

Walsall Homelessness Strategy

2018-2022



March 2018

Commission by: Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council
Formulated by: Neil Morland Housing Consultant Ltd



Walsall Council

PROUD OF OUR PAST OUR PRESENT AND FOR OUR FUTURE

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 the Labour Party. 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 landlord and a voluntary organisation.

Acknowledgement

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Disclaimer: All views and any errors contained in this strategy 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 strategy.

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Foreword

Together with our partners we have developed a new and comprehensive strategy to tackle homelessness in the borough which places prevention at its heart. The partnership will deploy a variety of approaches, including early interventions between the Council and Housing Associations, Health and criminal justice services to help reduce and prevent homelessness in Walsall. In addition it will look to remodel temporary accommodation and provide a comprehensive housing first service for rough sleepers in the town.

This new approach ties in with the 2017 Homelessness Reduction Act which comes into effect in April of this year. The Act comes as a response to the national homelessness picture, which shows a country wide increase in street homeless and a surge in the uptake of temporary accommodation.

A lot of expert research and planning has gone into this Walsall strategy, so it meets the statutory government standard, but most importantly meets the needs of our customers. It will consolidate and strengthen existing prevention work and partnerships to try and bring about a longer term reduction in homelessness.

We have consulted with our partners and service users to make sure that we get this right. Our partners are fully committed in delivering this Strategy together. Walsall has focussed on prevention work in previous years, and we are proud of our services including our youth homelessness services, Housing First pilot and night shelter provision.

It's important we remember that homelessness is a complex issue, but at the same time it can affect any of us, either directly or through someone we know. There are a variety of reasons and situations which can lead to a person being without a home. Whatever the circumstances, it impacts significantly on individuals, including their health and wellbeing and their employment prospects, and it is all of our duty to help reduce and prevent homelessness – I look forward to tackling this together.

Councillor Diane Coughlan
Portfolio Holder, Social Care

James Walsh
Executive Director, Resources and Transformation

1. Introduction

Our approach to formulating this homelessness strategy, complies with the obligations explained in the Homelessness Act 2002.

This strategy seeks to tackle all forms of homelessness, including those owed a statutory duty (typically families with dependent children, or vulnerable adults), but also those who are single, sleeping on the streets, or other transient arrangements, e.g. sleeping on a friend's sofa.

When formulating this strategy, we had regard to the conclusions of the recently published Homelessness Review of Walsall, which assessed the levels and patterns of homelessness, plus identified gaps in knowledge and services.

While the Homelessness Review paints a picture on homelessness locally, the Homelessness Strategy sets out how to address the problem

When formulating this strategy, we took into account other local and national plans for addressing homelessness. We also took into account the local authority's own allocations scheme and tenancy strategy, plus regional housing strategies.

The results of the Review, have been used to inform this Strategy. The Strategy has 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 actions have been identified for the local authority, along with any other organisation involved with tackling homelessness. Specific actions have been included for people who are more at risk of homelessness. Actions contained in this Strategy take consideration of how the local authority discharges its homelessness functions. Also taken into account are the functions exercised by children services and adult social care. The strategy promotes working across organisations and policy boundaries, to ensure social inclusion and equality of access to services.

A broad range of organisations have been consulted, including those with lived experience of homelessness prior to finalising the strategy.

2. National and Regional Homelessness Context

Decisions about homelessness law for England are the responsibility of the UK Government (and is a devolved matter for the governments of Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales). The Department of Communities and Local Government is charged with leading on policy formulation and implementation.

2.1 Statistics

The UK Government published strategies for preventing homelessness and ending rough sleeping in 2011 and 2012. Nevertheless, statistics collected by all English local housing authorities show that homelessness has worsened. Between 2009/10 to 2016/17, there was;

- 25% increase in the overall number of people assisted by local authorities
- 30% reduction in the number of people whose homelessness was prevented
- 42% reduction in the number of people whose homelessness was relieved
- 33% increase in the number of people owed the main housing (homelessness) duty of assistance (s.193(2), part 7, Housing Act 1996)
- 34% increase in the number of households living in local authority temporary accommodation
- 58% increase in the number of people sleeping rough

Chart 1: Homelessness Levels, England, 2009/10 – 2016/17

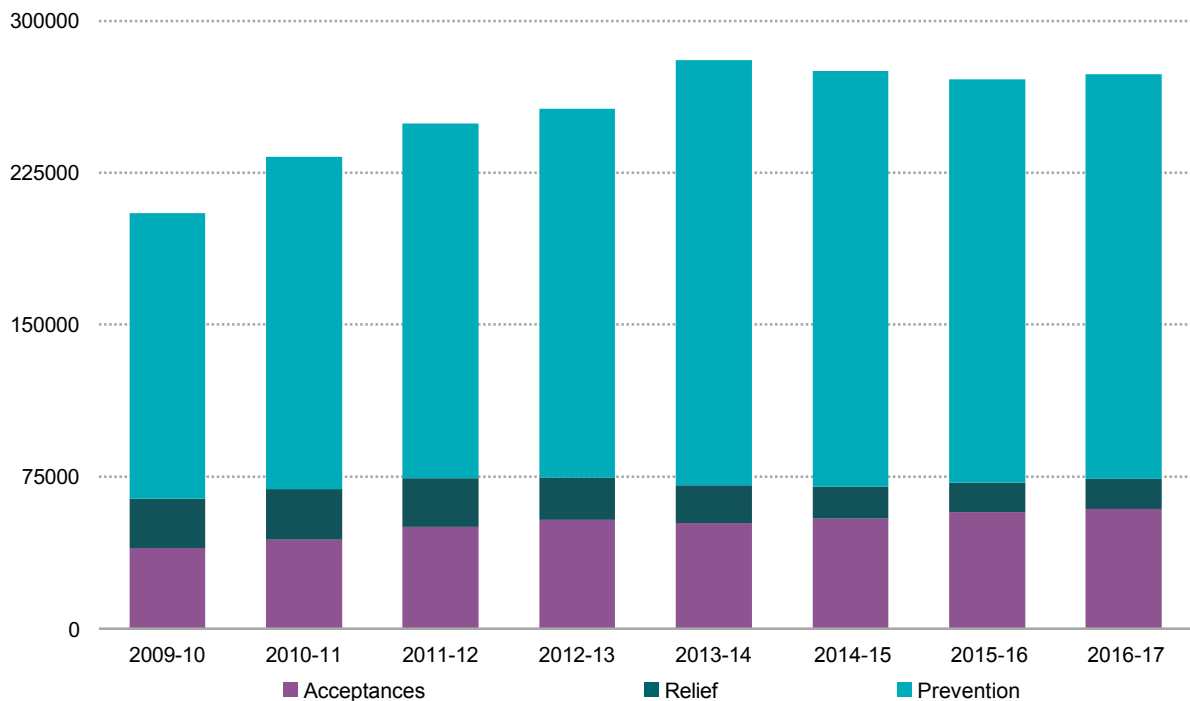


Chart 2: Temporary Accommodation, England, 2009/10 – 2016/17

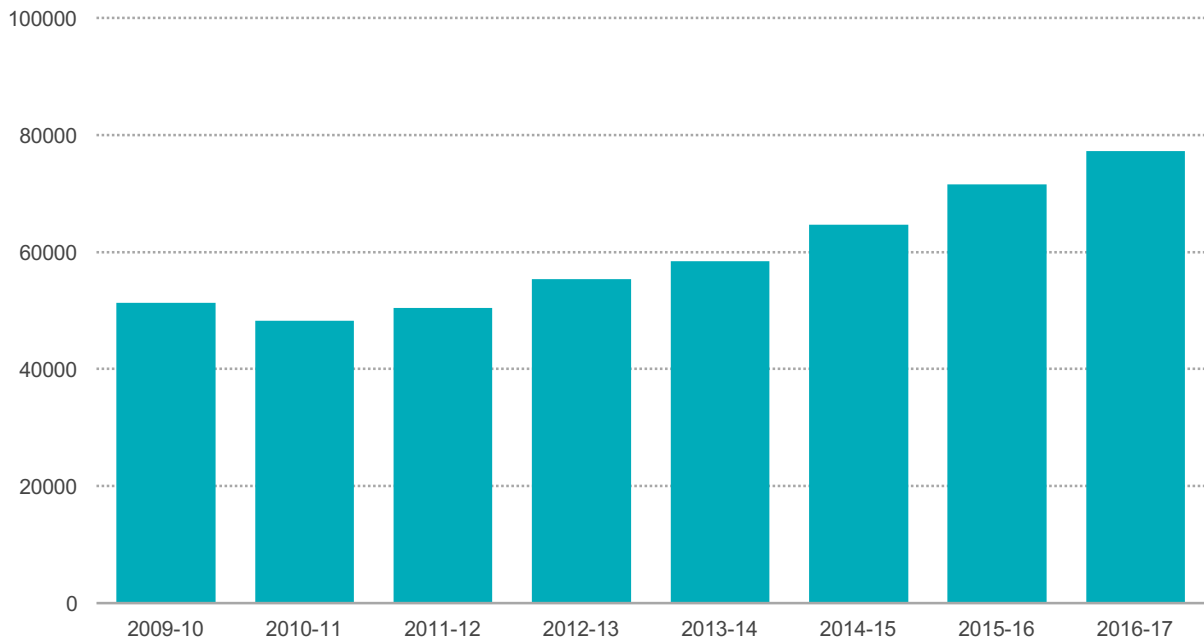
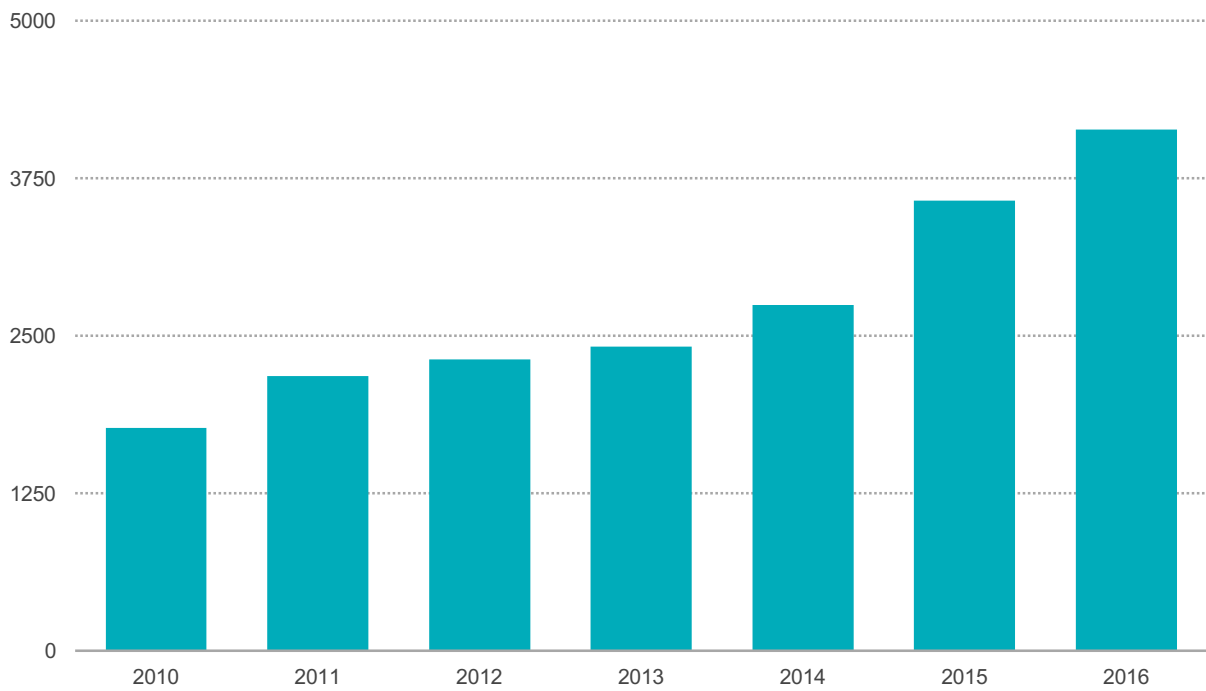


Chart 3: Rough Sleeping, England, 2010 - 2016



These statistics show that more people are approaching local authorities for assistance, however the method in which they are being assisted has changed. Fewer people are having their homelessness prevented or relieved. At the same time, more people are benefiting from the statutory safety net, applicable to those who have a priority need for accommodation and are not intentionally homeless. This has driven-up the number of people provided with temporary accommodation. Additionally, the levels of people experiencing street homelessness has gone-up to a volume not seen since 1997. The publication of homelessness statistics by UK Government was criticised in 2015, by the UK Statistics Authority, for a lack of clarity. Subsequently, the Department for Communities & Local Government has arranged to make significant changes to how homelessness is monitored from April 2018.

2.2 Homelessness Reduction Act 2017

As a consequence of the increase in homelessness, the Communities and Local Government Select Committee launched an enquiry into homelessness in December 2015, first such investigation for a decade. Over 150 pieces of written evidence was submitted to the Committee. Further oral evidence was heard over four sittings, from 12 individuals. The Committee carried-out visits to local authorities and voluntary organisations throughout England, plus held several meetings with people who were, or had previously been, homeless. The Committee concluded that, the cost and availability of housing has pushed the problem of homelessness to such a level that a renewed Government-wide strategy is needed. The Committee set-out 18 recommendations, including:

- Improving the understanding of the causes and scale of homelessness across the country, especially on the levels of rough sleeping outside of London.
- A new code of practice for local authorities, the present code of guidance was published a decade ago, much of the content is increasingly out-dated.
- Strategic planning of services to help meet the support needs of mentally ill people who are homeless or living in temporary or insecure housing, would help to improve access to mental health services.
- Introducing new duty to prevent homelessness to benefit many people who presently gain little or no assistance.

Unusually, a Homelessness Reduction Bill was produced following the inquiry into homelessness, by the Communities and Local Government Committee. Exceptionally, the Committee commenced an enquiry to look at the Bill prior to a debate in Parliament. The Committee received 59 written submissions, plus took oral evidence from 6 individuals. This legislation was a Private Member's Bill, sponsored Bob Blackman MP, with the support of the whole the Committee. The UK Government later declared support for the Bill. The Bill drew on the conclusion of an independent review of the legal duties owed to homeless people facilitated by the voluntary organisation Crisis UK. The Bill was inspired by similar legislation found in Wales. The Bill had the backing of chief executives from more than a dozen not-for-profit organisations. The National Landlords Association also supported the Bill, as did the Local Government Association, plus the Housing Law Practitioners Society. The Bill offers more protection for people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness, at an earlier stage, to a greater number of people than currently.

The Bill received Royal Assent on 27 April 2017, becoming an act of Parliament and henceforth being known as the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. Enactment has been timetables for April. The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 contained a number of clauses that expands the existing legislation, in addition to introducing new duties. These are summarised below:

- Meaning of being threatened with homeless extended up from 28 days to 56 days
- The existing duty to provide advisory service, is extend to bespoke advice for prescribed 7 cohorts people
- A new duty is introduced, to assess all eligible applicants' cases and agree a plan to meet housing and support needs
- The existing duty to prevent homelessness in cases threatened homelessness is expanded, to disregard whether a person has a priority need for accommodation or is intentionally homeless
- A new duty is introduced, to relieve homelessness owed to those who are homeless
- A new duty is introduced, to help to secure accommodation for those who are threatened homelessness or who are homeless
- A new responsibility on part of applicant to co-operate is introduced
- Local connection for care leavers is revised to reduce referrals between local authorities
- New rights to seek a review of the new duties are introduced
- A new duty is introduced, for public authorities to refer cases to local housing authority
- The requirement to ensure suitability of private rented sector accommodation is expanded to properties procured for the purpose of preventing or relieving homelessness

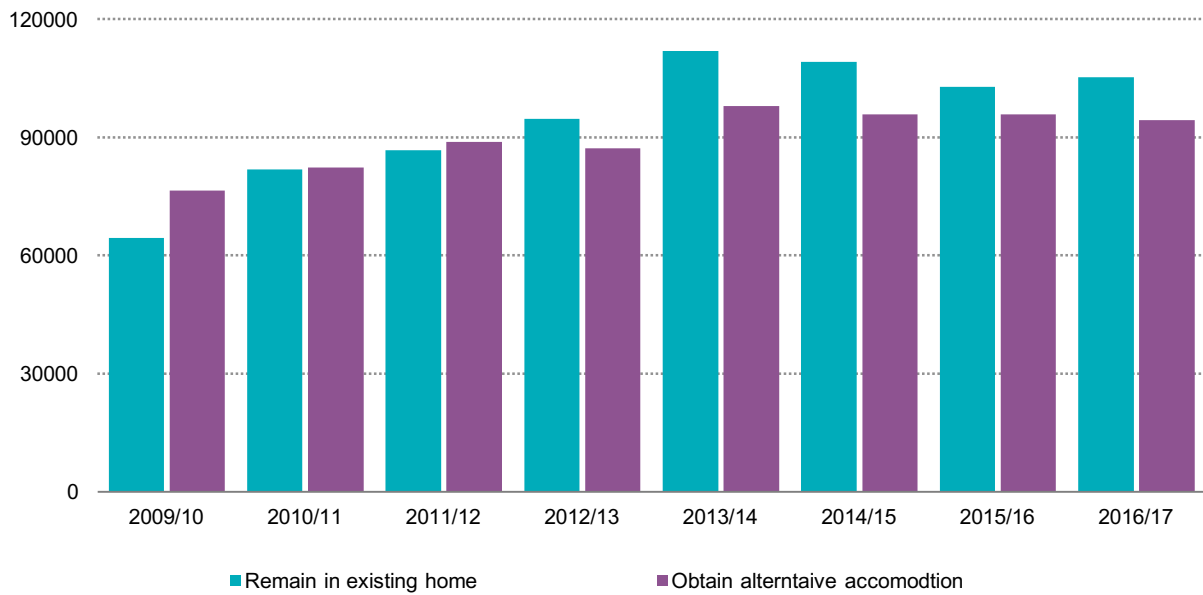
2.3 Homelessness Prevention and Relief

Local authorities have voluntarily carried-out activities to prevent and relieve homelessness since 2003 onwards. There are a range of discretionary initiatives used to assist people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness. Any casework action taken is done so outside any legal obligation to do so. The UK Government recognises three forms of homelessness prevention:

- Early Prevention – Identifying people at risk of homelessness, accommodation and necessary support can be made available in time to prevent homelessness. Early identification can target people in known risk groups (e.g. those leaving local authority care) before they reach crisis point.
- Pre-Crisis Prevention – This can take the form of advice services and proactive intervention, such as negotiation with landlords on behalf of tenants. Even if this only delays the leaving date, it can allow time to manage a move to alternative accommodation and so prevent homelessness.
- Preventing Reoccurring Homelessness – By providing support to formerly homeless people who have been accommodated and ensuring tenancy sustainment, repeat homelessness can be prevented in cases where the provision of accommodation by itself is insufficient.

Typically, local authorities are able to help people to remain in their existing home, or obtain alternative accommodation. Previously (2009/10), 55% people were helped to obtain alternative accommodation, and 45% were assisted to remain in their existing home. More recently this trend has reversed, with 53% of people being helped to remain in their existing home, compared 47% being helped to obtain alternative accommodation.

Chart 4: Homelessness Prevention Outcomes, England, 2009/10 – 2016/17



Of all casework action, the most common used methods to prevent homelessness, by helping people to remain in their existing accommodation, include:

- 12% – resolving housing benefit problems
- 10% – assistance to remain in private rented sector accommodation
- 6% – debt advice

Chart 5: Help to Remain in Existing Home, England, 2016/17

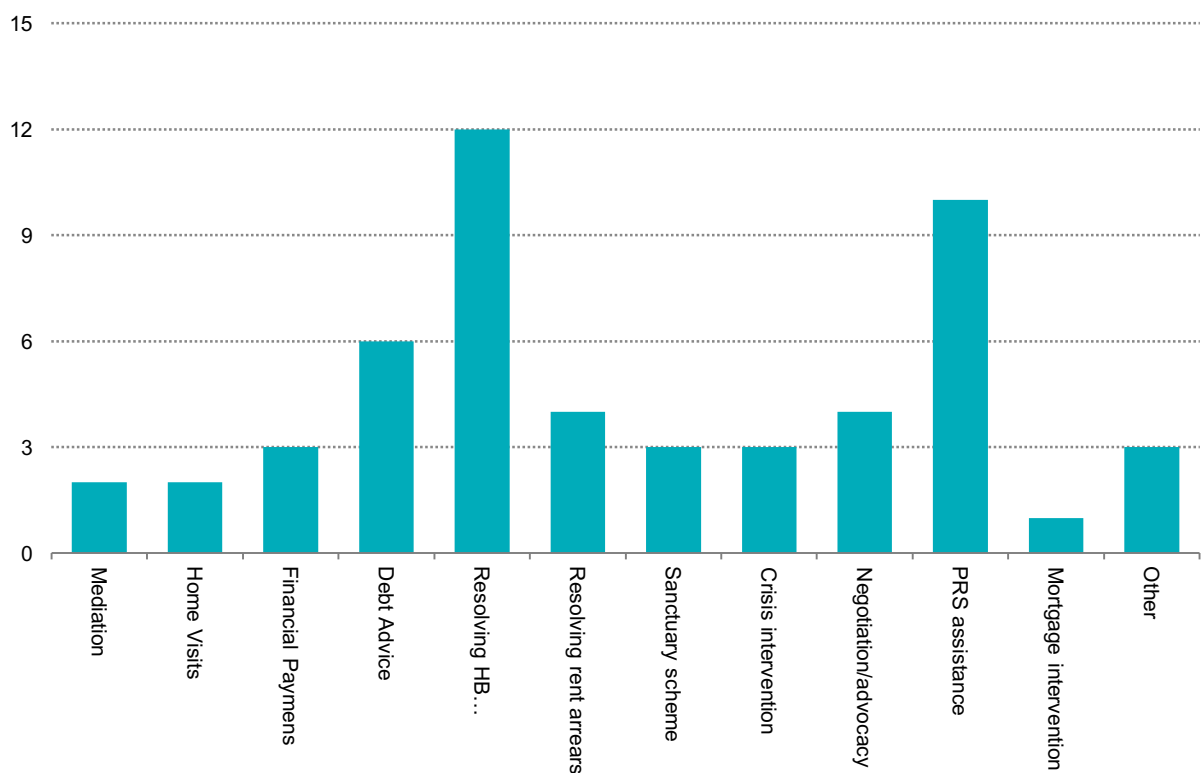
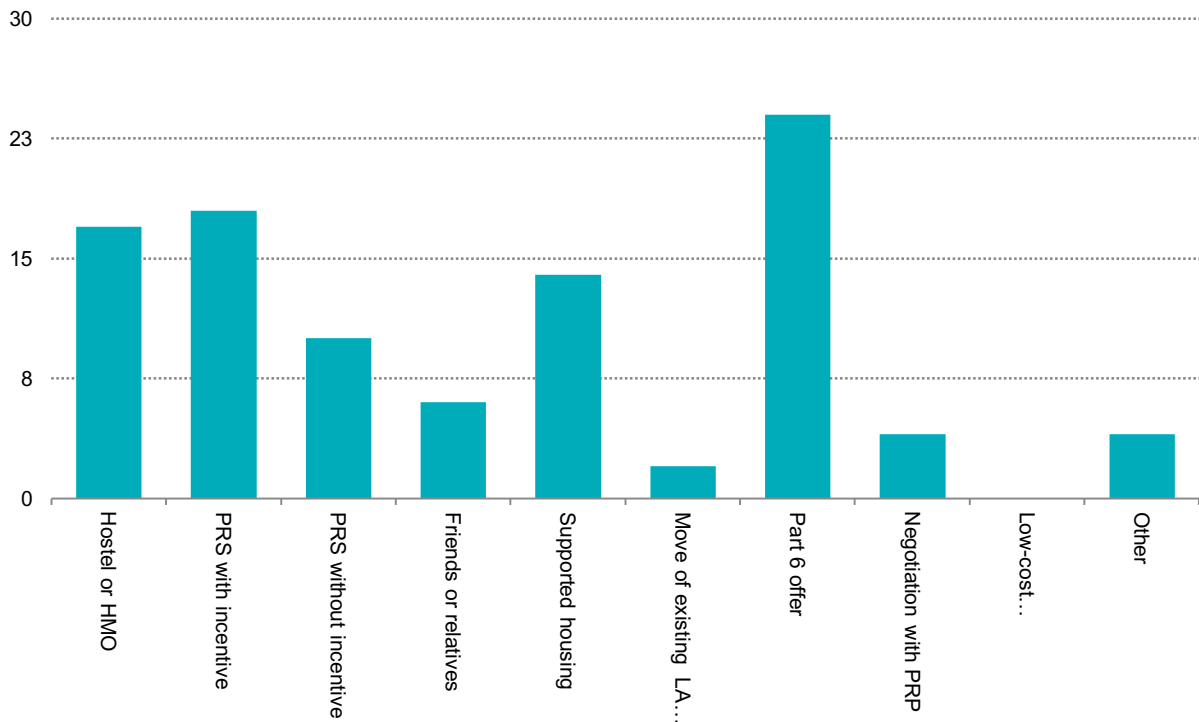


Chart 6: Help to Obtain Alternative Accommodation, England, 2016/17



Of all casework action, the most common methods used to prevent or relieve homelessness, by assisting people to obtain alternative accommodation, include:

- 28% – private rented sector (with or without use of landlord incentive)
- 24% – allocation of social housing
- 17% – hostel or house of multiple occupation

Casework action associated with housing benefit problems has doubled since 2009/10. During the same period the number of people whose reason for loss of their last settled home is due to the end of assured shorthold tenancy has increased to become the main reason for homelessness, accounting for 31% of cases in 2016/17. The National Audit Office, reported in 2017 that a succession of reforms to welfare benefits entitlements, implemented by the UK Government, are not coincidental. The report criticised the lack of a joined-up Government strategy for tackling homelessness.

2.4 UK Government Priorities

The UK Government has received criticism about rising levels of homelessness and lack of a coherent strategy for tackling the problems from the UK Statistics Authority (in 2015), the Communities & Local Government Select Committee (in 2016), the National Audit Office, the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman, and the Commons Public Account Committee (all in 2017).

Subsequently, the UK Government declared an ambition to halve rough sleeping by 2022 and end it by 2027. To help accomplish this, a taskforce has assembled, whose membership includes influential figures from public authorities and voluntary organisations, to provide advice on the formulation of a strategy.

The UK Government has allocated a substantial sum of funding to help tackle homelessness. During the present spending period (2016/17 – 2019/20), £932.7m has been awarded, this has included:

- £315m Homelessness Prevention Grant, 2016/17 – 2019/20
- £100m Move-on Accommodation Fund, 2016
- £20m Homelessness Prevention Trailblazers, 2017
- £10m Rough Sleeping Fund, 2017
- £10m Rough Sleeping Social Impact Bond, 2017
- £402m Flexible Homelessness Support Grant, 2017/18 – 2018/19
- £72.7m Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 New Burdens Grant, 2017/18 – 2019/20
- £3m Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 Data Systems Upgrade Grant, 2017

Having already responded to the Communities and Local Government Select Committee's Homelessness Enquiry, the UK Government is presently concentrating on the commencement of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. To accomplish this, more funding for the Flexible Homelessness Support Grant is to be announced for 2019/20. This follows the formation of a local authority working group for allocation of new burdens monies. Secondary legislation on deliberate and unreasonable refusal to cooperate and the duty of a public authority to make referrals will be introduced early in 2018. Further to this, an implementation steering group was established, whose responsibility included revising code of practice. A draft new code of statutory guidance was published for consultation in November 2017, a final version will be available before April 2018, along with specific guidance on youth homelessness. A Homelessness Advice & Support Team has formed, with recruits from local government, to offer assistance to local authorities during the period of enactment. The National Homelessness Advisory Service continues to be funded, providing advice to frontline practitioners on the complexities of homelessness law. A good practice website for local authorities will be launched in 2018. As previously mentioned, a new performance monitoring regime, the Homelessness Case Level Information Collection, will start from April 2018. The Cross-departmental ministerial working group continues to meet quarterly, to co-ordinate a cross-governmental response to tackling homelessness. Enactment of the Homelessness Reduction Act is scheduled for April 2018.

2.5 West Midlands Combined Authority

The strategic authority for the West Midlands Metropolitan County, has no devolved responsibility for homelessness policy, this remains a matter for national and local governments. Nevertheless, the Elected Mayor of West Midlands has established a taskforce to co-ordinate efforts across the city region to tackle homelessness. This was prompted by the fact the rough sleeping has more than tripled across the Combined Authority area, with over 100 people bedded down on the street on any given night.

The taskforce has adopted the following seven principles:

- Tackle all forms of homelessness, not just rough sleeping
- Influence the Mayors priorities across other policy areas (e.g. housing, mental health, transport)
- Support existing work rather than replace it
- Have honest discussion about difficult topics (e.g. welfare reform)
- Harness skills and expertise from across the region and different sectors

- Focus on where the Mayor and West Midlands Combined Authority can have maximum impact
- Make decisions based on hard evidence and data

The Homelessness Taskforce is led by a steering group, with task-groups working in specific priorities. The membership of the Taskforce includes representatives from:

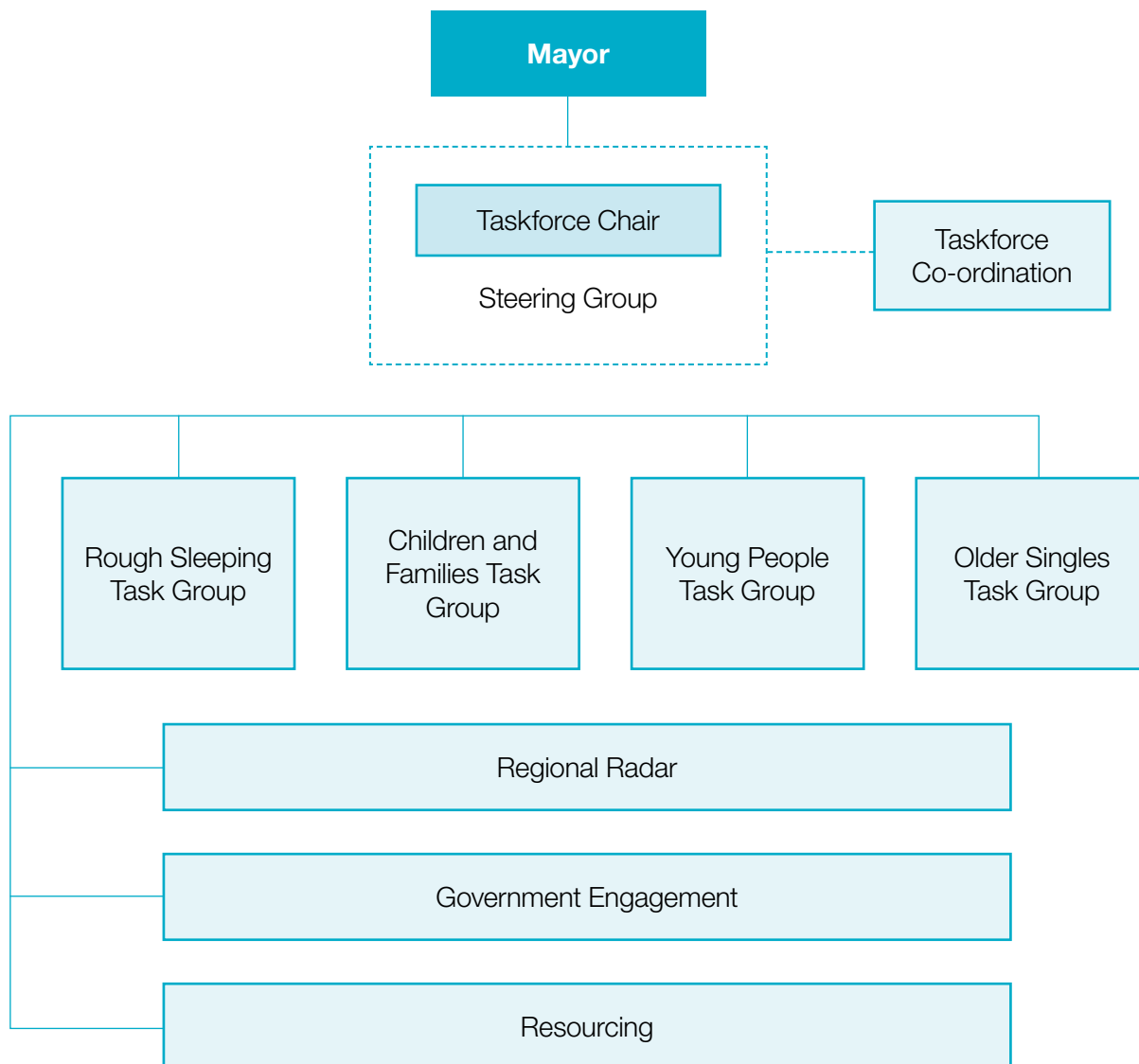
- Birmingham City Council
- Birmingham & Solihull
- Coventry City Council
- Crisis UK
- Gowling WLG
- KPMG
- Public Health England
- Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council
- Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council
- St Basils
- Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council
- WM Housing Group
- West Midlands Combined Authority
- West Midlands Fire Service
- West Midlands Police
- Wolverhampton City Council
- YMCA Black Country Group

Task-groups have been established, each having clear roles with different needs for skills and expertise, on the following themes:

- Rough sleeping
- Children and Families (led by Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council)
- Young People
- Older

Additionally, a research and analysis hub, name the West Midlands Regional Radar, has been established to compile, analyse and share information on homelessness trends and practice-based insights to inform local, regional and national policy and service responses.

Picture 1: West Midlands Homelessness Taskforce, 2017

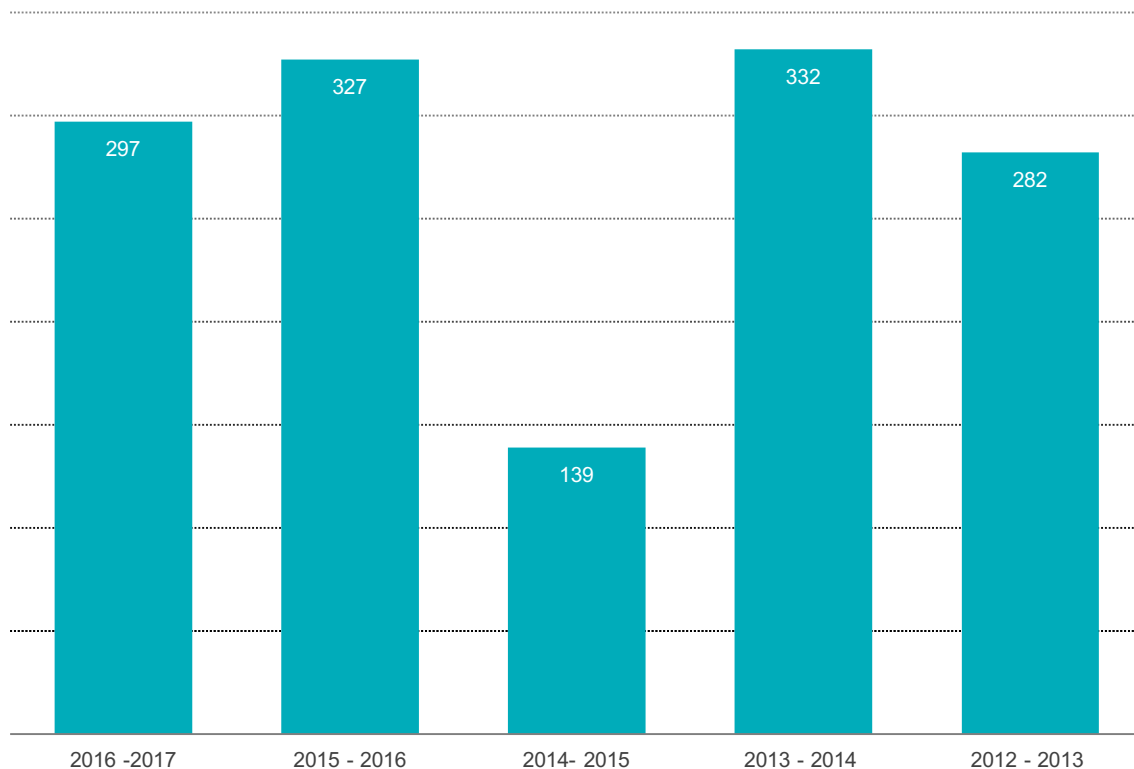


3. Local Homelessness Context

3.1 Levels of Homelessness

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. Homelessness acceptances in 2016/17 increased by 5% compared to levels in 2012/13.

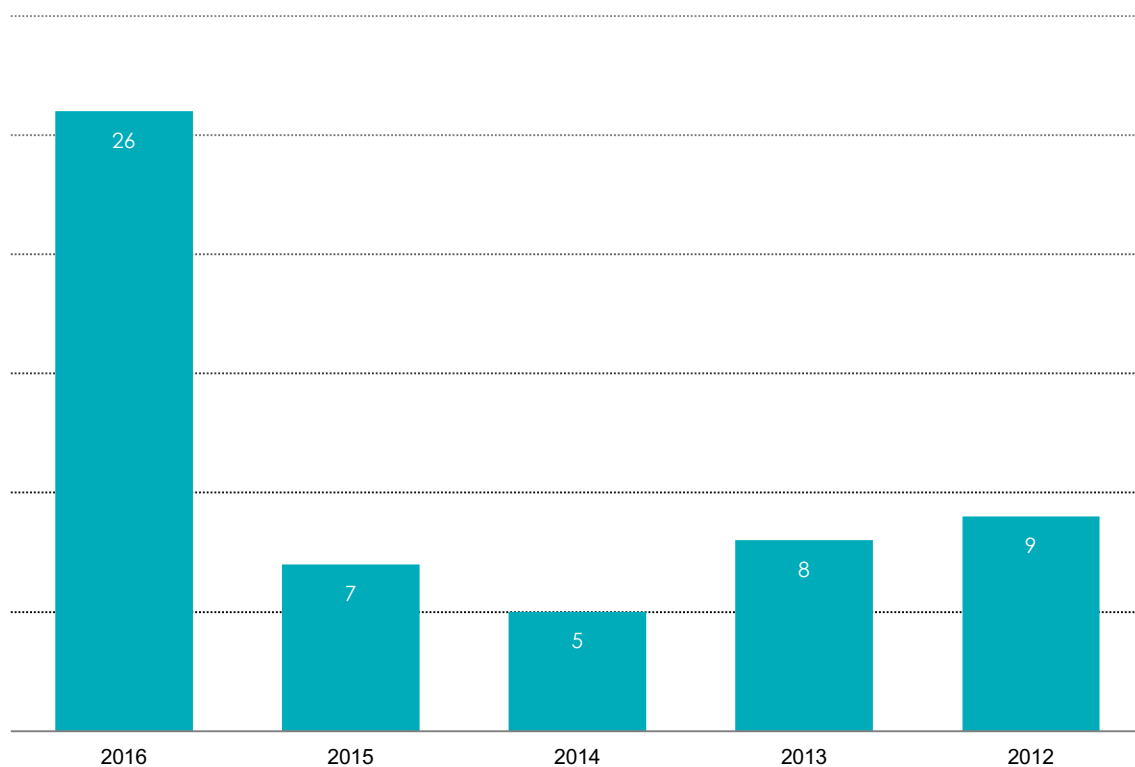
Chart 7: Homelessness acceptances, Walsall, 2012/13 – 2016/17



The overwhelming majority of homeless applications (81%), resulted in the Walsall Council accepting the main homelessness (housing) duty. This being to secure suitable accommodation. Compared to England, more people in Walsall benefit from the statutory safety net, being offered suitable accommodation by the local housing, 81% of applications in Walsall, compared to 51% for England. When compared to England, the levels of homelessness acceptances in Walsall are more than 50% higher.

The number of people who are experiencing street homeless in Walsall has increased by two-thirds during the past five years. The rate (using per 1000 households) of street homelessness in Walsall is 22% compared to that for the whole of England.

Chart 8: Levels of rough sleeping, Walsall, 2012 - 2016



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 than 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.

3.2 Activities to Prevent People Becoming Homeless

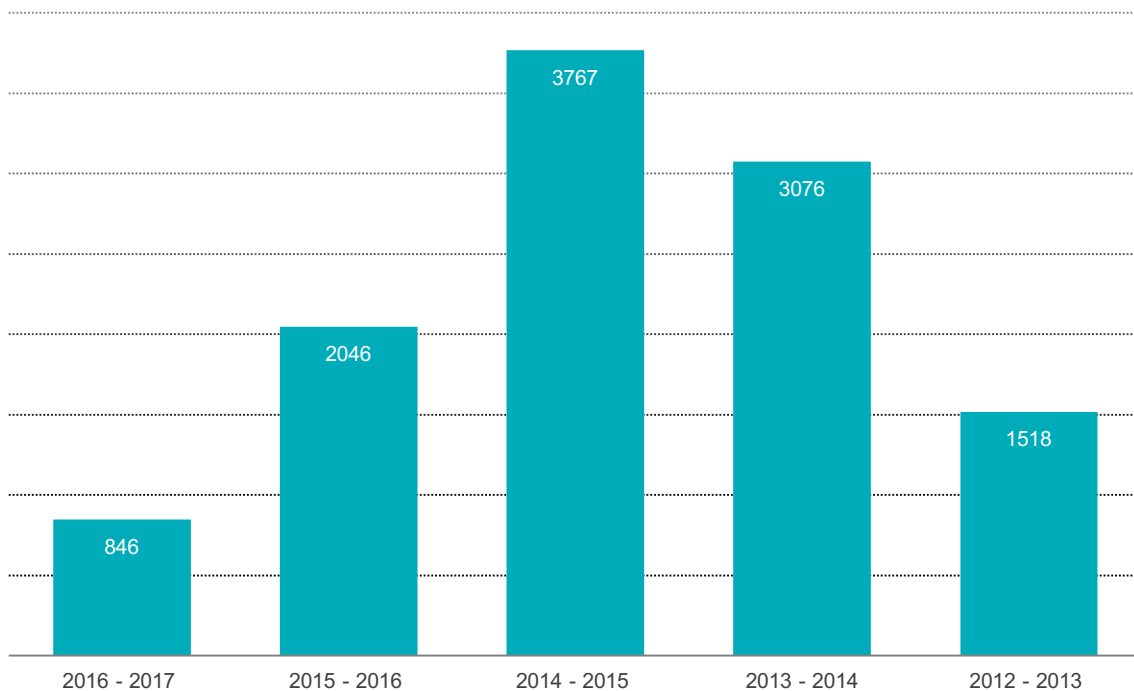
The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 will extend the duties owed to persons who are homeless or threatened with homelessness from April 2018. Meaning the local authority will have to ensure there are a comprehensive range of activities in place to prevent homelessness.

Recent links have been established between Walsall Council and the Community Rehabilitation Company for Staffordshire and the West Midlands (SWMCRC) seek 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 a detailed housing options advice and are helped to move-on to specialist supported housing operated by St Basils, YMCA Black Country Group and Walsall Housing Group. Walsall has adopted an Armed Forces Covenant, which includes a commitment from local social housing providers to prioritise armed forces personnel when allocating social housing. A range of services are offered to victims of domestic abuse by Black Country Women's Aid, which helps keep victims and their children safe. Walsall Council and the NHS hospital trust do not have a joint approach to preventing homelessness at the point of discharge from hospital, which is resulting in unsatisfactory outcomes. Walsall Council commission a range of care and support for vulnerable adults which will prevent homelessness occurring. However there is no specific information and advice for

vulnerable adults who are more likely to become homeless. Prevention activities for young people at risk of parental exclusion, including those aged 16/17 years, supports them and their families, to resolve problems, using an asset-based needs assessment tool, which fosters outcome focused action plans.

Walsall Council's homelessness service has historically excelled at the pre-crisis prevention of homelessness. The strong joint working between employees of the local authority homelessness and housing benefit service should be acknowledged as a critical success factor. The reasons for why performance has fallen recently needs fully understanding, so outcomes can be increased back up to peak levels. However, when compared to the whole of England, the rate of successful casework outcomes (measured by per 1000 households) is now higher in Walsall than it is across England for the first time in the past five years. Walsall Council help almost two-thirds of people remain in existing accommodation, with just over one third being helped to obtain alternative accommodation.

Chart 9: Homelessness prevention casework outcomes, Walsall, 2012/13 – 2016/17



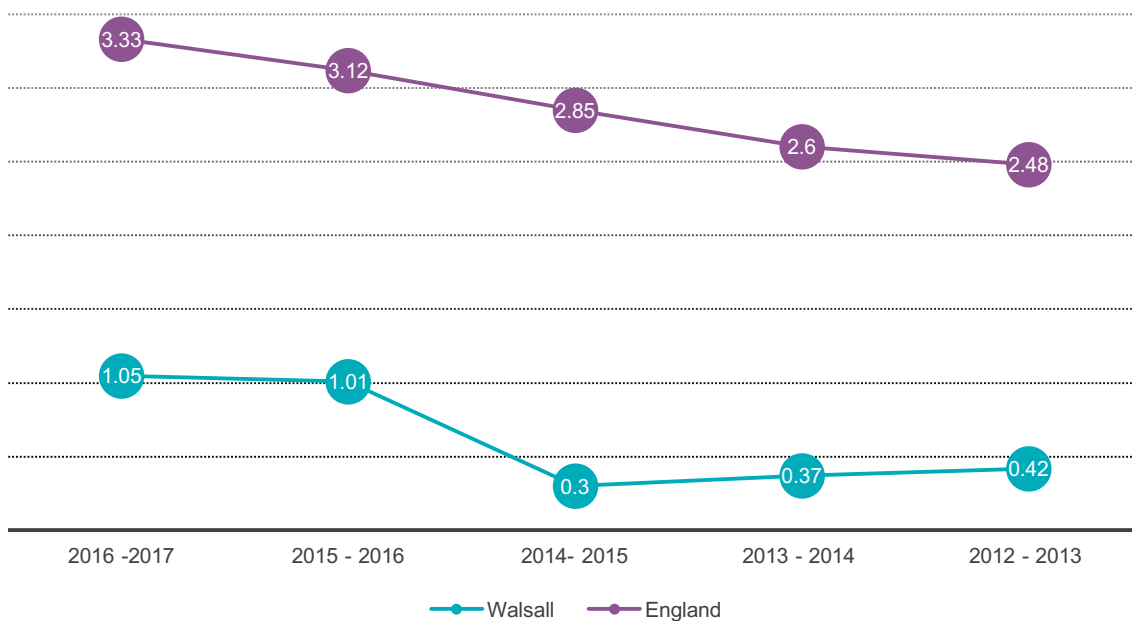
Please note that the result for 2016/17 appears low due to data recording issues. When prevention due to Discretionary Housing Payments is included, the 2016/17 figure should have read **2083** which is slightly higher than the previous year's activity.

3.3 Activities to Securing Accommodation for People Who Are Homeless

During the past five years there has been an overall increase in the number of households for whom Walsall Council has secured temporary accommodation. The relative rate of temporary accommodation usage for England is three-times higher than what it is for Walsall. However, Walsall Council has four times the amount local authority stock for use as temporary accommodation compared to the national average. Walsall Council owns and manages a portfolio of temporary accommodation. The stock is concentrated in a small number of sites throughout the local authority area. 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.

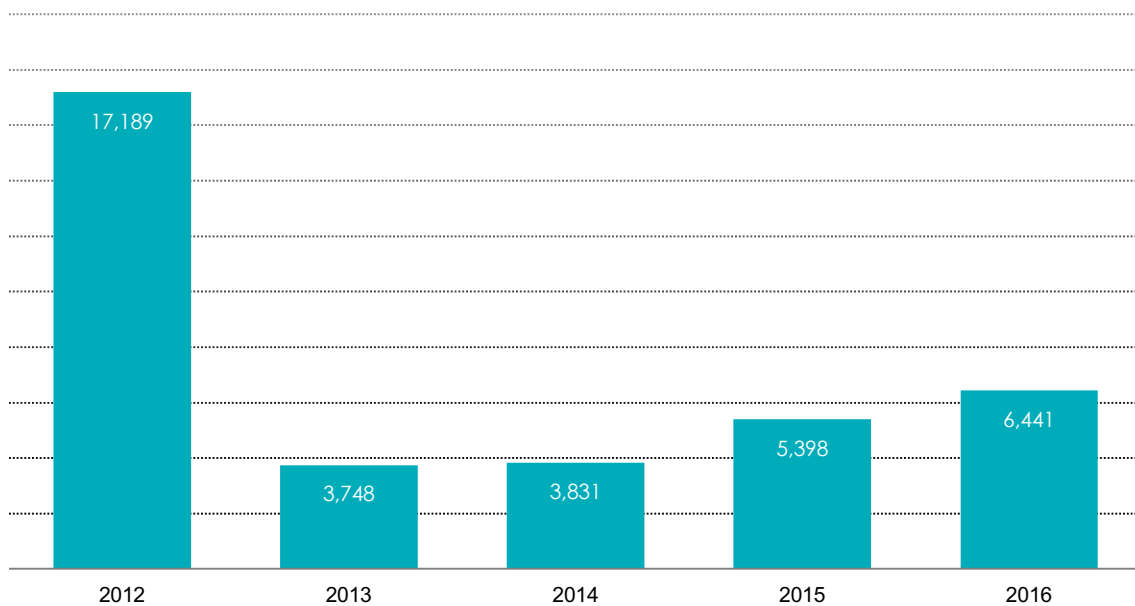
An increasing (136% during the past five years) number of people who are entitled to temporary accommodation, are instead choosing to make their own arrangements rather than accepting an offer temporary accommodation from Walsall Council.

Chart 10: Temporary accommodation levels by per 1000 households, Walsall and England, 2012/13 – 2016/17



The scale of successful casework activity to relieve homelessness has reduced across England, by 42% from 2012/13 to 2015/16. This reduction has occurred at the same time homelessness acceptances have increased. Walsall Council has recorded no positive actions to relieve homelessness during the past five years.

Chart 11: Number of households registered for an allocation of social housing, Walsall, 2012-2016



The number of households registered for social housing in Walsall reduced significantly, 79%, between 2012 to 2013. From 2013 to 2016, levels have almost doubled, increasing by 42%. However current levels remain just over 10,000 (63%) below what they were in 2012. During the same period lettings increased by only 6%, in 2012/13, there were 2.4 applicants for every letting, by 2015/16 this has almost doubled to 4 applicants for every letting. 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, one of every five lettings are made to homeless households.

Walsall Council fund YMCA Black Country Group to operate a night-shelter during the winter months. 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. Wilbraham Court provides supported accommodation for men and women who have complex and multiple needs and are also homeless. Walsall Council commission 22 units, people are typically resident from 6 months to 2 years, but on average for a 12-month period. Accord Housing Group are funded by Walsall Council to provide a refuge for women and their children escaping domestic abuse. Accord Housing Group is also being funded by Walsall Council to operate a new provision of accommodation and support, operated to Housing First principles.

3.4 Activities to Support People Who Are, or Have Been, Homeless

Parents, other relatives or friends no longer willing or able to accommodate, is the main reasons for why people become homelessness in Walsall. St Basils are commissioned by Walsall Council to provide supported housing for people aged 16-25 years old, however demand for this scheme exceeds the provision available. Children aged 16 or 17 years of age who are homeless receive care and support from Walsall Council's Children Services.

Homelessness can occur due to non-violent as well as violent breakdown of a relationship with a partner. Equally, domestic or racially motivated violence instigated by a partner, or other associated persons, can cause homelessness. Walsall Council commission Accord Housing Group and Women's Aid Black Country Group to provide support for people at risk of homelessness due these reasons.

Mortgage arrears have been falling in the past five years. Regulations require that mortgage lenders attempt to apply a number of measures to assist people who are struggling to pay their housing costs.

Social housing rent arrears as a reason for homelessness 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. Accord provides support to tenants, this includes a pre-tenancy workshop, financial advice from a dedicated advisor and employment coaching. Walsall Housing Group 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.

Rent arrears at private sector dwellings have fallen over the past five years by 70%. Homelessness due to end of assured shorthold tenancy has reduced in Walsall by 50% during the past five years, but is still the third main reason for homelessness locally, whereas for the whole of England it is now the main cause of homelessness.

Refugees becoming homeless, following acceptances of their claim for asylum, has never been a significant cause of homelessness locally.

Walsall Council commission YMCA Black Country Group to provide day services at the Glebe Centre to people who are experiencing multiple and complex needs. 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. Typically, 30 – 50 people might use the centre on any given day, with approximately 370 people using over a 12-month period. Specific health provision includes a nurse who provides treatment, a fully equipped health suite has recently been installed.

Faith groups from across the local area provided drop-in services in the evenings and at weekends.

3.5 Resources for Tackling Homelessness

Walsall Council invests substantial sums of its own money into activities that are carried out by voluntary organisations to tackle homelessness including:

- Accord Group
- Citizens Advice Walsall
- Women's Refuge
- St Basil's
- Walsall Housing Group
- Wilbraham Court
- Women's Aid Black Country
- YMCA Black Country Group

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 the local housing authority for the duration of the current spending period (April 2016 – March 2020), an average of £363,182.25 per year

Table 1: UK Government Funding Allocations to Walsall Council – 2016/17 to 2019/20

Amount	Title	Period
£476,956.00	Homelessness Prevention Grant	April 2016 – March 2020
£623,790.00	Flexible Homelessness Support Grant	April 2017 – March 2019
£351,987.00	Homelessness Reduction 2017 New Burdens Grant	April 2018 – March 2020
£1,452,733.00		

Walsall Council's homelessness service has almost 40 people employed to administer the duties prescribed in law. 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 projects for supporting women escaping domestic abuse. The homelessness service primarily operates from the Civic Centre, however home visits or outreach sessions do take place. The team have received training on a variety of topics associated with the practice of homelessness law. Walsall Council are active participants to the homelessness work-streams of West Midlands Combined Authority.

The Council's homelessness team has reached an agreement for IT software company Civica, to supply the Abrisas Housing Needs System, which will generate a range of automated efficiencies. The updated IT software system will prove to be invaluable once the new duties to prevent and relieve homelessness commences from April 2018.

3.6 Consultation with stakeholder and service users

The views of service users and stakeholders solicited when gathering evidence to inform this strategy, were consistent in many ways, however there was an important divergence in viewpoints.

There was agreement between stakeholders and service users that homelessness was increasing and social housing was the best accommodation option for people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness.

Service users and stakeholder views differed about the best way to support some to recover from the experience of being homeless, with the former placing more emphasis on help to live independently, but the latter consider other factors such as help with money being equally important. Additionally, service users thought that more accommodation should be a priority for the future, whereas preventing homelessness was the main priority selected by stakeholders.

4. Delivering this Homelessness Strategy

4.1 General Principles

The delivery of the strategy requires close working between housing services, adult social care services, children services and public health, all located within the local authority. These sections of the Council provide statutory functions, plus commit financial assistance, which will support to deliver the strategy.

Social landlords are under a duty to assist local authorities with their homelessness functions. They are expected to play an active role in the delivery of the strategy.

Throughout the duration of this strategy, the local authority will seek to build stronger relationships between departments and agencies, to foster a multi-agency commitment to deliver the strategy. The Council will be especially keen to ensure involvement from the voluntary sector, along with co-operation with a wide range of public authorities. The Council will also confer with people who have lived experience of homelessness, to get their views about what works, any barriers to service and any suggestions for improvements.

4.2 Corporate Commitment

Progress towards tackling homelessness and achieving the objectives of this strategy will be reported to the Council's Cabinet. Annual corporate plans will have clear responsibilities for tackling homelessness, linked to chief officers, and progress will be discussed at meetings of the corporate management team. An elected councillor will be selected to champion the issue of homelessness across all council business.

A committee of elected councillors will scrutinise the delivery of the homelessness once every 12 months. The chairpersons of the Homelessness Strategy Steering Group and the Homelessness Forum, will provide a report on (i) levels of homelessness, (ii) activities on preventing homelessness, securing accommodation and providing support, (iii) resources for tackling homelessness.

4.3 Homelessness Strategy Steering Group

A Homelessness Strategy Steering Group will be formed to oversee the delivery of this Homelessness Strategy Action Plan. The Group will meet every three months to (i) review the levels of homelessness, (ii) consider the activities for preventing homelessness, securing accommodation and providing support, and (iii) coordinate the resources for tackling homelessness. The Group will be responsible for annually updating the Plan, to ensure it remains relevant. The Group will be chaired by a Chief Officer with responsibility for local housing authority functions. Membership will consist of chief or principle officers responsible for:

- Adult social care
- Children services
- Public health
- Housing benefit administration

Plus, a representative of local social housing providers

Homelessness Strategy Task & Finish Groups will be established as and when needed, to accomplish specific actions from the Action Plan. Any group formed will be chaired by a member of the Steering Group, with outputs being reported back to the Steering Group. Membership will consist of any relevant public authority, voluntary organisation or other person that attends the Homelessness Forum. These groups will be for a fixed term of no more than 12 months. Specific action plans will be formulated to control the work of any such group.

4.4 Homelessness Forum

A Homelessness Forum will be formed to provide an overview of progress made to deliver the Homelessness Strategy Action Plan. The Forum will meet every six months to (i) comment on the levels of homelessness, (ii) promote activities being carried out to prevent homelessness, secure accommodation and provided support, (iii) explain how resources are being used to tackle homelessness. The Forum will also be a vehicle for inviting interested parties to participate in Homelessness Strategy Task & Finish Groups. The Forum will be chaired by the elected councillor for homelessness. Membership of the Forum will include all agencies represented at the Strategy Steering Group, plus:

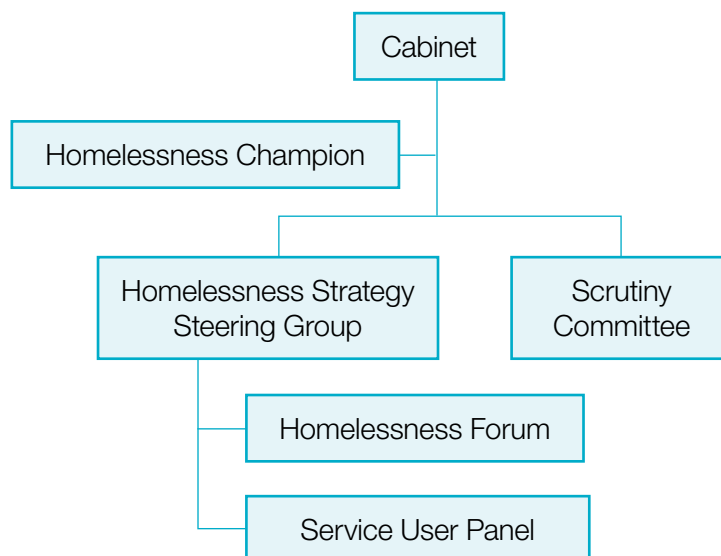
- Any other public authority
- Voluntary organisations
- Any other interested persons (including those with lived experience)

4.5 Service User Involvement

A panel of service user will be assembled annually to review the progress of delivering the homelessness strategy action plan, plus be consulted about the priorities for the year ahead. Their know-how will be used to ensure the activities carried-out, will have a relevant impact on the lives of those who it is intended to benefit.

Additionally, an annual service users survey will be carried-out, to seek views of what’s working well and what could be better in respect of the advice and assistance they receive to prevent or relieve homelessness.

Picture 2: Walsall Homelessness Strategy Governance Structure



5. Action Plan

Objective 1: Monitor the levels of homelessness

What	How	Who	When
Improve data collection about single, street and hidden homelessness, and use this to predict future demand	Introduce a new monitoring system akin to the CHAIN database used in Greater London, as part of the Localities partnerships	Local Housing Authority Public authorities Voluntary organisations	March 2019
Improve data collection on all homeless, or at risk of homelessness groups, and use this to predict future demand and potential solutions	Establish a data sharing protocol between key partners Provide homelessness trend information to relevant Locality panels	Local Housing Authority Public authorities Voluntary organisations Children's Services Schools and other educational institutions	March 2019
Extend current monitoring regime for commissioned domestic abuse services, to all current and future commissioned services for high risk groups of homelessness	Establish joint performance monitoring and management systems between all local commissioners and providers of services that tackle homelessness	Local Housing Authority Adult Social Care Children Services Public Health	March 2020
Eradicate inconsistency of data collection on levels of statutory homelessness	Provide training to all relevant local authority employees on new UK Government's performance monitoring requirements, alongside installation of new IT software system	Local Housing Authority	March 2018
Make better use of local and national data to better forecast future likely homelessness trends	Carryout a qualitative analysis of intelligence on (child) poverty, labour market factors, housing market factors, by ward area and household characteristic to better predict risks of homelessness	Local Housing Authority	March 2021

Objective 2: Prevent Homelessness

What	How	Who	When
Ensure there are a comprehensive range of activities in place for pre-crisis prevention of homelessness	<p>Update procedures for current initiatives that help people to remain in existing accommodation, along with improving measures for helping people to obtain alternative accommodation</p> <p>Maximise tenancy support services to reduce the levels of repeat homelessness</p> <p>Review and revise Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) policy on annual basis to ensure it retains a homelessness prevention focus</p>	Housing Providers Local Housing Authority Voluntary sector	June 2018
Improve system of evidencing the outcomes and results from homelessness prevention activities	Introduce a system to capture prevention outcomes accomplished by public authorities and voluntary organisations	Local Housing Authority Public Authorities Voluntary Organisations	June 2019
Increase the range of early homelessness prevention activities	Agree a joint pathway with criminal justice agencies to prevent offenders becoming homeless following release from secure estates	Local Housing Authority National Probation Service Community Rehabilitation Company	June 2019
	Promote the local arrangements as an exemplar of practice for how to prevent care leavers from becoming homeless	Local Housing Authority Children Services Voluntary Organisations	June 2018
	Agree a joint pathway with Armed Forces to prevent armed forces personnel from becoming homeless when leaving the Armed Forces	Local Housing Authority Public Authorities Voluntary Organisations SAFA and RAFA	June 2019
	Agree a joint pathway with NHS Trusts to prevent patients from becoming homeless when leaving hospital, based on guidance promoted by Department of Health	Local Housing Authority NHS Trusts Adult Social Care	June 2019
	Agree an evictions protocol with social landlords to monitor, manage and reduce the level of evictions	Local Housing Authority Children Services Voluntary Organisations	June 2019
	Establish an eviction prevention panel process as part of the existing Localities partnerships panels	Housing Associations Local Authority Children's Services Schools and other educational institutions All public sector agencies Voluntary organisations	September 2018

	Publicise the outcomes being achieved with victims of domestic abuse and how this helping to prevent homelessness	Local Housing Authority Adult Social Care	June 2019
	Agree a range of collaborative activities that can both prevent social care needs arising and homelessness occurring	Local Housing Authority Public Health	June 2019
	Develop a range of activities to prevent homelessness for people who are leaving a residential rehab for treatment of a substance dependency	Local Housing Authority Public Health	June 2019
Increase levels of homelessness prevention activity	Update housing advice information	Local Housing Authority	June 2018
	Provide training to employees from public authorities and voluntary organisations on homelessness prevention, securing accommodation when homeless, rights when homeless, help available when homelessness, and how to access it	Local Housing Authority Public Authorities Voluntary Organisations Educational Institutions	June 2020

Objective 3: Secure Accommodation for People Who Are Homeless

What	How	Who	When
Bring to an end the use of bed and breakfast accommodation to housing homelessness households	Formulate a policy for how temporary accommodation will be procured	Local Housing Authority	September 2018
	Formulate a policy for how temporary accommodation will be allocated	Local Housing Authority	September 2018
Re-structure current temporary accommodation portfolio	Carryout an options appraisal into future TA arrangements that ensures temporary accommodation is dispersed across the local authority area in a suitable mixture of locations, with suitable property types, and suitable numbers of bedroom, taking into account charges and rules of claiming help with housing costs	Local Housing Authority Housing Benefits Administrators Social Landlords Private Landlords	September 2019
Better understand the reasons behind the increase in the number of people who arrange their own temporary accommodation	Carryout an analysis of people who remain 'homeless at home', including their characteristics, causes of homelessness and experience while homeless	Local Housing Authority	September 2020
Adopt use of powers to make a private rented sector offer to homeless applicants owed the main housing (homelessness) duty	Formulate a policy, procedure, processes, and paperwork templates to ensure powers are used proportionally, consistently and fairly Improve standards in the private rented sector through the implementation of Selective Licensing	Local Housing Authority	September 2018
Improve how social housing is allocated	Amend Council's Housing Allocations Policy to reflect changes in law and practice	Local Housing Authority	December 2018
	Carryout an options appraisal for a common housing register and common housing allocations policy for all social housing in Walsall	Local Housing Authority Social Landlords	September 2019
	Improve performance monitoring and reporting on voids and lettings of social housing	Local Housing Authority Social Landlords	September 2020

Modernise housing support services for people who are homeless	Commission emergency accommodation provision that is accessible all year	Local Housing Authority Housing Benefit Administrators Public Health	September 2019
	Carryout a review of existing supported housing, consulting with service users and stakeholders, against the following standards: 1) Access 2) Physical condition 3) Support services 4) Evictions and exclusions 5) Move-on	Local Housing Authority Public Health Voluntary organisations	September 2018
	Carryout a formal evaluation of Housing First Pilot, to inform future commissioning strategies	Local Housing Authority Public Health Social Landlords	September 2020
	Merge funding for all homelessness specific housing support services into a single contract, that incorporates both emergency accommodation and supported housing, which operates to Housing First methods and is operated by a consortium of service providers	Local Housing Authority Housing Benefit Administrators Public Health Social Landlords Voluntary Organisations	September 2021

Objective 4: Support People Who Are, or Have Been, Homeless

What	How	Who	When
Invest further in supporting people who are risk of homelessness due to parental/ other family/friend exclusion	Promote the local arrangements as an exemplar of practice for how to help young adults who become homeless	Local Housing Authority Children Services Voluntary organisations CCG/Community Health National Probation Dudley Mental health	December 2018
	Integrate some homelessness officers into the locality working model	Local Housing Authority Children Services	December 2019
Ensure satisfactory support for victims of domestic violence, racial harassment and all hate crimes	Re-tender for women's refuge jointly with other domestic abuse services to deliver better value and quality for commissioners and service users	Local Housing Authority Children Services Public Authorities Voluntary Organisations Housing Associations	December 2020
	Carryout research into the causes and experiences of homelessness for people of a black or other minority ethnic origin, to inform future service provision	Local Housing Authority Public Authorities Voluntary Organisations Police NHS/Mental Health Trust	December 2021
Benchmark social landlords' activities for tackling homelessness to better qualify the value and impact of their contributions	Carryout a review of the following activities: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Board level commitment to preventing homelessness 2. Corporate objectives for tackling homelessness 3. Performance on key homelessness prevention factors (e.g. rent collection, tenant arrears, NTOs served, evictions, exclusions for housing register) 4. Approach to prevent money problems (e.g. arrears recovery and debt management) 5. Procedures to prevent anti-social behaviour, harassment and domestic abuse 6. Practices to prevent welfare and hardship issues arising (e.g. aids and adaptations) 7. Housing advice offered to prevent homelessness 8. Tenant support needs assessed and met to prevent homelessness 9. Gaps in services that need to be filled to prevent homelessness 10. Identifying BME communities needs to prevent homelessness 	Local Housing Authority Social Landlords	December 2020

Improve quality, effectiveness and value of community-based support for people who are homeless	Carryout a review of day services provided at the Glebe Centre for people who are homeless against the following standards: 1) Personalised 2) Deinstitutionalised 3) Inter-grated 4) Asset-based 5) Poverty informed	Local Housing Authority Voluntary Sector Community Health	December 2018
	Re-design day services contract and integrate with locality-based working, and to incorporate support with health needs, jointly alongside social care and housing needs	Local Housing Authority Public Health Adult Social Care	December 2019
	Recommission welfare and debt advice services	Local Authority	2019

Objective 5: Increase Resources for Tackling Homelessness

What	How	Who	When
Make best use of national and local government funding for tackling homelessness, to drive-up quality, value and effectiveness of outcomes in tackling homelessness	Establish a joint commissioning arrangement for funding for activities to tackle homelessness by pooling commissioning budgets, merge contracts, and align tendering of service provision, and jointly appraise service delivery	Local Housing Authority Adult Social Care Children Services Public Health	March 2019
	Funding from the Council's General Fund to be increased in-line with local rates of homelessness	Local Housing Authority	March 2018
	Guarantee all funding currently awarded by UK Government to tackle homelessness will be continued beyond current spending period by the local authority	Local Housing Authority	March 2020
	Work closely with WMCA partners to maximise funding opportunities, in particular access to national Housing First pilot monies	West Midlands Combined Authority	April 2018
Ensure adequate staffing levels to administer statutory homelessness duties	Maintain current number of employees contracted to administer homelessness duties	Local Housing Authority	March 2018
	Ensure management supervision of homelessness officers are retained by the local housing authority when some officers are deployed to work in localities	Local Housing Authority	March 2019
	Establish an additional post to co-ordinate overseeing the homelessness strategy, which can also incorporate responsibilities for having oversight of the housing allocations policy and tenancy strategy	Local Housing Authority	March 2020
Update IT software for monitoring performance and managing casework	Procure homelessness module for the Abris system from Civica	Local Housing Authority	March 2018
	Procure housing register, offering choice and promoting housing options module for the Abris system from Civica	Local Housing Authority	March 2019

Money, Home, Job

Walsall Council
Zone 1J
Civic Centre
Darwall Street
Walsall
WS1 1TP

Tel: 01922 655411
Email: Housing&WelfareSupport@walsall.gov.uk
Website: www.walsall.gov.uk/housing