevention Grant since 2003, the purpose of which is to aid the delivery of activities set-out in the Council's homelessness strategy. The funding can be used for initiatives carried-out by the local authority, or invested into projects operated by voluntary organisations. The current funding is guaranteed until March 2020, it's uncertain if this funding stream will continue in the new spending period starting from April 2020.

The Flexible Homelessness Support Grant allocated by the Department for Communities & Local Government, replaced the Temporary Accommodation Subsidy previously administered by the Department for Work & Pensions for more than a decade until March 2017. The new funding arrangement replaced a tightly controlled subsidy system to procure

and manage temporary accommodation, which could only be used once a person had become homeless. The new grant system enables flexibility to spend the funding on preventing homelessness, in addition to assisting those who are homeless. Two years of funding has already been allocated, an additional one year of funding will be announced in due course, the amount is expected to be approximately £300,000.00 This funding is guaranteed until March 2020, it's uncertain if this funding stream will continue in the new spending period starting from April 2020.

The UK Government has made the new burdens funding available to help meet the requirement of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. An example of this is the homelessness service upgrading data system to allow a better understanding of how the new legislation is changing homelessness prevention in the area. This funding is guaranteed only two years and will not be available in the new spending period starting April 2020.

6.2 People

Walsall Council's homelessness service has almost 40 people employed to administer the duties prescribed in law. A head of service, who oversees a number of functions, including housing benefit and homelessness, manages 2 team leader posts that are specifically for overseeing homelessness functions and welfare rights functions. Three specialist officers are employed to support the team leader, who collectively supervise 27 employees. One-third of the workers provide advice to young people, a second-third provide general advice and guidance, and the final third provide assistance to people living in temporary accommodation. A further 3 employees are located in the Council's Gateway to carry out administrative duties, plus one employee is seconded to Black Country Women's Aid and working with Accord Groups' Aven House project. This volume of employees is suitable for the size of the local authority area and the number of households who are homeless.

The homelessness service primarily operates from the Civic Centre, however home visits or outreach sessions take place as needed. Given the number of young people who become homeless, it is sensible to have a dedicated team of people to focus on the needs of those 16 to 29 years old. With the commencement of new duties to prevent and relieve homelessness from April 2018, roles and responsibilities would be benefit from being re-focused away from specific demographics, towards a more generic set of responsibilities that cover the three core tasks of triage, casework, and accommodation functions.

The team have received training on a variety of topics associated with the practice of homelessness law, including being educated on the requirements arising from the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. Furthermore, employees are given opportunities to learn softer skills, such as Psychologically Informed Environment Services.

Walsall Council are active participants to the homelessness work-streams of the West Midlands Combined Authority. Officers from housing contribute to a number of activities being led by the West Midlands Elected Mayor. The high regard of the Council's approach to tackling youth homelessness is recognised, with Walsall Council's assistant director of children services being asked to lead on families and children work strand for the West Midlands Combined Authority.

6.3 IT

The Council's homelessness service uses a basic IT system to record case work outcomes. However, due to the age and limitations of the product, an agreement has been reached for the Civica company (which already supplies IT software to administrate the local authority's housing benefit functions) to supply the Abris Housing Needs system. This market leading service delivers a range of automated efficiencies, that are available for use via a number of hardware devices (e.g. desktop computer, tablet, phone).

6.4 Conclusions about resources for tackling homelessness

Funding of activities to prevent homelessness, secure accommodation and provide support are carried-out by different people across various sections of the local authority. While it is positive that various departments of the council commission services that tackle homelessness, the separate arrangements for commissioning and contract management doesn't foster consistent practice, nor allow the sharing of intelligence. Achievements accomplished from expenditure of the UK Government funding awards must be evidenced, to demonstrate how the Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council is able to deliver more effective, better quality or greater value outcomes for local housing authority and persons who are homeless or threatened with homelessness. Securing assurances of funding arrangements from April 2020 is essential. With homelessness levels forecast to increase during the next five years, current funding levels will need to be at least maintained, and ideally increased.

Current staffing levels are adequate, but with future levels of homelessness forecast to increase, cuts to the number of post and employees must be avoided. The additional burdens arising from the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 will result in the increase of workloads, meaning more staff might be required. The requirements of the duties mean that current splits in responsibilities will need to be reconsidered.

The updated IT software system will prove to be invaluable once the new duties to prevent and relieve homelessness commences from April 2018. It will be important that along with the homelessness module, others for administering the housing register, offering choice, facilitating mutual exchange, promoting housing options and coordinating the allocation of housing support provision, are also brought as part of the package the Council procures from its IT supplier.

7. Consultation

This chapter shows the results from two surveys carried out with service users and stakeholders. The surveys were carried-out to gather quantitative data on people’s attitudes, opinions and experiences of homelessness in Walsall.

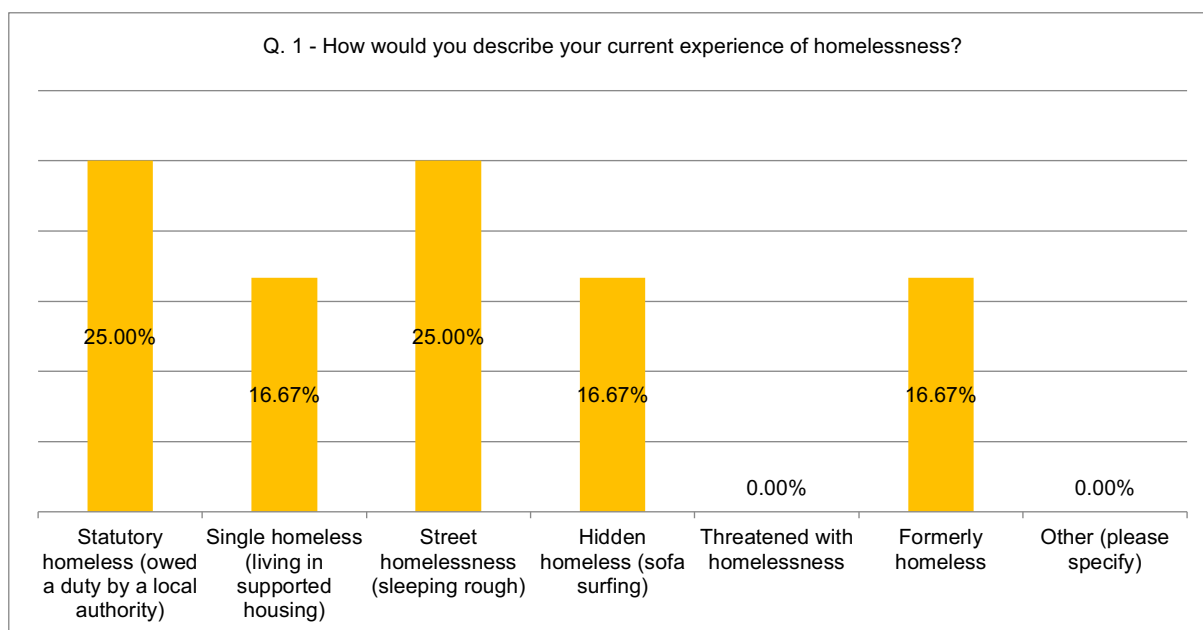
7.1 Service user consultation

Service user consultation was conducted face-to-face during December 2017. Interviews took place an onsite visit at Walsall Council Civic Centre and The Glebe Centre. A total of 12 responses were collected.

The main forms of homelessness experienced by service users who responded to the survey was statutory homelessness and street homelessness, each accounting for 25% (3 for each form) of all respondents and collectively and half (6) of all respondents. An equal portion of applicants identified as being single, street or formerly homeless (2 each, 6 in total). None (0) of the applicants identified as being threatened with homelessness.

“Sleeping rough is depressing, it’s always difficult to get warm and dry”

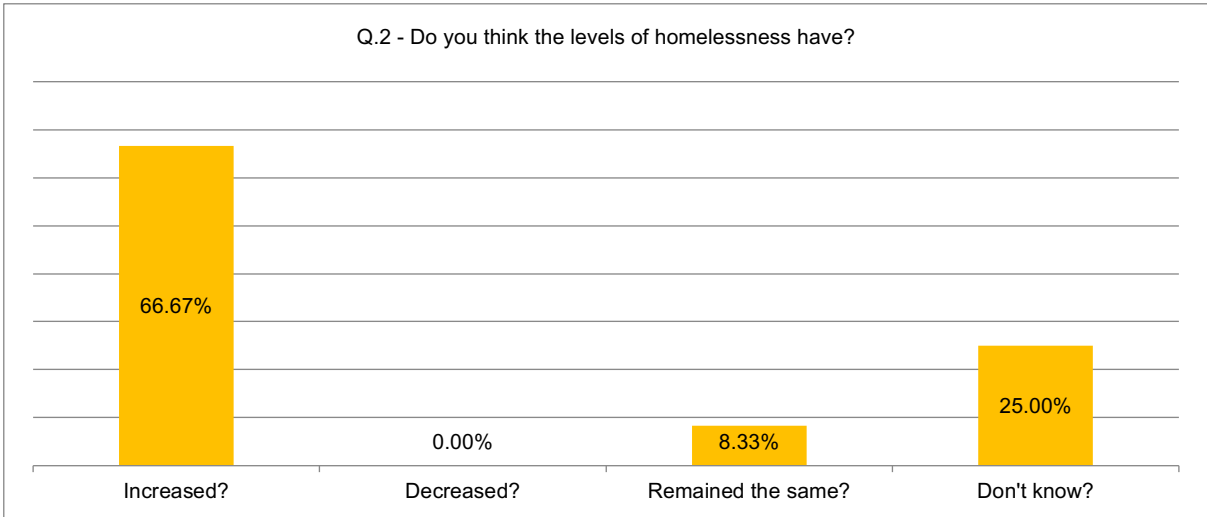
“Being homeless made me feel like I failed, now I’ve got some where to live and my life is back on track I can feel proud of myself”



Two-thirds (8) of respondents thought that the levels of homelessness had increased, a quarter (3) didn’t know one respondent believed the levels has remained the same. None of the respondents believed that levels had reduced.

“All the time I see more people coming on to the streets”

“It’s wrong that so many people are homeless... more and more people are sleeping rough”

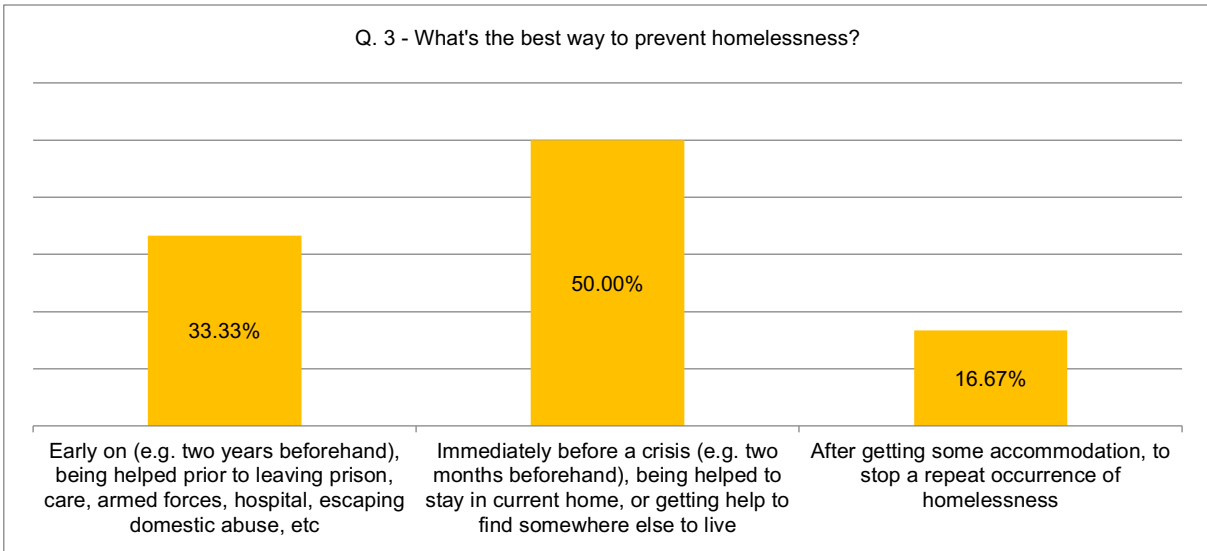


Half (6) of respondents the best way to prevent homelessness, was immediately before a crisis. One-third (4) said homelessness was best prevented early on. Less than one-fifth said the best way to prevent homelessness was after getting accommodation to stop a repeat occurrence of homelessness.

“If I’d have help to find somewhere to live before I left prison, I wouldn’t have to be sleeping rough now. I left jail on a Friday, by the time I got here there was nowhere I could go to get help”

“Once I got my eviction notice, I knew that I needed to sort-out my arrears. If I’d been able to pay-back when I owed before the date I had to leave my flat, I might not have become homeless”

“Now I’ve got somewhere to live, I’m not going to screw things up again. The help I’m getting to keep on top of things, means I won’t become homeless again”

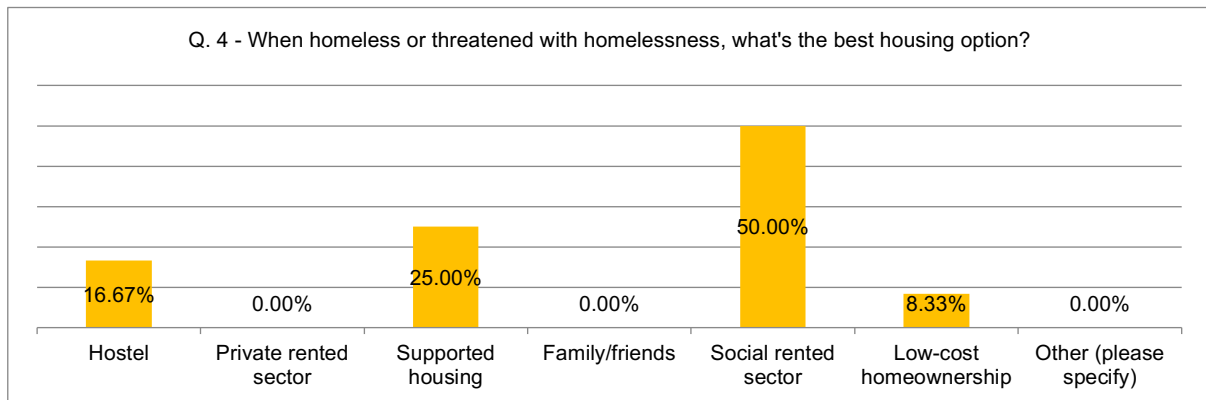


Half (6) of respondents said that when homeless or threatened with homelessness, the best housing option was social rented housing. One quarter (3) said that supported housing was the best housing option. Just under one-fifth (2) said a hostel was the best housing option. Less than one-tenth (1) said low-cost homeownership was the best housing option.

"I'm so pleased to have a housing association flat. It's near enough to college... its' got a really good kitchen and bathroom. Its only got one bedroom, but that's all I need"

"Supported housing is exactly what I need, I'm not ready to live on my own yet"

"I don't like hostels. I've stayed in them before... they're full people you don't know, you have to share bathrooms with strangers, that's just not right"



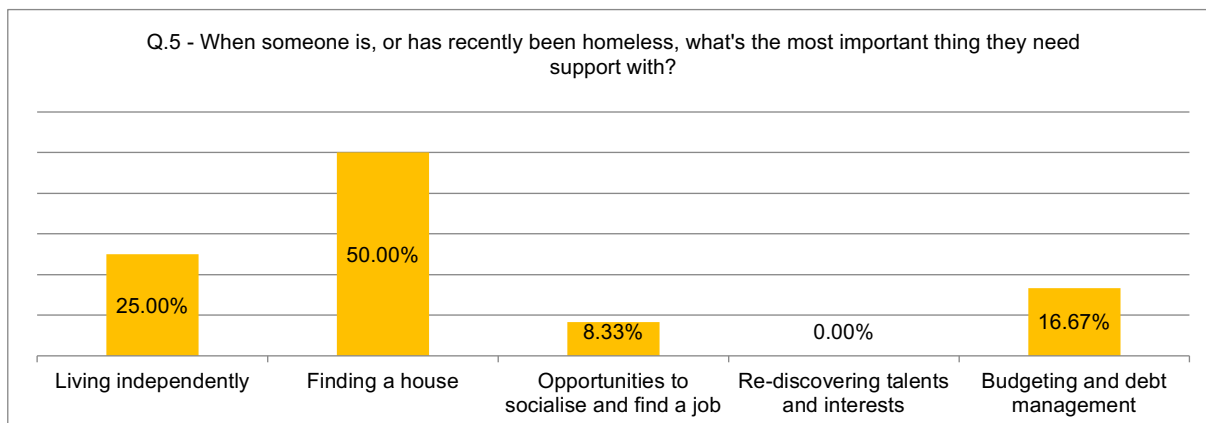
Half (6) of all respondents said that the most important thing they need support with was finding a house. One-quarter (25%) said living independently, just under one-fifth (2) said budgeting and debt management, just under one-tenth (1) said opportunities to socialise and find a job.

"The main things you need help with is finding a house. There's so many forms to fill-in and other stuff you need to do before anyone will even think about giving you somewhere to live"

"I'd never had my own place before, so getting help with paying bills and things like that was really important"

"When I first went on benefits, I had no idea how I was going have enough money to pay rent and other thing like the electricity, plus afford to buy some food. Getting help with budgeting helped me to stop worrying"

"It can get lonely living on your own, sometimes I go days without seeing anyone. I'd really like to find some more friends and something to more interesting to do with my time"



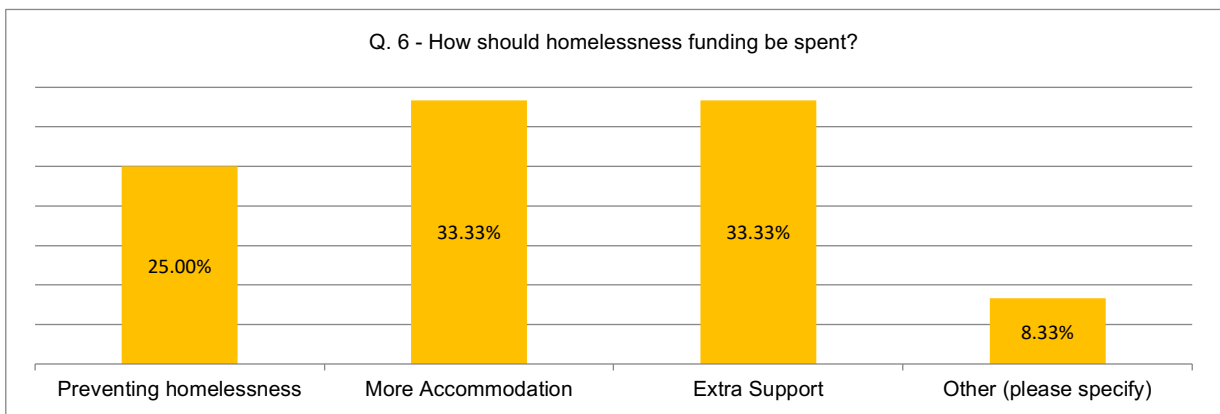
One third (4) of respondents said homelessness funding should be spent on more accommodation, a further one-third (4) said extra support, and one-quarter (3) saying preventing homelessness. One respondent saying funding should spent on all three activities.

“People need somewhere to live, it’s as simple as that. There’s got to be more homes built”

“You need help to make sure things don’t wrong again, and you make the best of the chances that are being offered to you”

“It would have been better if I something could have been done so I hadn’t become homeless in the first place”

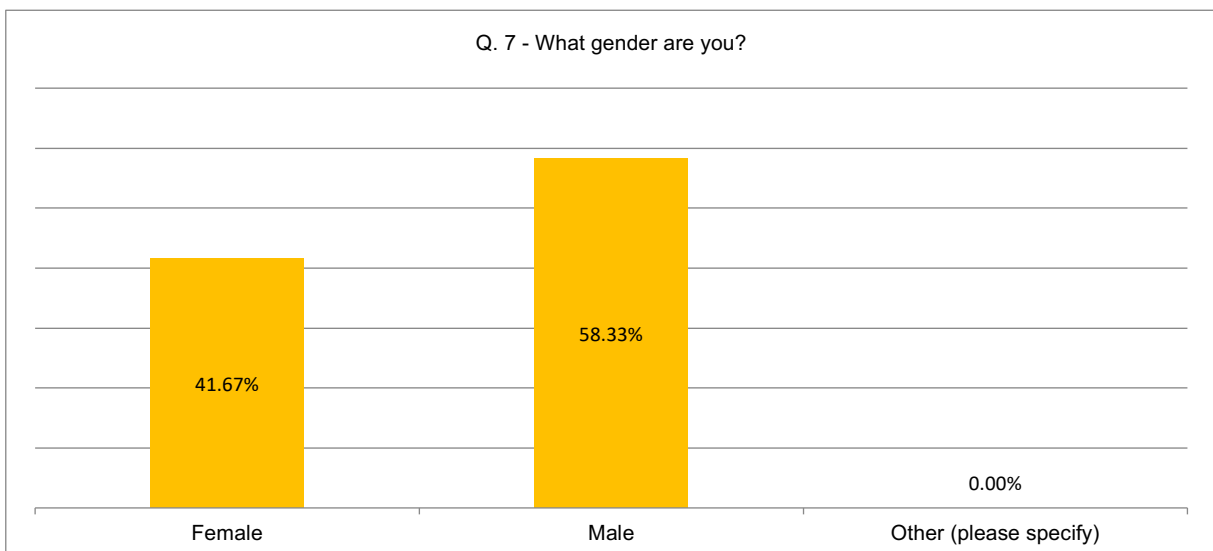
“you need it all; help to stop you from becoming homeless, somewhere to live, and support so you can get on with your life”



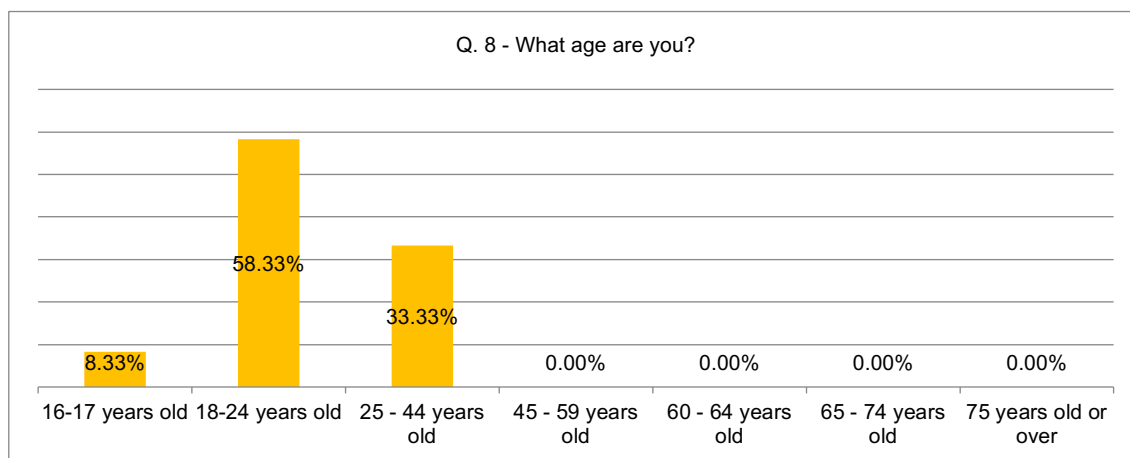
Over half (7) of respondents were male, with less than half (5) being female.

“There’s always load more blokes sleeping rough...there are some women, but not many”

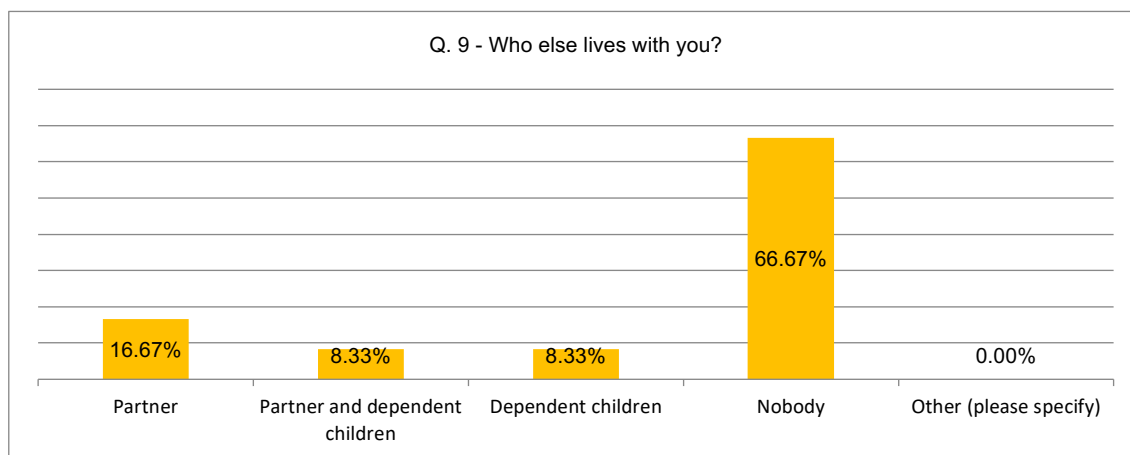
“I already had my daughter, so they had to give me somewhere to live. If I’d been on my own, I’m sure I would have ended up on the street”



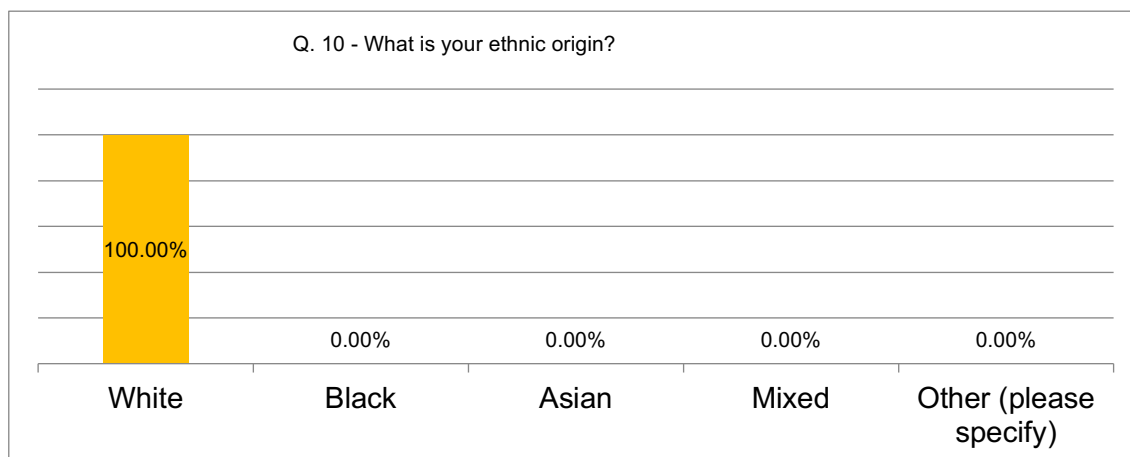
More than half (7) of respondents were aged between 18 and 24 years old. One-third (4) were aged between 25 and 44 years old. Just under one-tenth were aged between 16 and 17 years old.



Two-thirds (8) of respondents lived with nobody, just under one-fifth (2) lived with a partner, just under one-tenth (1) lived with a partner and dependent children, a further one-tenth (1) lived with dependent children only.



All (12) of the respondents identified as being of a white ethnic origin.

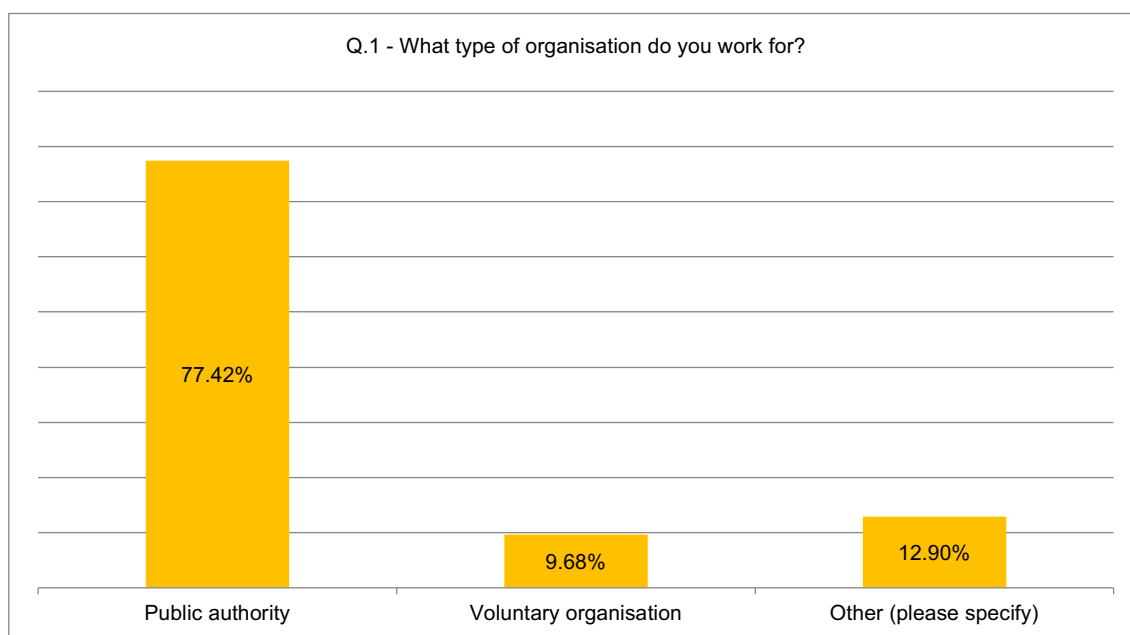


7.2 Stakeholder consultation

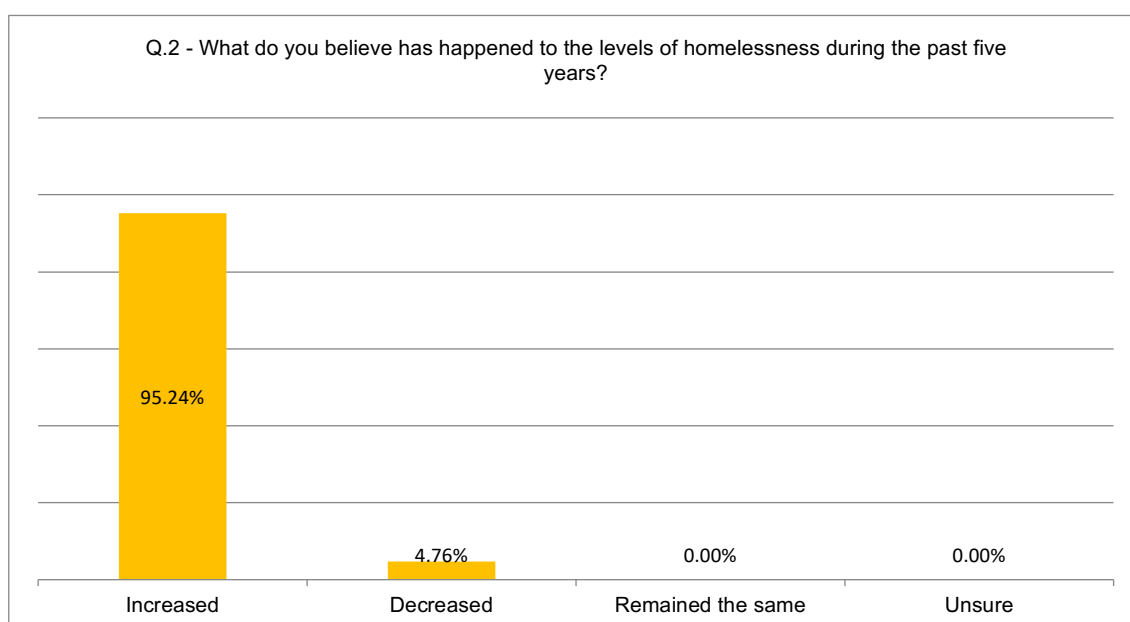
A total of 95 stakeholders were invited to complete an online survey, between Monday 8 January and Friday 19 January 2018. All 60 elected councillors were invited to complete the survey, along with all other persons who had previously been interviewed as part of the carrying the review (see appendix one for details).

A total of 31 people partially responded to the survey, 32% of all those invited. A total of 20 people completed the whole survey, 21% of those invited.

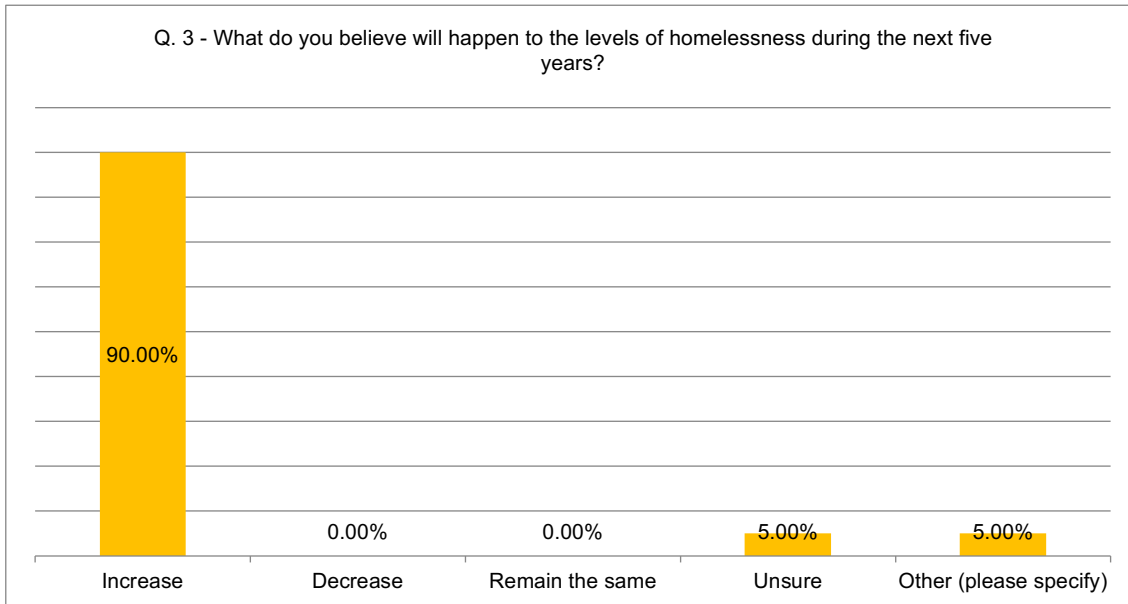
Just over three-quarters (24) of respondents worked for a public authority, just over one-tenth (3) worked for a voluntary organisation, and just under one-tenth (4) worked for other bodies (most commonly social housing providers).



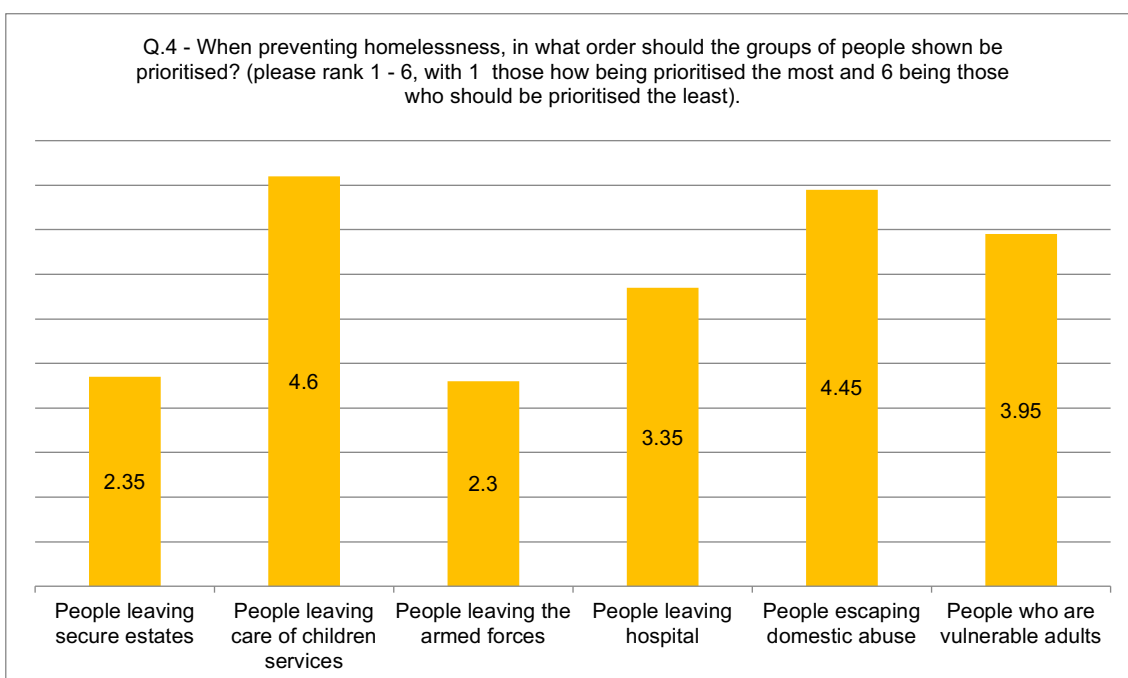
More than nine-tenths (20) of the respondents believed that the levels of homelessness had increased during the past five years. Less than one-tenth (1) of respondents believed levels had decreased.



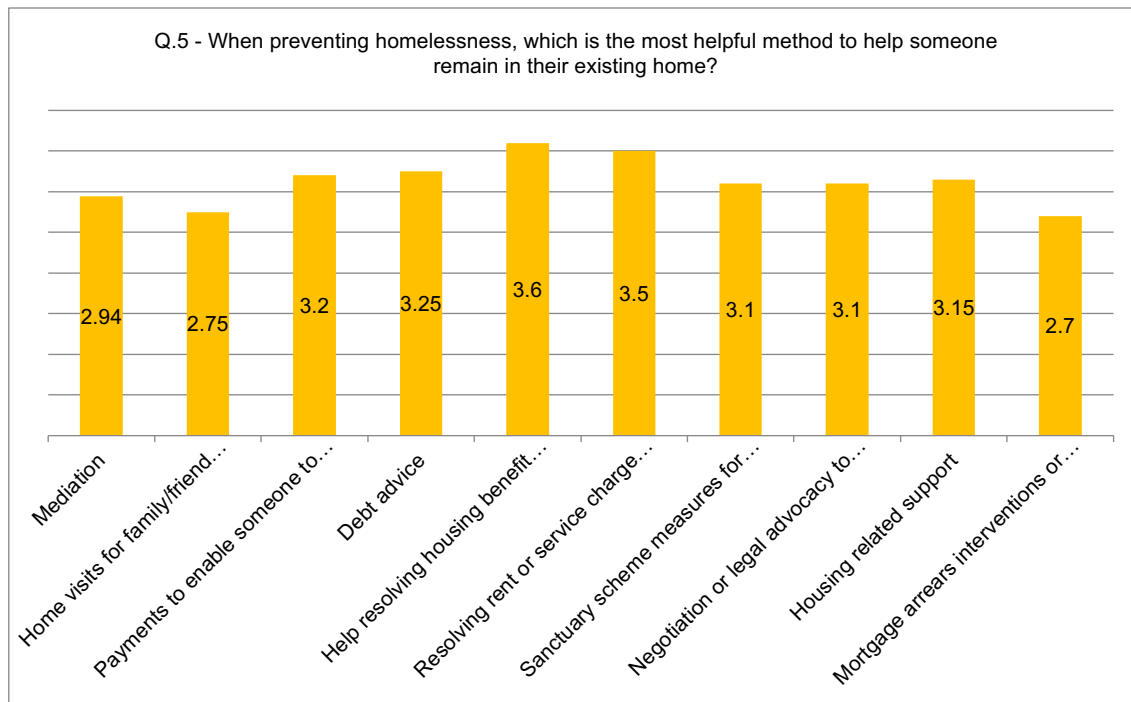
Nine-tenths of respondents believed that the levels of homelessness would continue to increase during the next five years. Less than one-tenth (1) of respondents were unsure what would happen to the levels of homelessness in the next five years. A further respondent stated that the whether the levels of homelessness increased or decreased would depend on what action is taken to tackle it.



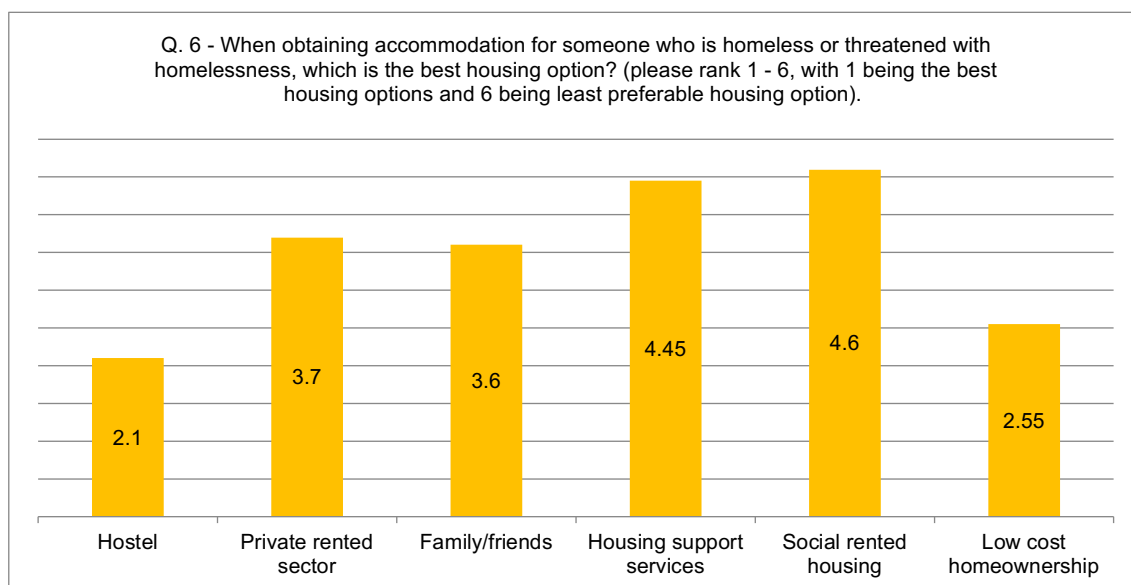
Respondents ranked people leaving the care of children services as the group of people who should be prioritised to be prevented from becoming homeless, with 10 (50%) respondents ranking this as their first preference. None of the respondents (nil) ranked people leaving hospital as being the first preference for being prioritised to be prevented from becoming homeless. 10 (50%) of respondents ranked last people leaving the armed forces as the group that should be the least prioritised for being prevented from becoming homeless. None (nil) of the respondents ranked people leaving hospital or escaping domestic abuse, as the group that should be the least prioritised for being prevented from becoming homeless.



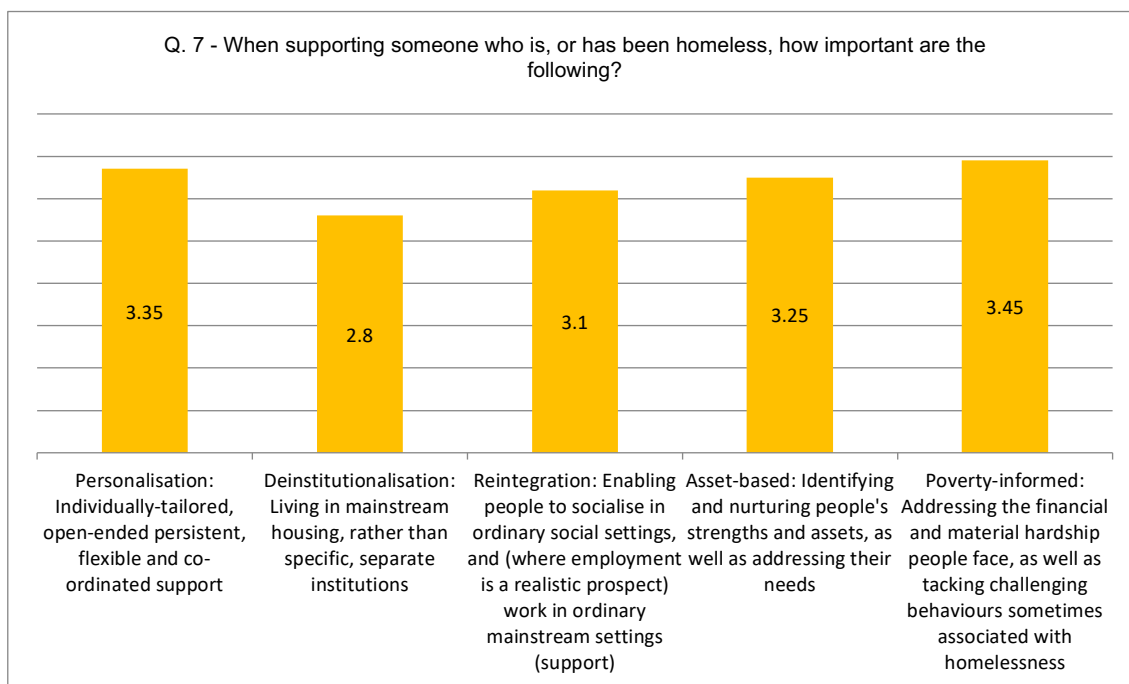
Just under-two thirds (12) of respondents said the most helpful method to help someone remain in the existing home was help resolving housing benefit problems. One-tenth (2) of respondents said mortgage arrears interventions or mortgage rescue was the least helpful method to help someone remain in the existing home. Overall, the survey results showed that there was no consensus on the most helpful method of preventing homelessness, with a fairly even spread across all prevention activities.



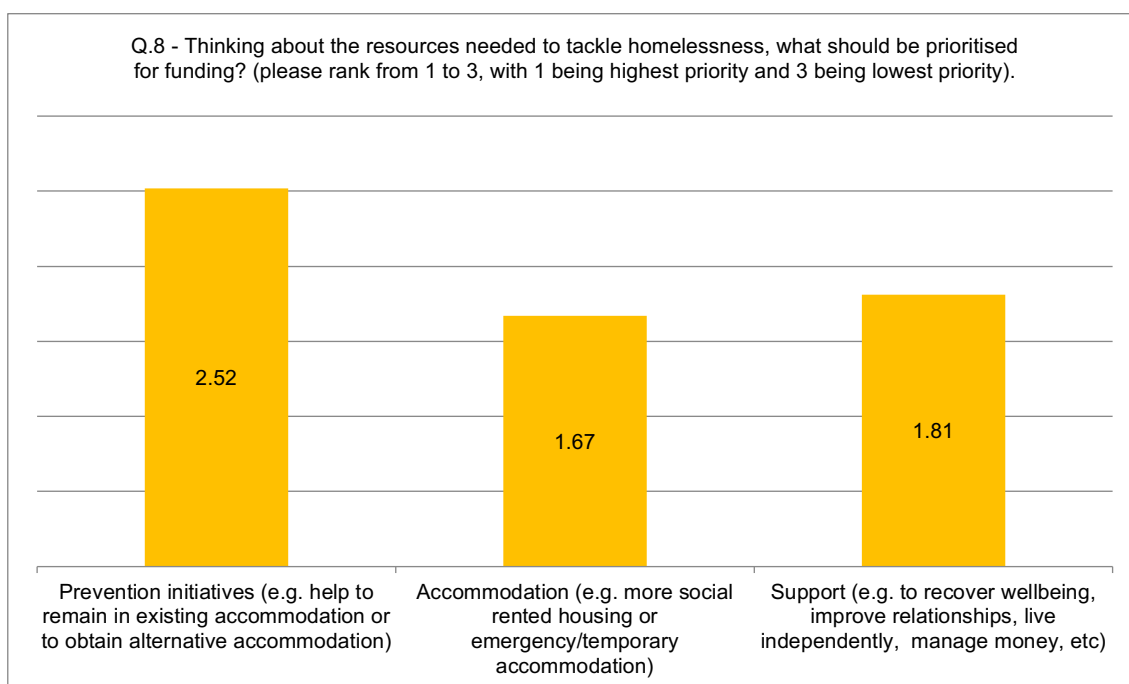
More than two-thirds (8) of respondents ranked social rented housing as the best housing option when obtain accommodation for a person who is homeless or threatened with homelessness. None (nil) of the respondents ranked private rented sector accommodation as the best housing option. More than two-thirds (8) of respondents ranked low-cost home ownership as the least best housing option. None (nil) of the respondents ranked private rented sector accommodation as the least best housing option. Overall, social rented housing scored highest as the best option, with hostel accommodation scoring lowest.



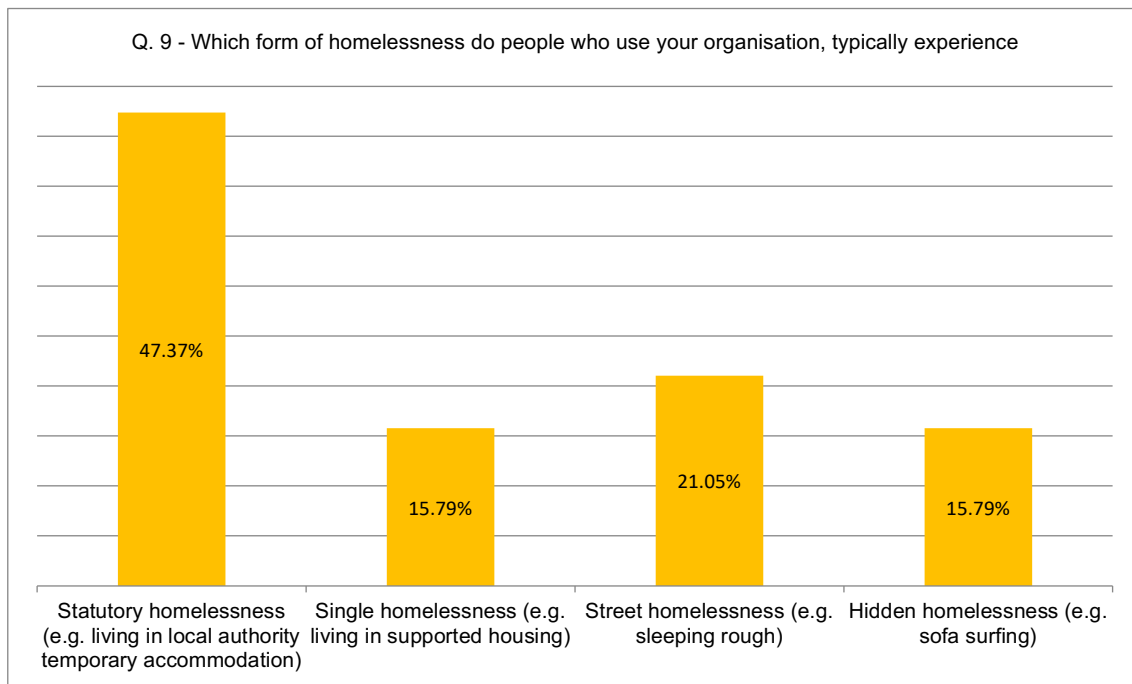
Half (50%) of all respondents said it was significantly important that when people who are or have been homeless, provide help that is poverty informed. Only one-fifth of respondents said that deinstitutionalisation was significantly important. Overall, there was little difference between the five factors.



More than half (57%) of respondents ranked highest resources for homelessness prevention initiatives as the activity that should be prioritised for funding, with less than one-fifth (19%) ranking support as the highest priority for funding. More than half (57%) of respondents ranked lowest accommodation, with less than one-tenth ranking prevention lowest. Overall respondents ranked prevention initiatives highest and accommodation lowest for funding.



Just under than half (9) of respondents said that statutory homeless was typically the form of homelessness of people who used their organisation. One-fifth (4) said street homelessness, with less than one-fifth reporting single homelessness (3) and hidden homelessness (3).



7.3 Conclusions about consultation

The views of service users and stakeholders solicited during this review were consistent in many ways. However, there was a difference of opinion about the best to support a person to recover from being homeless, and also how funding should be prioritised in the future.

An overwhelming number of stakeholders and service users believe the levels of homelessness have increased during the past five years. The large rise in the levels of rough sleeping reported for 2016, explains why most people had this view.

The majority service users and stakeholders agreed that social rented housing is the best housing option for people who are homeless. Given that securing social rented housing is still the main way that homelessness is prevented or relieved, this perhaps isn't surprising.

Stakeholders and service users hold a similar view that personalised support to live independently is crucial to help people exit homelessness. However, stakeholders gave a lot more priority to resolving debts and nurturing talents, than compared to service users who considered these factors to be a much lower priority. Service users gave much more priority to the housing aspect of supporting people who had been homeless, compared to stakeholders, whom gave much equal priority to all the actors. This suggests that stakeholder awareness of what works in to prevent and relieve homelessness, differs somewhat from those who have had lived experience of homelessness. There is a case for bridging the gap between professional understanding of works to tackle homelessness, against the know-how of service users.

Service users and stakeholder opinions differed how homelessness funding should be spent. More accommodation was the priority for service users, with preventing homelessness being least priority. Whereas for stakeholders, preventing homelessness was the most important consideration and more accommodation being the lowest priority. The conception of prevention is common throughout public policy, so this might explain why stakeholders viewed this as a higher priority. This suggests there is a need to inform potential service users of the benefits of preventing homelessness.

8. Findings

This chapter re-visits the conclusions set-out at the end of each chapter of the report. As a direct response to the conclusions are a series of recommendations. These recommendations are for the use of the local authority to prioritise actions for the next homelessness strategy.

8.1 Conclusions

While there is excellent recording of the levels of statutory homelessness, much improvement could be made to the collection, analysis and reporting of data about single, street and hidden homelessness. Public bodies that have to report on homelessness to national governmental bodies, could also share this data with the local housing authority.

Excellent data is collected and reported on domestic abuse, this approach could be adopted with other voluntary organisations funded to help people at risk of homelessness, such as offenders, care leavers, people leaving hospital, and vulnerable adults.

Current levels of statutory homelessness and street homelessness in Walsall, by all official measures, exceed national rates. The local levels of youth homelessness have risen by 47%. In Walsall, women are more likely to experience homelessness than men. During the past five years, levels have increased both locally and nationally, however this trend is more inconsistent at borough levels compared to the nationwide picture. There could be some inconsistency of data collection by the local authority. Public bodies and voluntary organisations could do more to gather and share intelligence on the levels of homelessness.

Future levels of all forms homelessness are likely to increase. Primarily this is due to increasing childhood poverty rates. A secondary driver for a predicted increase, is the local higher than average rates of unemployment and persons who are not of a working age. This is linked to local house prices rising faster earnings. These factors, alongside increases in homelessness during the past five years, means it's reasonable to forecast further growth in the levels of homelessness. It is predicted that the levels of hidden homelessness are thirteen times higher than street homelessness, with young people, people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual and/or transgender, and people escaping domestic abuse being more likely to experience this form of homelessness⁵³. More could be done with data held by local and national public authorities, to identify people likely to be at risk of any form of homelessness, by for example by characteristic and/or electoral ward area.

The extension of duties owed to persons who are threatened with homelessness from April 2018, means that the local authority will have to ensure there are a comprehensive range of activities in place to prevent homelessness.

An improved system of evidencing the outcomes from homelessness prevention activities needs to be put in place. Efforts made by public authorities and voluntary organisations all need to be recognised.

Efforts to improve homelessness prevention activities for people leaving secure estates should be encouraged. Sufficient time and commitment needs to be made by both the local authority and criminal justice agencies to establish a pathway that guarantees nobody leaves prison with no fixed abode. Walsall Council carryout an exemplary range of homelessness prevention activities for care leavers, these practices and protocols agreed between housing and children services should be promoted as good practice. A better understanding is needed of what, if anything, could be done better to prevent homelessness for armed forces personnel. Preventing homelessness prior to discharge from hospital

⁵³ *London Assembly Housing Committee (September 2017), Hidden homelessness in London*

should comply with practices promoted by the Department of Health, a short-life joint working should be established between the local authority housing services and local NHS bodies to transform local procedures. Activities to prevent homelessness due to domestic abuse are excellent, outcomes achieved from commissioned services should be shared. Activities to prevent vulnerable adults from becoming homeless need attention. Specific interventions for those most at risk of homelessness (e.g. adults experiencing mental ill health) need to be developed, along the lines of those agreed between the local children services authority and the local housing authority. Likewise, activities to prevent other persons more likely to become homeless, such as people with a substance dependency, committing criminal offences, or involved in sex work, all need to be developed, with primary responsibility being taken by public health and police officials, supported by the Walsall Council, utilising existing partnership structures.

The local housing authority's homelessness service has historically excelled at the pre-crisis prevention of homelessness. The strong joint working between the local authority homelessness and housing benefit service should be acknowledged as a critical success factor. Due to data recording errors, it appears that performance has fallen recently however this is not the case. Policies, procedures, process charts and paperwork templates for the whole array of prevention schemes, will all need to be reviewed and updated as required as part of preparation for enactment of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.

The existing portfolio of temporary accommodation could be better managed. Targets should be set to reduce the amount of time a property is void. A performance management regime needs to be adopted to reduce the length of stay in temporary accommodation. The usage of temporary accommodation has been increasing, with levels of homelessness expected to rise further, there will be an ongoing additional demand for temporary accommodation. Despite entering into leasing arrangements, to grow the portfolio of temporary accommodation, it has been necessary to use bed and breakfast accommodation to accommodate homeless households. Walsall Council is more reliant on use of its own stock for provision of temporary accommodation, than is typically the case in other local authority areas. This temporary accommodation is concentrated in four buildings across three sites. While this arrangement has been satisfactory to-date, looking ahead the location, type, number of bedrooms and rental cost will increasingly become a problem for the local authority and the households occupying the accommodation. This is due to changes in the funding rules of temporary accommodation being implemented by the DWP. A coherent and sustainable strategy for procuring and allocating temporary accommodation is required. This should seek to dispose of the existing buildings, with sale proceeds being used to lease accommodation from social and/or private landlords.

There needs to be a better understanding of the drivers behind the increase in the number of people who arrange their own temporary accommodation. Is this associated with the issues set-out above, the current temporary accommodation portfolio, or its to do with a practice adopted by the workforce. Analysis is needed to understand how long people remain 'homeless at home', and whether more could be done to prevent or relieve their homelessness.

The recording and reporting on social housing allocations and lettings, made by all social landlords that own homes in the areas, has too many inconsistencies and inaccuracies. The absence of a common housing register and allocations policy hinders greater transparency and consistency as to how lettings are made. The current local housing authority allocations policy hasn't been revised to reflect the numerous changes that have occurred to primary and secondary legislation, since its publication. Nor does the document best enable the local authority to respond to the forthcoming changes to homelessness statute, arising from the enactment of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.

The current provision of supported accommodation needs updating. The present arrangements are not personalised enough, too institutional and fail to foster integration with the wider community. The fact that the emergency accommodation isn't available all year, and that people don't have a room of their own is not in line with modern standards of hostel provision. An over reliance on hostel type provision is out-of-step with the principles of Housing First, the now commonly accepted method for providing accommodation and support to vulnerable people who are homeless with multiple and complex needs. The two preliminary Housing First schemes, provide a welcome opportunity to test how the principles of Housing First can be applied in the local area. A formal evaluation that captures what works, would help to inform future commissioning strategies.

Exclusion by parental/other family/friends is the second main cause of homelessness in Walsall. However, there is a comprehensive and range of support available for people who are aged 16 to 25 years, who are more likely to become homeless due to this reason. This high-quality provision is primarily commissioned by Housing and Children Services and operated by St Basil's, in collaboration with social landlords. Walsall Council should be congratulated for ensuring satisfactory funding has been made available for these initiatives. The local authority, along with voluntary organisations, have made good use of obtaining national grant funding

Violent breakdown of relationships the main cause of homelessness. The local housing authority continues to fund a refuge, alongside a range of community-based provisions funded by the local children services authority. Whilst levels are below a peak, they are higher now than compared to five years ago. Continued funding at current levels for domestic abuse services will be required for the foreseeable future. Whilst a relatively low number of people become homeless due to racial violence, the fact that this is higher now than five years ago should be looked at further.

Social landlords make an invaluable contribution to support people with rent arrears. There is plenty of good practice across the four main social housing providers operating in the local authority area.

The Glebe Centre offers plenty of support to vulnerable people who are disadvantaged. There is significant public support for the work carried out the Glebe Centre, as demonstrated by the number of donations and persons who volunteer. An independent review of outcomes being achieved for public health and housing, should be commissioned to explore the effectiveness of practice and value for money of the Glebe Centre.

Funding of activities to prevent homelessness, secure accommodation and provide support are carried-out by different people across various sections of the local authority. While it is positive that various departments of the council commission services that tackle homelessness, the separate arrangements for commissioning and contract management doesn't foster consistent practice, nor allow the sharing of intelligence. Achievements accomplished from expenditure of the UK Government funding awards must be evidenced, to demonstrate how the Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council is able to deliver more effective, better quality or greater value outcomes for local housing authority and persons who are homeless or threatened with homelessness. Securing assurances of funding arrangements from April 2020 is essential. With homelessness levels forecast to increase during the next five years, current funding levels will need to be at least maintained, and ideally increased.

Current staffing levels are adequate, but with future levels of homelessness forecast to increase, cuts to the number of post and employees must be avoided. The additional burdens arising from the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 will result increase of

workloads, meaning more staff might be required. The requirements of the duties mean that current splits in responsibilities will need to be reconsidered.

The updated IT software system will prove to be invaluable once the new duties to prevent and relieve homelessness commences from April 2018. It will be important that along with the homelessness module, others for administering the housing register, offering choice, and promoting housing options, are also brought as part of the package the Council procure from its IT supplier.

The views of service users and stakeholders solicited during this review were consistent in many ways. However, there was a difference of opinion about the best way to support a person to recover from being homeless, and also how funding should be prioritised in the future.

An overwhelming number of stakeholders and service users believe that the levels of homelessness has increased during the past five years. The large rise in the levels of rough sleeping reported for 2016, explains why most people had this view.

The majority service users and stakeholders agreed that social rented housing is the best housing option for people who are homeless. Given that securing social rented housing is still the main way that homelessness is prevented or relieved, this perhaps isn't surprising.

Stakeholders and service users hold a similar view that personalised support to live independently is crucial to help people exit homelessness. However, stakeholders gave a lot more priority to resolving debts and nurturing talents, than compared to service users who considered these factors to be a much lower priority. Service users gave much more priority to the housing aspect of supporting people who had been homeless, compared to stakeholders, whom gave much equal priority to all the actors. This suggests that stakeholder awareness of what works in to prevent and relieve homelessness, differs somewhat from those who have had lived experience of homelessness. There is a case for bridging the gap between professional understanding of works to tackle homelessness, against the know-how of service users.

Service users and stakeholder opinions differed how homelessness funding should be spent. More accommodation was the priority for service users, with preventing homelessness being least priority. Whereas for stakeholders, preventing homelessness was the most important consideration and more accommodation being the lowest priority. The conception of prevention is common throughout public policy, so this might explain why stakeholders viewed this as a higher priority. This suggests there is a need to inform potential service users of the benefits of preventing homelessness.

8.2 Recommendations

The levels of homelessness should be continuously monitored and reported on. Given that homelessness levels are higher locally than they are nationally, plus levels are expected to increase over the next five years, close scrutiny will be needed to ensure policy makers can make informed decisions.

Preventing of homelessness should be a corporate priority. It offers better outcomes for people at risk of losing their home. A range of public authorities and voluntary organisations will need to collaborate together to increase and improve initiatives for preventing homelessness.

Increasing the supply of settled housing and maximising existing housing stock are vital to better securing accommodation for people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness. Joint working with social housing providers and private landlords will be crucial to ensuring people can swiftly obtain a suitable home.

Recognition of the real difference support makes to preventing re-occurring homelessness, can be demonstrated by ensuring funding for housing support services is aligned to delivery of the Homelessness Strategy.

Resources allocated for tackling homelessness, should be protected from spending freezes or cutbacks. Financial commitments for should be made beyond the current spending period, to cover the lifetime of the next Homelessness Strategy.

There should be regular consultation between service users and stakeholders throughout the delivery of the homelessness strategy. This should be extended to any service re-design or re-tendering that takes place.

Appendices

Appendix One – Record of Contributors

The following persons generously gave their time to contribute evidence (including responding to a survey) to this Homelessness Review:

- Mandy Beaumont – Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council
- Frances Brady – Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council
- Bernard Cysewski – Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council
- Patrick Duffy – Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council
- Councillor Ken Ferguson - Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council
- Jean Garwood – YMCA Black Country Group
- Iris Griffiths – Wilbraham Court
- Jane Haywood – YMCA Black Country Group
- Jeanette Hitchcock - Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council
- Mandy Holdcroft – Accord Group
- Neil Hollyhead – Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council
- Elise Hopkins – Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council
- Rob Hughes – Walsall Housing Group
- Mandeep Jandu – Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council
- Carol Jones – Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council
- Julie Jones - Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council
- David Mullard – Circle Group
- Ann Parks – Walsall Housing Group
- Andrea Potts – Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council
- Councillor Ian Roberts - Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council
- Adrian Roche – Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council
- Tracy Simcox – Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council
- Marie Smith - Watmos
- Jean Templeton – St Basil's
- Martin Thom - Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council
- Andy Wilcoxson – Staffordshire & West Midlands Community Rehabilitation Company
- Nick Woods – Longhurst Group

Appendix Two – Map of Street Homelessness Services

The current provision of street homelessness services (see example below) isn't personalised, relies on specific separate institutions and segregates people away from the wider community. This approach targets and dwells on people's weaknesses, and focuses on the challenging behaviour sometimes associated with street homelessness, rather than addressing the poverty people are experiencing.

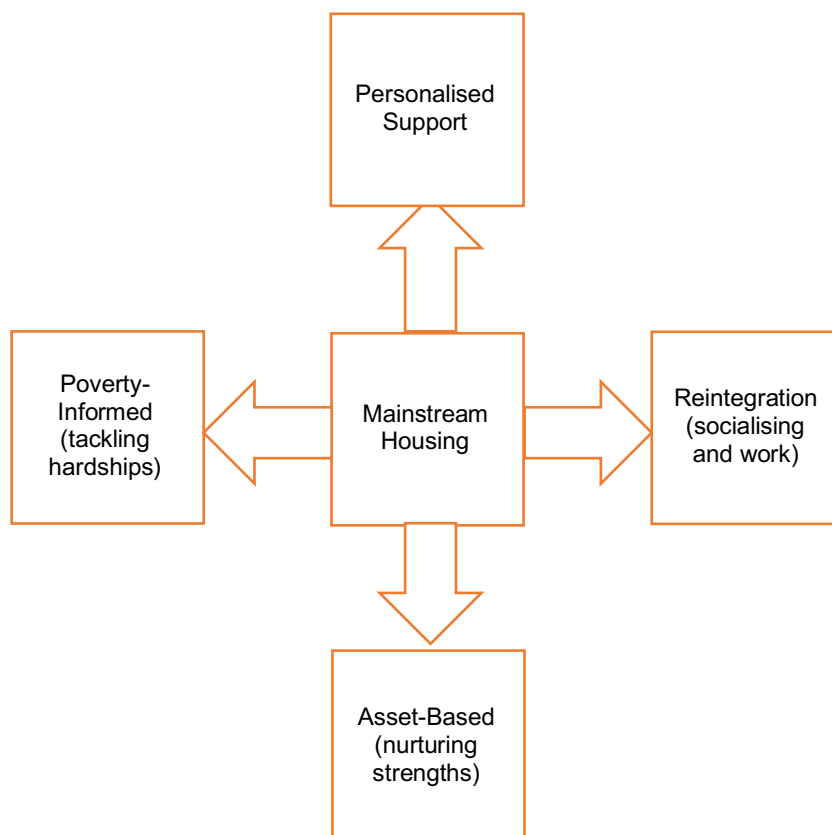
Picture 1: Current Street Homelessness Services, Walsall, 2017



A proposed future provision of street homelessness services (see example below) is based on the Housing First approach:

- Individually-tailored support that is open-ended, persistent, flexible and co-ordinated
- Mainstream housing as an option far as possible
- Support to socialise and work in ordinary mainstream social settings
- Identifies and nurtures people's strengths and assets, as well as addressing their needs
- Directly tackles the financial and material hardships that cause homelessness

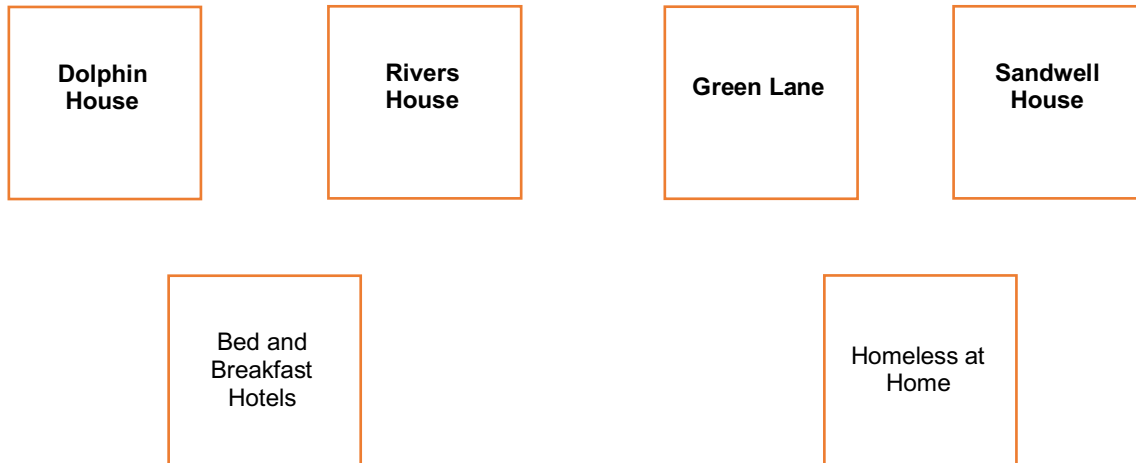
Picture 2: Proposed Future Street Homelessness Services, 2017, Walsall



Appendix three - Map of Temporary Accommodation Provision

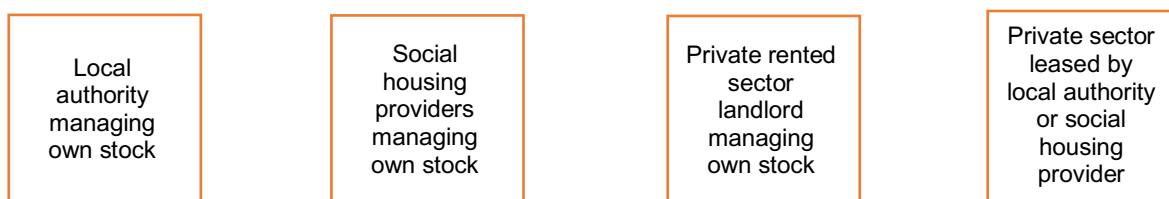
Temporary accommodation provided by Walsall Council is exclusively from its own stock. The units are concentrated across four buildings over three sites. Additionally, bed and breakfast accommodation is used when all the units are occupied. An increasing number of people are arranging their own temporary accommodation.

Picture 3: Current Provision of Temporary Accommodation



Walsall Council's use of own stock for temporary accommodation is out-of-step with the majority of local authorities. The provision is costly to maintain and creates concentrated pockets of homelessness in the borough. A more cost-effective model of temporary accommodation would be to have units dispersed across the borough, using any (or all) of the models shown below. A model of temporary to permanent should be considered.

Picture 5: Future proposed provision of temporary accommodation



Temporary accommodation should be procured in areas where homelessness is higher. This will allow people to remain close to their established support networks. A suitable number of properties will require level access, for the accommodation to be arranged on the ground floor, and adaptations made to kitchens and bathrooms. One-bedroom up to four-bedroom properties will be required, but primarily, two-bedroom and three-bedroom properties will be needed the most. Rents must be charged at relevant rates, but also be affordable for the occupants. The Flexible Homelessness Support Grant can be used to help pay towards the cost of the temporary accommodation.

Employee roles and responsibilities will have to be re-considered. An IT system is urgently needed to help reduce void periods and speed-up move-on.

Appendix four – Impact of Young Persons' Homelessness Services

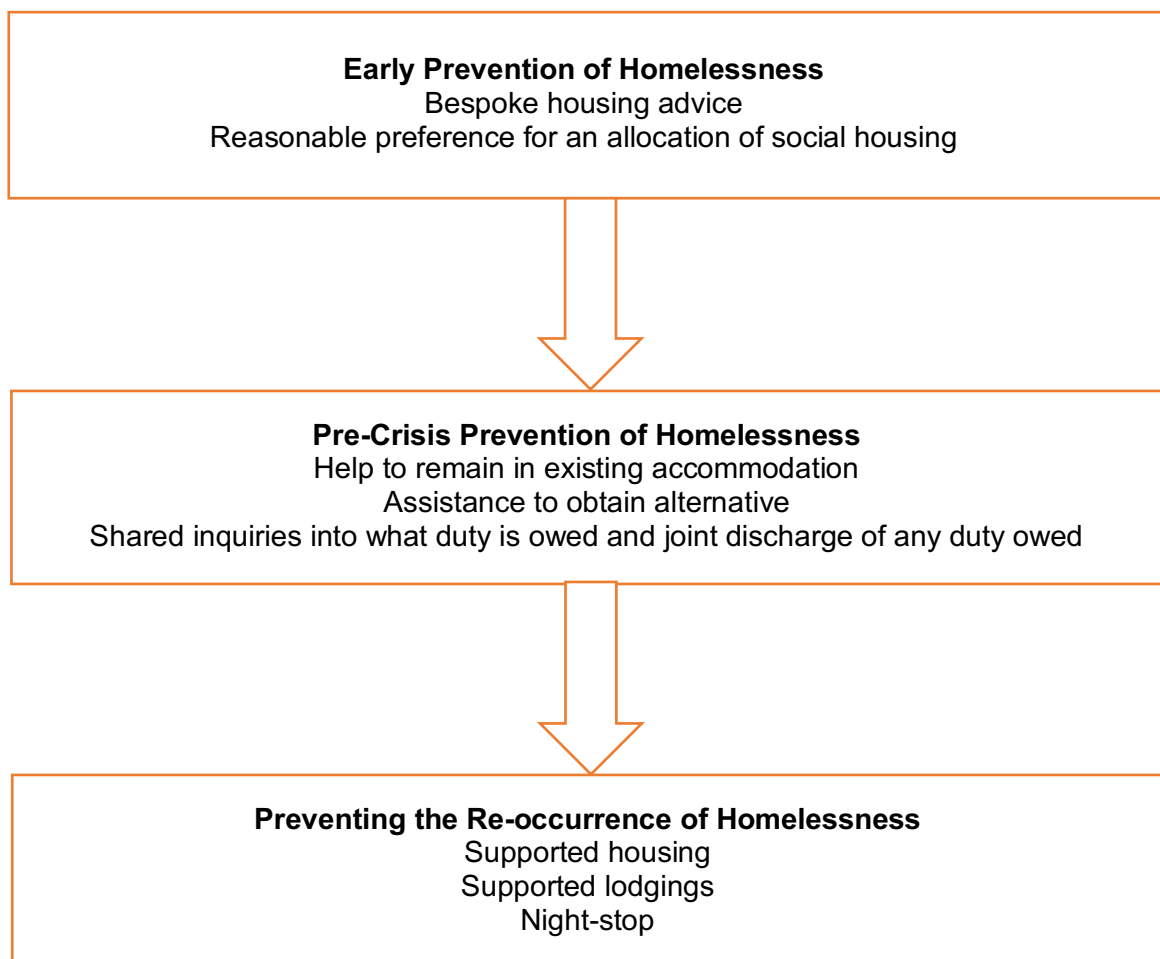
Strategic Approach

Walsall has a comprehensive range of services for children and young adults aged 16 – 24 years old, who homeless or threatened with homelessness. A good rating was awarded by Ofsted in 2017 for the Council's response to children aged 16 and 17, and children leaving the care of the children's social services authority, who are at risk of homelessness.

In Walsall, one in four applications for homelessness assistance are made by young people aged 16-24 years. Parents, other family and friends unwilling or unable to accommodation is the main reason why people become homeless in Walsall. Since 2012/13 youth homelessness has increased by 47%.

Walsall Council's departments responsible for children services and homelessness services are highly collaborative. A joint working protocol underpins the work that staff from across the local authority and voluntary organisations carryout.

Picture 4: Youth Homelessness Pathway, Walsall 2017



Preventing Homelessness

Walsall Council provides support to families, not in the social care system, to resolve problems that need more than one agency to respond. The work of this service is carried-out using an asset-based needs assessment tool, which fosters outcome focused action plans. This work is aligned to Walsall Council's Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub plus the Independent Domestic Violence Advice service, which Walsall Council commissioned Black Country Women's Aid to provide. All of this provision is operating on a locality-based model across the local authority area. This is backed-up by a dedicated service for those people who are on the edge of going into the care of the local authority, to work with young people and their families

Walsall Council care leavers are provided with a detailed guide explaining their housing options. Care leavers are helped to obtain accommodation from social and private landlords. Care leavers are afforded a reasonable preference in the local housing allocations scheme.

Walsall Council has a dedicated team to provide housing advice for young people aged 16-29 years of age. This work involves preventing homelessness by helping people to remain in existing accommodation (e.g. by negotiation with parents or landlord), or obtaining alternative accommodation (e.g. with family/friends or supported housing).

St Basil's provide accommodation and support for young people with complex needs, which features:

- Intensive support for young homeless people who are not in education, employment or training
- Training on life skills and independent living
- Private rental scheme and landlord service

Walsall Housing Group provide shared tenancies scheme where young people including care leavers can share a flat.

YMCA Black Country provide a supported lodgings and emergency night-stop scheme for young people aged 16-24.

Relieving Homelessness

Walsall Council carryout a joint assessment with all 16 and 17 years-olds who are homeless, or threatened with homelessness, to determine what duties are owed from either Children Act 1989 or the Housing Act 1996. Suitable temporary accommodation is made available, bed and breakfast accommodation is never used for homeless children aged 16 or 17 years. The right to choose between being a looked after child, or to be supported as a child in need, is explained comprehensively and concisely. The scope of support and accommodation associated with each option is set-out the form of a leaflet aimed at young people, so they can make an informed choice.

Walsall Council have a specific team for anyone aged 18 – 24, to get advice on preventing homelessness, securing accommodation when homeless, rights when homeless, help available when homeless and how to access it. Young people who are homeless are offered temporary accommodation when it is apparent they are vulnerable, unless they choose to make their own arrangements. A crash-pad is available for when a young person needs accommodation in an emergency. An assessment of their housing needs is carried-out, which is followed-up with advice and assistance to help find accommodation, and includes personalised information housing options in the local area.

Appendix five – Homelessness and the Private Rented Sector

In Walsall, rent arrears at private sector dwellings have fallen by 70% from 2012/13 to 2016/17. Homelessness due to termination of assured shorthold tenancy has also reduced by 70% during the past five years.

Across England, people becoming homeless due to the loss of private rented accommodation has double during the same period time. This has become the main reason become for losing their accommodation and becoming homeless, resulting in one-third of all occurrences of homelessness.

The National Audit Office reported in 2017 that the rise in homelessness throughout England is primarily as a direct consequence of welfare reforms enacted by the UK Government.

Locally, it has been forecast that more 5,000 households will be affected the freeze to Local Housing Allowance rates, with the typical claimant losing more than £1,500 per year.

The heat map below shows the primary risks that might drive-up homelessness from private rented sector landlords choosing to bring assured shorthold tenancies to an end. Because the factors driving-up homelessness from this tenure are significantly influenced by the policies of the UK Government, there isn't much action local authorities can take to mitigate this cause of homelessness from escalating.

Picture 5: Heat Map of Potential Homelessness from Private Rented Sector

