Cheshire West & Chester Council

Review of Homelessness
June 2024

Building futures, opening doors

Cheshire West and Chester

Cheshire West and Chester Council
Homelessness Review 2024

Introduction to the borough

The borough of Cheshire West and Chester covers approximately 350 square miles and is the fourth largest unitary authority in the North West. The area is characterised by attractive countryside, varied landscapes and diverse settlements. This includes the historic City of Chester, industrial towns, market towns and rural hamlets. Around 361,694 people live in the borough, and over a quarter live in rural areas.

361,994 people lived in Cheshire West at the time of the 2021 census. The population is forecast to increase by more than 10% by 2038, with the greatest increase expected in those aged 65 or over. According to the 2021 Census around 8.8% of local residents were from Black and Minority Ethnic backgrounds, an increase on the 5.5% reported in 2011 but far lower than the 26.5% England average. Polish remains by far the most frequently spoken non-English language.

Whilst Cheshire West is an affluent borough the overall picture masks stark gaps between areas of prosperity and deprivation. The median local household income is £35,100 per year but, 17.7% of local households have an annual income of less than £20,000 compared to 17.5% nationally. Some 24,670 local people live in neighbourhoods ranked in the most deprived 10% in England and the number of local children in low-income families has increased houses from 8,322 in 2020/21, to 9,252. Local life expectancy is higher than the national average for both males and females.

Recent information shows that visits to foodbanks increased from 22,515 in 2020 and have remained high at 26,028 for 2022/23, the percentage of local pupils known to be eligible for free school meals increased from 13.3% in 2019 to 18.4% in 2022 and unemployment, which had fallen from to 2.7% in 2022, has increased to 4.4%.

Local housing market trends and data

The data is compiled both from the Cheshire West and Chester State of the Borough data dashboard and the Office of National Statistics Census information for 2021. Both data sets provide useful information on the borough and highlight some of the key trends and emerging themes.

- There are 163,876 dwellings in Cheshire West and Chester and an estimated 155,156 households.
- Of the 163,876 homes and dwellings in Cheshire West, 30.3% are rented, 31.2% are owned with a mortgage or loan and 37.1% are owned outright. 46,889 local people live alone.
- Almost a third of households (30%) are single-person households.
- The average property price in the borough in February 2024 is £265,000. Across the North West, the average house price in February 2024 was £214,000. This means that, in February 2024, Cheshire West and Chester had the fifth-highest average house price in the North West.
- Local house prices remain more than seven times local annual earnings.
- The average monthly rent for a ‘room’ in the private rental market is £433 compared to £495 in England.
- The average local authority rent in the borough for 2024/25 is £98.95, equating to £4,947.50 per year.

- On 1 May 2024, there were 6706 applicants registered on our housing waiting list, showing the extent of local demand for social rented housing.
- Between 2019 and 2024, 1,122 empty homes were brought back into use. This exceeded the target of 970.
- In the last five years over 8,306 new properties have been built in the borough, of which 2,419 (30%) have been affordable homes.
- In the period April 2020 -March 2024, 583 homes were built on Council owned land, of which 403 were affordable homes including 125 Council homes,
- A further 206 homes are under construction on Council-owned land, 113 of which are affordable homes including 44 Council homes,
- From April 2020 -March 2024, 122 units of accommodation have been delivered through stock acquisition and conversions, in the main for supported housing.
- A further council owned site has planning permission and will commence construction this year delivering 99 affordable homes.
- Since 1 April 2019, the Council has supported 726 households through the Disabled Facilities Grant, Home Safety Grants and Decent Home Loans to support them to remain in their current homes and live safely and independently.

Further information can be accessed via the Cheshire West and Chester State of the Borough Report Housing: State of the Borough dashboard | Cheshire West and Chester Council.

The Homelessness Review

What is a homelessness review?

The Homelessness Act 2002 requires every local authority to carry out a review of homelessness in its area every five years, to develop and publish a homelessness strategy based on this review, and to consult with other local statutory and voluntary organisations.

The legislation states that the homelessness review must consider the following:

1. Current and future levels of homelessness.
2. Activities which are carried out for any of the following purposes:
   a. Preventing homelessness.
   b. Securing that accommodation is available for people experiencing homelessness in the district and will be available for people in the district who may experience homelessness.
   c. Providing support for people in the district who:
      - Are experiencing homelessness.
      - May experience homelessness.
      - Have experienced homelessness and need support to prevent them from experiencing homelessness again.
3. Resources available to the housing authority, the social services authority for the district, other public authorities, voluntary organisations, and other persons for activities mentioned in (b).

The aims of a homelessness review

This review will provide a basis for a strategic approach to tackle and prevent homelessness. Data and intelligence will be used to explore the extent to which our communities are experiencing homelessness or at risk of becoming homeless. Key trends will be analysed to assess the extent of homelessness in the future.

The review will identify the nature and availability of support, what services are currently being provided and by whom, and identify what resources are available, to prevent and tackle homelessness.

Information gathered in the review will provide an evidence base to support the Council to understand the needs of residents who are experiencing homelessness. This homelessness review will form the principal element of the required evidence base for Cheshire West and Chester Council to develop its Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy.

The methodology

The review process sought to identify the needs of all people experiencing homelessness, and those likely to experience homelessness. This was achieved by compiling a detailed picture of the past, current, and future nature and levels of homelessness across the borough.

The information and evidence gathered for the review have come from a wide range of sources including:

- Homelessness Case Level Collection (H-CLIC) data
- Cheshire West and Chester data
- Data from Forfutures and other partner agencies
- Consultation feedback from stakeholders, customers, and staff.

This information provides a detailed picture of the levels and causes of homelessness across the borough and used together with demographic data, the review identifies unmet needs and future trends. Consultation with staff, partners, and customers has been critical to the review process and will continue to inform the development of the strategy and improvements to existing council services.

The Homeless Reduction Act 2017

The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 (HRA) was one of the biggest changes to the rights of people experiencing homelessness in England for many years. The Act placed new legal duties on local housing authorities and amended the existing homelessness legislation in the Housing Act 1996.

The HRA made the following changes:

- The HRA duties apply to all eligible applicants (i.e., on the basis of immigration status), and ignore intentionality and priority need. The Act requires a thorough assessment of homelessness applications and a personalised response; placing new duties on local authorities to properly assess the cause of homelessness, circumstances, and needs of all household members, including children.
- The HRA places renewed emphasis on prevention of homelessness; extending from 28 to 56 days the period in which a household is defined as “threatened with homelessness”. The Act places a new “prevention” and “relief” duty on local authorities to “take reasonable steps” to prevent the threatened or actual homelessness of anyone who is eligible and to develop and agree with applicants on a personalised plan of the steps that will be taken to prevent or relieve homelessness.

- If the relief duty expires (after 56 days) and the household is unintentionally homeless and in priority need, then the existing main rehousing duty applies, and they must be offered suitable settled accommodation (or temporary accommodation until a suitable offer of settled accommodation has been made).
- The HRA aims to encourage joint working to tackle homelessness by placing a new duty on public authorities, such as hospitals and prisons, requiring them to make a referral, with the individual's consent, to the local housing authority if someone they're working with appears to be experiencing homelessness or threatened with homelessness.

Measuring homelessness

By law, a homelessness review must consider current and likely future levels of homelessness.

When we hear the term homeless, we often think of people sleeping on the street, which is the most visible form of homelessness, however, all forms of homelessness will be considered as part of the review including statutory, street, and hidden homelessness. To develop a true picture of homelessness the following will be analysed:

1. Statutory homelessness

    a) The number of households eligible for assistance from the Council that are either already homeless or threatened with homelessness within 56 days.
    b) Of those how many were owed a homeless prevention duty for 56 days or a homeless relief duty for 56 days (some households will be owed both duties)
    c) The number of households placed in temporary accommodation.
    d) Where homelessness was not prevented or relieved the number of households that were made a main duty decision on the final duties owed

2. Prevention and relief activities outside the Homeless Reduction Act 17

3. The number of people sleeping rough

4. An estimate of the number of hidden homeless (people not recorded in official statistics).

National Context

This review is being conducted in a time of continuing and new challenges both locally and nationally. Homelessness has increased over the last several years nationally following a sustained period of government austerity coupled with a challenging, and increasingly unaffordable, housing market. Welfare reform and legislative changes alongside these factors create a difficult environment for tackling homelessness; this has been compounded by the impact of the pandemic and more recently the cost-of-living crisis.

2022-23 largely saw homelessness levels increasing from 2021-22. In England in 2022-23, 311,990 households had initial assessments for homelessness which is a 7% increase compared with the previous year. Of these, 298,430 households were assessed as owed a homelessness duty, due to being threatened with homelessness or already being homeless. This is up 6.8% from the previous year, and also 3.0% above the pre-COVID level in 2019-20. On 31 March 2023, 104,510 households were in temporary accommodation, an increase of 10% from the same period last year.

Local housing allowance (LHA) increased from 1 April 2024 after rates had been frozen for four years. The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) use LHA rates to calculate Housing Benefit for tenants renting from private landlords. LHA rates relate to an area in which a claim is made and are set at the lowest 30th percentile of market rents and are calculated by the Valuations Office Agency. As LHA has not kept pace with the market, it has resulted in an increasingly unaffordable private rented market for households on low incomes who are dependent either wholly or in part for assistance with their housing costs. At the same time, there has been an increase in the number of homelessness applications resulting from a loss of accommodation within the private rented sector, alongside an increase in the number of private landlords wishing to leave the market.

The Rough Sleeping Strategy (2018) has set out the Government's ambition to halve rough sleeping by 2022 and end it by 2027 through organisations and services working together in new ways. The sharp drop in rough sleeping registered in Autumn 2020 is likely to have reflected the extraordinary action taken during the early part of that year under the Everyone In programme to shelter people at risk of sleeping rough during the height of the pandemic. As the pandemic subsided during 2021 and into 2022, Everyone In arrangements began to lapse in many areas.

The rough sleeping snapshot for 2023 unfortunately, shows a national upward trend in the number of people living on the streets across England, with every region seeing an increase in numbers on the street compared to the previous year. The number of people estimated to be sleeping rough in England on a single night in Autumn 2023 was 3,898. This was an increase of 829 people or 27% from 2022.

Homelessness in Cheshire West and Chester

Cheshire West and Chester Council are required to provide homelessness statistics in the form of quarterly submissions to the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC). The statistics collected are the Homelessness Case Level Information Classification (HCLIC). These submissions were introduced in April 2018 to coincide with the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. The data recorded from HCLIC aims to be used to provide more detailed information on the causes and effects of homelessness, long-term outcomes and what works to prevent homelessness.

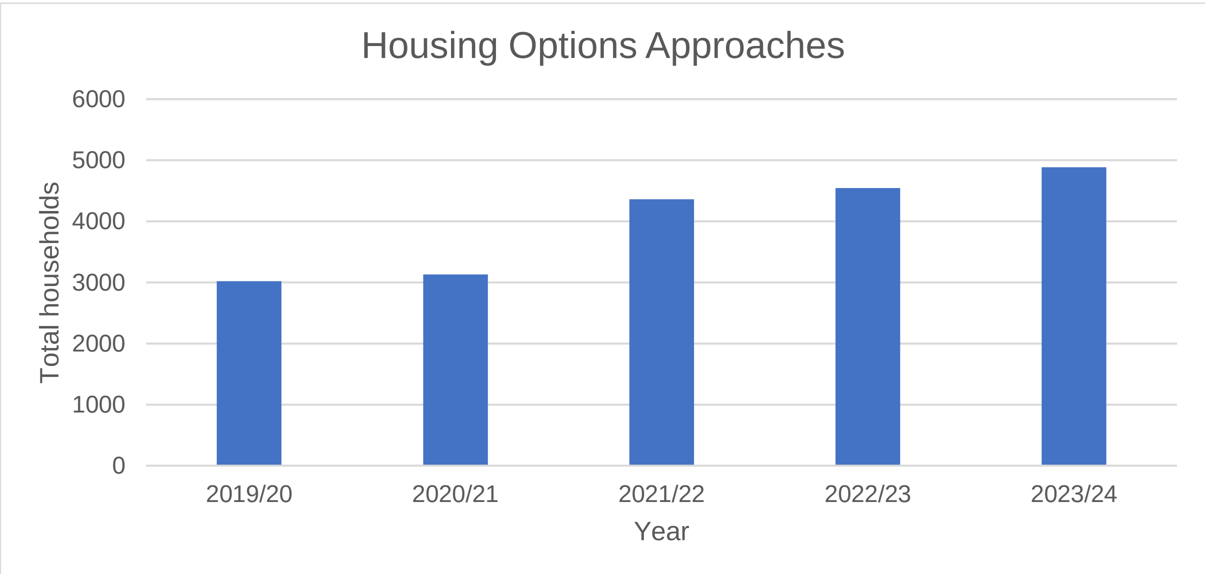
Demand on the Housing Options Service

The table below details the total number of approaches to the Housing Options service for the last five years:

Year	Total number of approaches
2019/20	3020
2020/21	3129
2021/22	4362
2022/23	4544
2023/24	4884

Source: CWAC data

Approach refers to when a customer has contacted the Council, and a homeless application has begun. The data shows that there has been a 62% increase in demand over the last five years. The highest increase in approaches was between the years 2020/21 and 2021/22 when there was a 39% increase in demand. This increase can be directly linked to the Covid-19 pandemic and the impact of emergency measures that were introduced.



Source: CWAC data

Duty to Refer

An important innovation brought in through the HRA was the Duty to Refer (DTR). In the interests of a prevention focused approach, this involves specified public agencies being mandated to notify the relevant local authority when they come into contact with a service user who is at risk of homelessness and therefore in need of housing assistance.

The table below shows the number of Duty to Refer notifications received over the last three years:

Referral into the authority	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
By a public body under the duty to refer	89	127	153
By an agency that is not a public body subject to the Duty to Refer	44	64	205
By another local authority: local connection referral	2	1	3
Total	**135**	**192**	**361**

Source: HCLIC

Duty to Refer notifications have increased significantly over the last 3 years, with the last 12 months seeing a 53% increase alone. The main referring agencies are criminal justice organisations and Adult Social Care.

The Commitment to Refer is a voluntary commitment that registered housing providers will refer an individual or household to a local housing authority if they are homeless or threatened with homelessness, thereby supporting the aims of the Homelessness Reduction Act and particularly the Duty to Refer. Locally within Cheshire West and Chester there has been a significant increase in referrals from agencies not subject to the Duty Refer and the increase could coincide with the work the Council has completed with the Homelessness Reduction Board to improve procedures for residents at risk of homelessness.

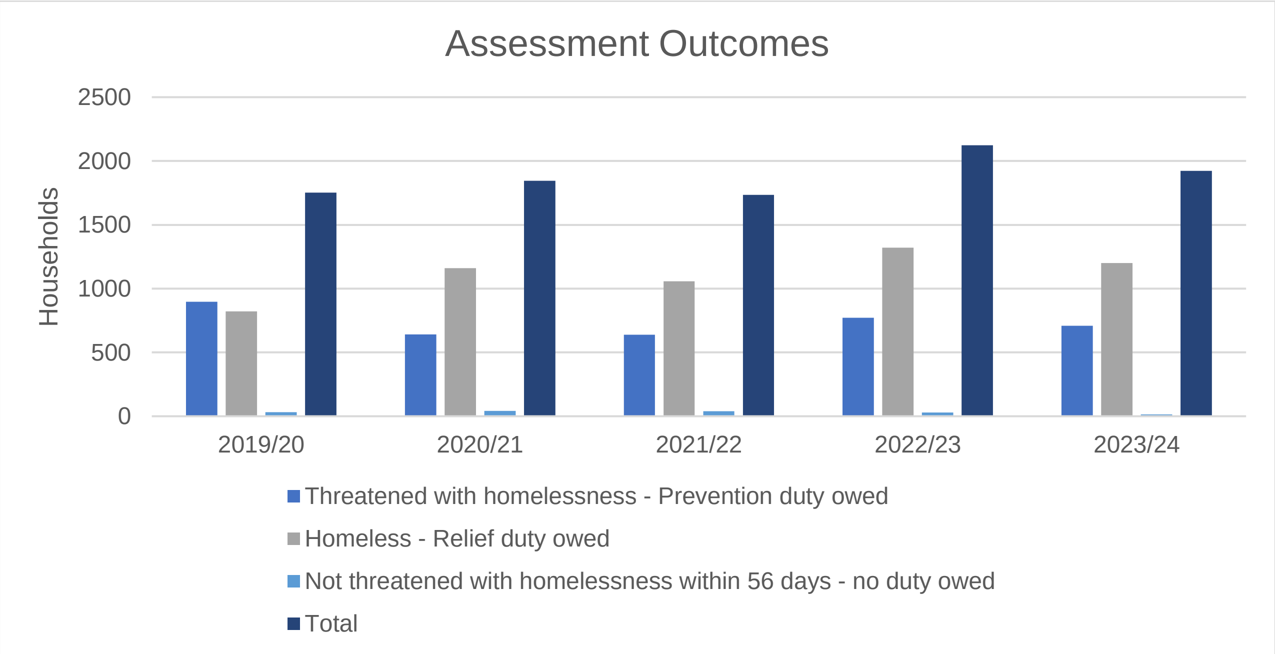
Homelessness Statistics and HCLIC data

Assessments
The data below analyses the assessments and outcomes recorded under the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.

Assessments	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Threatened with homelessness - Prevention duty owed	898	642	639	772	708
Homeless - Relief duty owed	821	1161	1,057	1,321	1,201
Not threatened with homelessness within 56 days - no duty owed	33	43	39	30	13
Total	**1,752**	**1,846**	**1,735**	**2,123**	**1,922**

Source: HCLIC

The number of annual assessments decreased by 9% in the last year. The graph below illustrates the assessment outcomes.



Source: HCLIC

Over the last four years, the majority of customers were owed a relief duty compared with the prevention duty.

The ratio between prevention and relief work in 2023/24 indicates that 37% of households were owed a prevention duty compared with 63% owed a relief duty. The national data for 2023/24 was not published at the time of completing this review; however, the ratio between prevention and relief for the North West in 2022/23 was 43% of households were owed a prevention duty, compared with 36% in Cheshire West, and 54% of households owed a relief duty compared with 62% in Cheshire West.

During 2019/20 the ratio between prevention and relief cases was equally split and this was mirrored within the North West statistics. However, it is likely the increase in customers presenting at the relief stage has changed over the last 4 years as a consequence of the pandemic when opportunities for prevention were greatly reduced. A larger percentage of customers present at the relief stage when insecure accommodation arrangements break down. It is likely that the service has not recovered from the impact of the pandemic.

Profile of Households Experiencing Homelessness

The family composition of households owed a prevention duty is detailed in the table below.

Household composition prevention duty	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Single	306	343	316
Couple/other	58	77	72
Households with children	275	352	320
Total	**639**	**772**	**708**

Source: HCLIC

In 2023/24 single people accounted for 45% of those owed a prevention duty and families accounted for 46% of those owed a prevention duty. Households with children presenting at prevention stages have remained consistently between 43% and 46% for the last 3 years and single households presenting at prevention stage have decreased from 48% to 45% over the last 3 years.

The family composition of households owed a relief duty is detailed in the table below.

Household Composition Relief Duty	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Single	837	968	901
Couple/other	46	58	57
Households with children	174	295	247
Total	**1057**	**1321**	**1205**

Source: HCLIC

Over the last three years the majority of households owed a relief duty were single people accounting for 75% in 2023/24. In total, single people account for 64% of all households owed a prevention or relief duty in 2023/24, and 63% the previous year.

Single households are over-represented at the relief stage in all years. Before the introduction of the HRA, statutory responses to homelessness have focused on families with children rather than single people, this may indicate that families are more likely to approach the service prior to experiencing homelessness than single people. It is also important to note that single people are more likely to be in insecure accommodation or their homelessness may be hidden, and as such their housing arrangements were more likely to have been impacted by the pandemic. It is also possible that it may be more difficult to prevent homelessness for single households due to the shortage of one-bedroom and affordable properties in social and private housing.

Age

The table below shows the age of the main applicant owed a prevention or relief duty over the last three years.

Age	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
16 - 17 years	17 (1%)	18 (1%)	14 (1%)
18 - 24 years	310 (18%)	376 (18%)	348 (18%)
25 - 34 years	528 (31%)	647 (31%)	545 (28%)
35 - 44 years	419 (25%)	548 (26%)	501 (26%)
45 - 54 years	239 (14%)	283 (14%)	266 (14%)
55 - 64 years	111 (7%)	145 (7%)	149 (8%)
65 - 74 years	53 (3%)	57 (3%)	69 (4%)
75+ years	18 (1%)	19 (1%)	21 (1%)

Source: HCLIC

The largest age group every year is those aged 25 – 34 years, followed by those aged 35 – 44 years. In 2023/24 people aged 18 – 34 years accounted for 46% of all customers. Younger people are more likely to struggle to find affordable housing options, particularly single under 35 years old who are subject to the shared room rate and lower Universal Credit entitlements.

Eligibility

The table below shows the reason for eligibility of the main applicant of those owed a prevention or relief duty for the last three years.

Reason for eligibility of main applicants owed a duty	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
British or Irish citizen, habitually resident in UK, Ireland, Channel Islands, or Isle of Man, or deported from another country	1,640	1,926	1,565
EEA citizen residing in the UK prior to 31 December 2020: A family member of one of the above groups	4	7	4
EEA citizen residing in the UK prior to 31 December 2020: other	5	5	6
EEA citizen residing in the UK prior to 31 December 2020: self-employed	1	1	4
EEA citizen residing in the UK prior to 31 December 2020: settled status	14	31	33
EEA citizen residing in the UK prior to 31 December 2020: worker	9	7	22
Non-UK: Granted refugee status	7	40	223
Non-UK: Indefinite Leave to Remain	10	32	64
Non-UK: Limited Leave to Remain	5	26	32
Non-UK: Other protection (e.g. humanitarian, discretionary, family members of NI and stateless persons under Immigration rules)	1	2	2
Other protection	0	15	0
Total	**1,696**	**2,092**	**1,955**

Source: HCLIC

British or Irish citizens, habitually resident in the UK represented the main reason for eligibility for homelessness assistance during 2021/22 and 2022/23, representing at least 92% of eligible households. However, during 2023/24 this has reduced to 80% of customers.

During 2021/22, ‘Non-UK: Granted refugee statuses represented just 0.4% of the reasons for eligibility for homeless assistance. The latest figures for 2023/24 demonstrate that ‘Non-UK: Granted refugee status’ now represents 11% of customers eligible for homeless assistance. Overall, during 2023/24 eligibility due to a refugee status represented 16% of all homeless households owed a duty.

Employment

The table below shows the total number of assessed households employment status.

Employment status of main applicants owed a duty	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Registered unemployed	528	582	638
Not working due to long-term illness / disability	332	417	384
Full-time employment	275	357	295
Part-time employment	148	215	236
Not seeking work / at home	79	121	81
Not registered unemployed but seeking work	72	85	90
Retired	61	60	67
Student / training	27	24	109
Other	135	171	28
Not known	39	61	27
Total	**1696**	**2093**	**1955**

Source: HCLIC

The most common employment status for lead applicants of households owed a prevention or relief duty was registered unemployed, accounting for 33% of households in 2023/24, this is a 5% increase since 2022/23.

During 2023/24 the second largest category was households where the lead applicant was not working due to long-term illness / disability, accounting for 20% of households. This was the same percentage as in 2022/23.

Support needs.

The table below shows the total number of assessed households who have an identified support need.

Support Needs	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Households with a support need	1,445	1,566	1,070
Total support needs	4,867	4,277	2,003

Source: HCLIC

Of the clients owed a duty by the Housing Options team during 2021/22, 85% had a support need, and in 2022/23 75% of households had a support need. At the time of completing this review the national data for 2023/24 was not published but for 2022/23 in the North West 57% of households owed a duty had a support need.

In 2023/24 a total of 2,003 support needs were identified for 1,070 households, this accounts for 56% of households owed a duty having a support need. This is a decrease of 26% of households having a support need from 2022/23. At the time of writing this review, further investigation is being completed to identify the reason for the reduction, but initial evidence suggests that it is a processing error within the ICT platform.

The nature of the identified support needs is detailed below.

Support Needs	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
History of mental health problems	965	942	468
Physical ill health and disability	584	596	340
At risk of / has experienced domestic abuse	440	387	190
Offending history	452	384	173
History of repeat homelessness	471	368	105
Drug dependency needs	206	170	99
History of rough sleeping	366	245	100
Alcohol dependency needs	173	151	90
Learning disability	330	249	62
Young person aged 18-25 years requiring support to manage independently	142	134	73
Access to education, employment or training	129	157	14
At risk of / has experienced abuse (non-domestic abuse)	235	160	42

At risk of / has experienced sexual abuse / exploitation	127	82	15
Old age	60	44	27
Care leaver aged 21+ years	58	55	24
Care leaver aged 18-20 years	20	25	16
Young person aged 16-17 years	22	22	15
Young parent requiring support to manage independently	33	24	21
Former asylum seeker	12	32	90
Served in HM Forces	42	50	17
Support needs-Difficulties budgeting	0	0	20
Support needs-Victim of modern slavery	0	0	2
Total	**4,867**	**4,277**	**2,003**

Source: HCLIC

The most frequently occurring support need is mental health, accounting for 23% of all declared support needs in 2023/24. Other frequently occurring support needs include physical ill health, domestic abuse, and offending history.

Reasons for Homelessness

The table below details the main causes of homelessness for those owed a prevention and relief duty.

Reason for homelessness	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Departure from institution: Custody / Look after child placement / Hospital	66	117	81
Domestic abuse – victim	236	296	210
End of private rented tenancy – assured shorthold tenancy	298	476	466
End of private rented tenancy – not assured shorthold tenancy	38	54	32
End of social rented tenancy	44	63	64
Eviction from supported housing	75	69	62
Family or friends no longer willing or able to accommodate	471	599	492
Home no longer suitable due to disability / ill health	0	0	4
Mortgage repossession or sale of owner occupier property	0	0	16
Non-racially motivated / other motivated violence or harassment	76	81	53
Relationship with partner ended (non-violent breakdown)	168	167	119
Required to leave accommodation provided by Home Office as asylum support	7	28	151
Unsuccessful placement or exclusion from resettlement scheme/sponsorship	0	0	81
Voluntarily left accommodation to relocate	0	0	5
Domestic abuse – alleged perpetrator excluded from property	0	0	29

Source: HCLIC

Since 2021 the main reason for homelessness in Cheshire West and Chester is due to family or friends no longer willing or able to accommodate, this initially could be linked to the impact of the pandemic. However, as the main driver for homelessness has remained consistent for the last three years it could now arguably be a result of the increased cost of living for most households, who are unable to financially support family members who are sofa surfing. During 2023/24 family or friend evicting accounted for 26% of households.

The end of private rented accommodation for the last three years has remained the second main reason for homelessness. For 2023/24 this accounted for 25% of households and has increased by 5% over the last three years.

The homelessness impacts of the Ukrainian and Afghan refugee crises, and wider asylum dispersal pressures, are demonstrated in the increase in households presenting at both the prevention and relief stage due to the household required to leave accommodation provided by the Home Office as asylum support and the breakdown of sponsorships. In 2023/24 this accounted for 12% of duties, whereas in 2021/22 it accounted for only 0.4% of duties owed. This increase in demand is likely to be linked to the change in government policies towards resettlement and the war in Ukraine where we are seeing an increase in refugees present as homeless.

Prevention Outcomes

The table below details the number of cases where the prevention duty came to an end during the year and the outcomes achieved.

Reason for prevention duty ending	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Secured accommodation for 6+ months	283	277	347
Homeless (including intentionally homeless)	186	226	239
Contact lost	56	52	41
56 days elapsed and no further action	113	87	66
Withdrew application / applicant deceased	5	11	25
No longer eligible	2	7	7
Refused suitable accommodation offer	3	1	7
Refused to cooperate	0	2	4
Total	**648**	**663**	**736**

Source: HCLIC

During 2023/24 of the 736 cases where the prevention duty ended, homelessness was prevented for 347 households, equating to a prevention rate of 47%, which is slightly below the North West average of 52% for 2022/23. However, it is a 5% increase for the Cheshire West and Chester prevention rate in 2022/23 which was 42%.

The table below displays the accommodation outcomes for successful prevention cases.

Prevention outcomes	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Moved to alternative accommodation	235	226	257
Stayed in existing accommodation	48	51	90
Total	**283**	**277**	**347**

Source: HCLIC

Over recent years the service has been much more successful at assisting households to secure alternative accommodation, rather than enabling households to remain in their existing accommodation. In 2022/23, of those cases prevention from homelessness, 82% were helped to secure alternative accommodation, this reduced to 74% during 2023/24. However, during 2023/24 26% of households were supported to remain in their existing accommodation, this is a 10% increase from the previous year.

The table below illustrates the prevention activity that resulted in homelessness being successfully prevented.

Prevention Activity	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Accommodation secured by local authority or organisation delivering housing options service	187	166	201
Helped to secure accommodation found by applicant, with financial payment	7	14	20
Helped to secure accommodation found by applicant, without financial payment	45	39	40
Negotiation / mediation / advocacy work to prevent eviction / repossession	11	12	19
Negotiation / mediation work to secure return to family or friend	7	10	20
Supported housing provided	12	4	5
Discretionary Housing Payment to reduce shortfall	0	3	3
Other financial payments (e.g. to reduce arrears)	1	3	5
Other	10	20	27
No activity – advice and information provided	3	6	6
Helped to secure suitable sponsorship or hosting placement in a private home	0	0	1
Total	**283**	**277**	**347**

Source: HCLIC

The main prevention activity is accommodation secured by the local authority or organisation delivering housing options service. This accounted for 58% of prevention activity during 2023/24.

Only 5% of prevention activity during 2023/24 was due to successful negotiation or mediation work to enable a return to family or friends accommodation. As family and friends evicting is the main cause of homelessness in the borough there is a need to have an enhanced focus on mediation and promoting planned moves.

The table below shows the type of accommodation secured under prevention activity.

Accommodation Outcome	**2021/22**	**2022/23**	**2023/24**
Social rented sector	166	173	194
Private rented sector	85	78	104
Staying with family	14	17	35
Staying with friends	3	2	2
Owner-occupier	4	0	1
Other	3	2	10
Not known	8	5	1
Total	**283**	**277**	**347**

Source: HCLIC

The majority of households whose homelessness was prevented were helped to access social housing and this has increased gradually over the last three years. The increase can be related to the changes to the Common Allocations Policy that awards a high-priority banding regardless of priority need.

Successful outcomes in the private rented sector have remained consistently between 28% and 30% of prevention outcomes. Only 11% of positive outcomes in 2023/24 had their homelessness prevented by staying with friends and family.

Relief Outcomes

The table below shows the reasons why the relief duty has ended during the year.

Reason for households relief duty ending	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Secured accommodation for 6+ months	401	405	421
56 days elapsed	552	656	776
Contact lost	142	155	147
Withdrew application / applicant deceased	50	69	59
Refused final accommodation	6	10	2
Intentionally homeless from accommodation provided	26	28	16
Local connection referral accepted by other LA	5	6	3
No longer eligible	18	16	4
Notice served due to refusal to cooperate	15	5	1
Not known	1	0	0
Total	**1216**	**1350**	**1429**

Source: HCLIC

In 2023/24 the relief duty ended for a total of 1429 households, of which 421 had accommodation secured – this indicates that of those households owed a relief duty homelessness was relieved for 29% of these households. At the time of completing the review, the national data for 2023/24 was not completed, however, the successful relief rate for the North West was 38%. This indicates that CWAC could be below the North West average by 9%. The data indicates that a greater focus on relief work is needed.

Loss of contact accounts for at least 10% of relief outcomes over the last three years. It is likely that this may be a result of the pressure on the service, but this will require some focus as it currently signifies no meaningful outcome has been achieved following the assessment.

The table below illustrates the relief activity for successful relief cases.

Relief activity	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Accommodation secured by local authority or organisation delivering housing options service	234	258	269
Supported housing provided	57	57	36
Helped to secure accommodation found by applicant, with financial payment	29	13	18
Helped to secure accommodation found by applicant, without financial payment	37	33	40
Other activity through which accommodation secured	36	35	44
No activity	8	9	14
Total	**401**	**405**	**421**

Source: HCLIC

The most common relief activity is accommodation secured by the Housing Option's team. The table below shows the accommodation secured under relief work.

Accommodation Outcome (Relief)	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Social rented sector	194	291	280
Private rented sector	70	76	78
Staying with family	18	15	28
Staying with friends	5	7	7
Owner-occupier	3	4	7
Other	11	9	21
Not known	100	3	0
Total	**401**	**405**	**421**

Source: HCLIC

In 2023/24, 67% of households had their homelessness relieved through being helped to access social housing, followed by accessing the private rented sector (19%).

The most successful way that the council is currently able to prevent and relieve homelessness is through an offer of social housing and private rented accommodation.

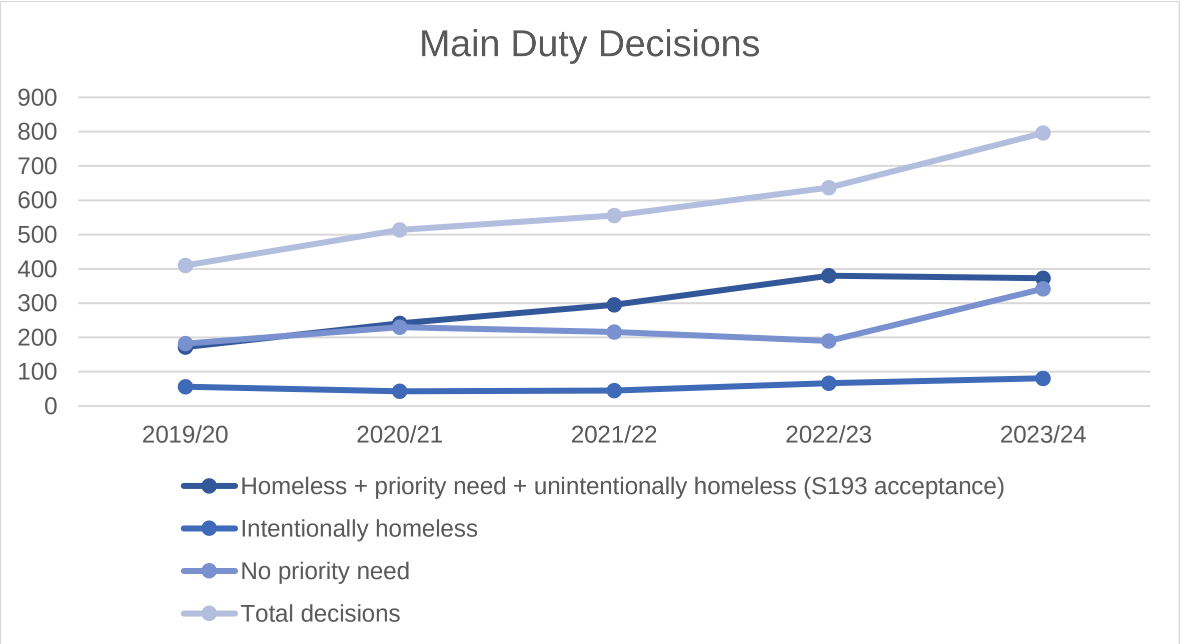
Main Duty Decisions

The table below details the number of main duty decisions for households where homelessness could not be prevented or relieved. The table displays five years' worth of data as it is important to review pre-pandemic.

Main Duty Decisions	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Homeless + priority need + unintentionally homeless (S193 acceptance)	172	241	295	380	373
Intentionally homeless	56	43	45	67	81
No priority need	182	230	216	190	342
Total decisions	**410**	**514**	**556**	**637**	**796**

Source: HCLIC

The graph below illustrates that the number of main duty decisions has been steadily increasing over the last five years. Over the last two years there has been an increase in intentionally homeless and no priority need decisions and a 13% decrease in full duty acceptances. During 2023/24 no priority need decisions increased by 13%.



Source: HCLIC

Of the original 1,909 households owed a prevention or relief duty in 2023/24, 797 households (42%) went on to have a main decision made. This included 373 households (47%) being owed a full duty (s193), and 81 households (10%) being considered intentionally homeless. In 2022/23 60% of households were owed a full duty (s193), and 11% were considered intentionally homeless.

The table below shows the priority need reason for accepted cases.

Priority Need	**2021/22**	**2022/23**	**2023/24**
Household includes dependent children	108	154	122
Physical disability / ill health	39	50	54
Mental health problems	46	68	63
Household includes a pregnant woman	5	10	17
Domestic abuse	24	21	57
Young applicant	5	2	0
Old age	3	0	0
Homeless because of emergency	3	1	0
Other	30	47	5
Vulnerable with children	32	27	0

Source: HCLIC

Households with dependent children make up the largest priority group, followed by vulnerability due to mental health, physical health, and fleeing domestic violence. This data pattern is the same for the past three years.

The table below illustrates the reasons for the main duty decisions ending.

Reason for End of Main Duty	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Housing Act 1996 Pt6 social housing offer - accepted	209	227	295
Housing Act 1996 Pt6 social housing offer - refused	7	13	15
Private rented sector offer - accepted	15	11	8
Private rented sector offer - refused	0	0	6
Voluntarily ceased to occupy	14	15	22
Refused suitable TA offer, withdrew or lost contact	15	17	18
Became intentionally homeless from TA	9	14	24
Ceased to be eligible	3	0	0
Not known	0	0	0

Source: HCLIC

Over the past three years, at least 76% of all main duties were ended through an offer of social housing. The number of duties ending due to voluntarily ceasing to occupy, Housing Act 1996 Pt6 social housing offer refusal, and becoming intentionally homeless from temporary accommodation have all gradually increased over the past three years.

Temporary Accommodation

This section explores the use of temporary accommodation in Cheshire West and Chester.

Temporary accommodation is temporary housing for people who are experiencing homelessness whilst they work with the Housing Options team to secure suitable permanent accommodation. Temporary accommodation is offered to customers when they are considered to be in priority need and homeless. The Council uses a range of properties as temporary accommodation and also uses hotel accommodation to meet the demand.

The council currently provides 57 units of dispersed temporary accommodation in Chester, Ellesmere Port, and Northwich. Support for people in temporary accommodation is provided by Forfutures as part of the homelessness support contract. The types and locations of temporary accommodation are listed below.

Area	Type	Units
Chester	Block of self-contained flats	13
Chester	Self-contained flats	5
Chester	Family house	1
Chester	Shared house	8
Ellesmere Port	Self-contained flats	20
Northwich	Self-contained flats	8
Winsford	Family house	1
Winsford	Self-contained flat	1
	Total	**57**

Source: CWAC data

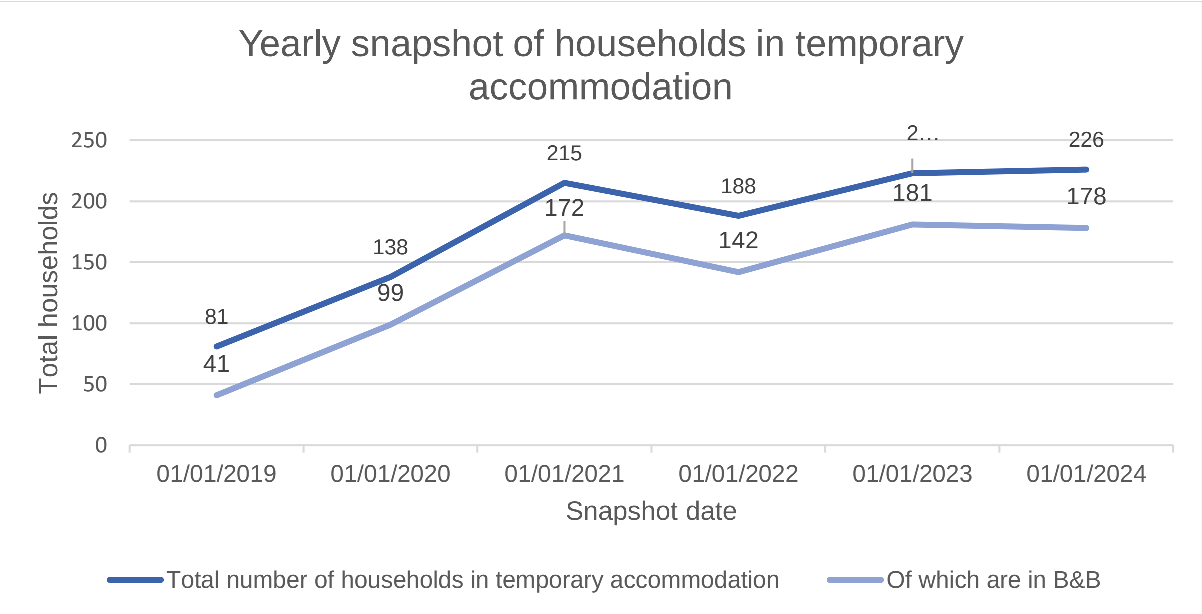
The table below shows the number of households accommodated in temporary accommodation at the end of January for the past six years, including the number of households who were placed in hotels. The analysis includes 2019 and provides an indication for temporary accommodation numbers before the pandemic.

Year	Total number in temporary accommodation at end of January	Of which are hotel accommodation	
		Number	%
January 2019	81	41	51%
January 2020	138	99	72%
January 2021	215	172	80%
January 2022	188	142	76%
January 2023	223	181	81%
January 2024	226	178	79%

Source: CWAC data

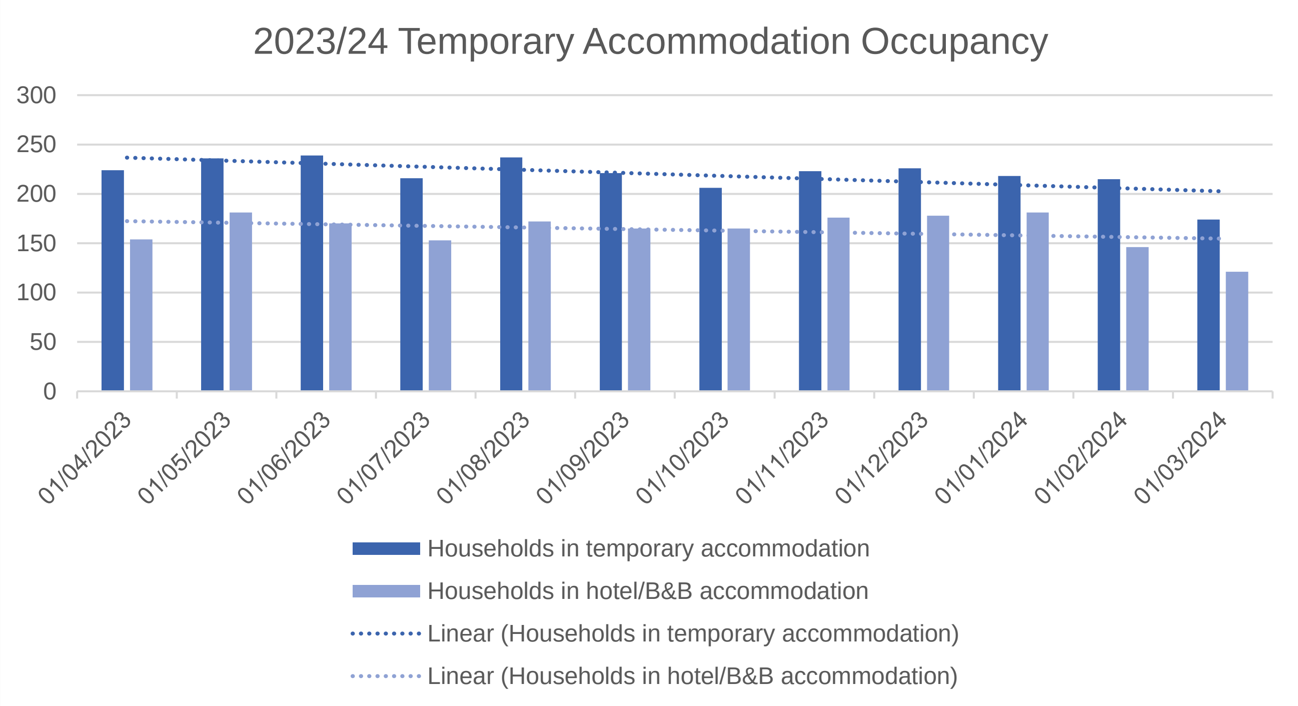
The number of households in temporary accommodation at the end of January each year has increased significantly since January 2019, peaking recently in January 2024, representing a 179% increase in demand over five years. There has been a 64% increase in demand for temporary accommodation between January 2020 and January 2024, January 2020 representing the year the pandemic restrictions began.

The graph below illustrates that although total numbers in temporary accommodation have grown exponentially and rapidly following the pandemic, it is clear that the Council has not acquired temporary accommodation units to keep up with demand, relying more and more on hotel provision.



Source: CWAC data

The graph below illustrates the temporary accommodation bookings for 2023/24. The Trend lines show total temporary accommodation demand is beginning to decrease.



Source: CWAC data

For the last three years, the Council has booked hotel accommodation through a Dynamic Purchasing System. This allows the team to create blook bookings with hotels that are considered the Council's preferred suppliers. This means the hotels that are used for bookings meet the Council's health and safety requirements. Block bookings guarantee the rooms at a set price.

The below table displays the weekly snapshot for households in hotel accommodation for the past 12 months. The snapshot is taken each Wednesday throughout the year. At the start of April 2024, 161 households were in hotel accommodation, of which 131 were single households (81%), 9 couples (6%), and 21 families (13%).

The highest number of households placed in hotel accommodation during 2023/24 was recorded on 10 January 2024, when 197 households were accommodated, of which 160 were single households (81%), and 21 families (11%). Hotel placements have begun to decrease during 2024, with a 32% reduction in demand between January 2024 and March 2024.

		Household Type		
Snapshot Date	**Total number of households in hotels**	**Single**	**Couple / Other**	**Families**
29/03/2023	180	148	10	22
05/04/2023	167	137	12	18
12/04/2023	168	139	11	18
19/04/2023	154	125	10	19
26/04/2023	149	124	11	14
05/05/2023	157	135	9	13
10/05/2023	167	141	9	17

17/05/2023	167	140	8	19
24/05/2023	167	139	8	20
31/05/2023	181	153	7	21
07/06/2023	179	146	7	26
14/06/2023	171	136	8	27
21/06/2023	165	140	6	19
28/06/2023	175	147	7	21
05/07/2023	178	146	9	23
12/07/2023	186	150	12	24
19/07/2023	177	143	9	25
26/07/2023	164	131	9	24
02/08/2023	159	125	10	24
09/08/2023	164	122	8	34
16/08/2023	171	120	8	43
23/08/2023	170	124	7	39
30/08/2023	172	127	8	37
06/09/2023	177	131	7	39
13/09/2023	187	138	10	39
20/09/2023	176	132	9	35
27/09/2023	171	122	11	38
04/10/2023	170	125	11	34
11/10/2023	166	120	10	36
18/10/2023	157	121	10	26
25/10/2023	166	132	8	26
01/11/2023	163	133	9	21
08/11/2023	160	132	9	19
15/11/2023	157	126	10	21
22/11/2023	163	132	10	21
29/11/2023	171	138	10	23
06/12/2023	175	138	11	26
13/12/2023	176	140	15	21
20/12/2023	176	143	15	18
27/12/2023	180	150	14	16
03/01/2024	177	144	14	19
10/01/2024	197	160	16	21
17/01/2024	195	159	15	21
24/01/2024	163	131	12	20
31/01/2024	177	145	14	18
07/02/2024	174	141	15	18
14/02/2024	165	134	16	15
21/02/2024	163	134	15	14
28/02/2024	154	122	15	17
06/03/2024	139	112	16	11
13/03/2024	135	107	15	13
20/03/2024	127	101	12	14
27/03/2024	132	106	12	14

Source: CWAC data

Further analysis of the outcomes for those households placed in hotels during 2023/24, shows that 142 households were rehoused by a registered provider, 41 households accessed the private rented sector, 67 households accessed supported housing or refuge, and 49 households returned to family and friends. Unfortunately, 190 households placed during the year went on to be excluded from hotels. This demonstrates the unsuitability of hotel accommodation for households especially those with complex needs.

The table below illustrates the cost of hotel accommodation for the last five years. Expenditure on hotel provision has increased by 341% during this time.

Year	Hotel Spend
2019/20	£993,960.76
2020/21	£3,911,649.59
2021/22	£2,938,350.84
2022/23	£3,512,146.74
2023/24	£4,387,910.47

Source: CWAC data

In addition to the hotel costs, there are other associated costs. These costs include:

- Security costs (total cost for security in 2023/24 was £515,287)
- Staff time in making placements and managing hotel bookings.
- Staff time in managing the neighbourhood issues, public meetings, increase in complaints and Freedom of Information requests.

Rough sleeping

Rough sleeping is defined by the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) as:

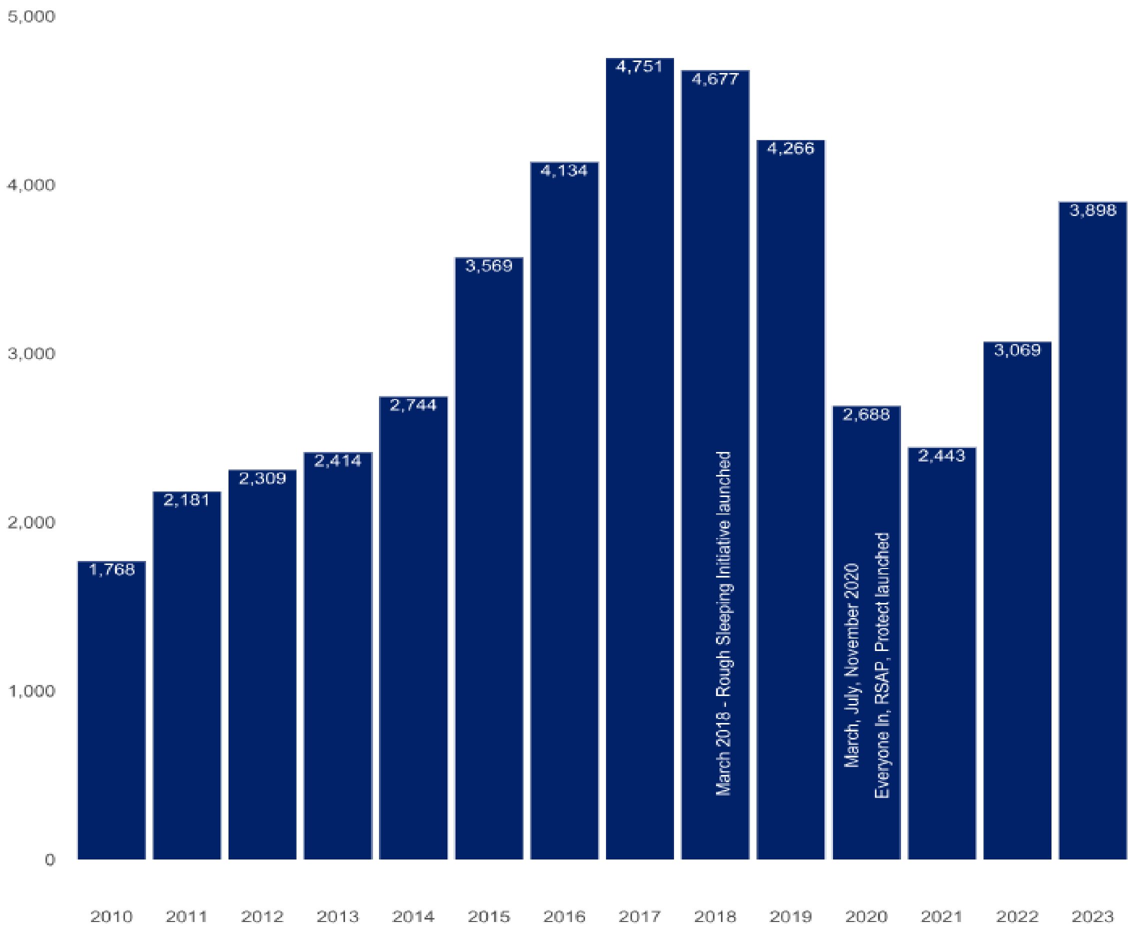
1. People sleeping, about to bed down (sitting on/in or standing next to their bedding) or actually bedded down in the open air (such as on the street, in tents, doorways, parks, bus shelters or encampments).
2. People in buildings or other places not designed for habitation (such as stairwells, barns, sheds, car parks, cars, derelict boats, stations, or “bashes” which are makeshift shelters often comprised of cardboard boxes).

Official Rough Sleeper Count

Once a year every local authority is required to submit an official figure of the number of rough sleepers found on a single night or to submit an estimate. The estimate is based on local information and intelligence being available.

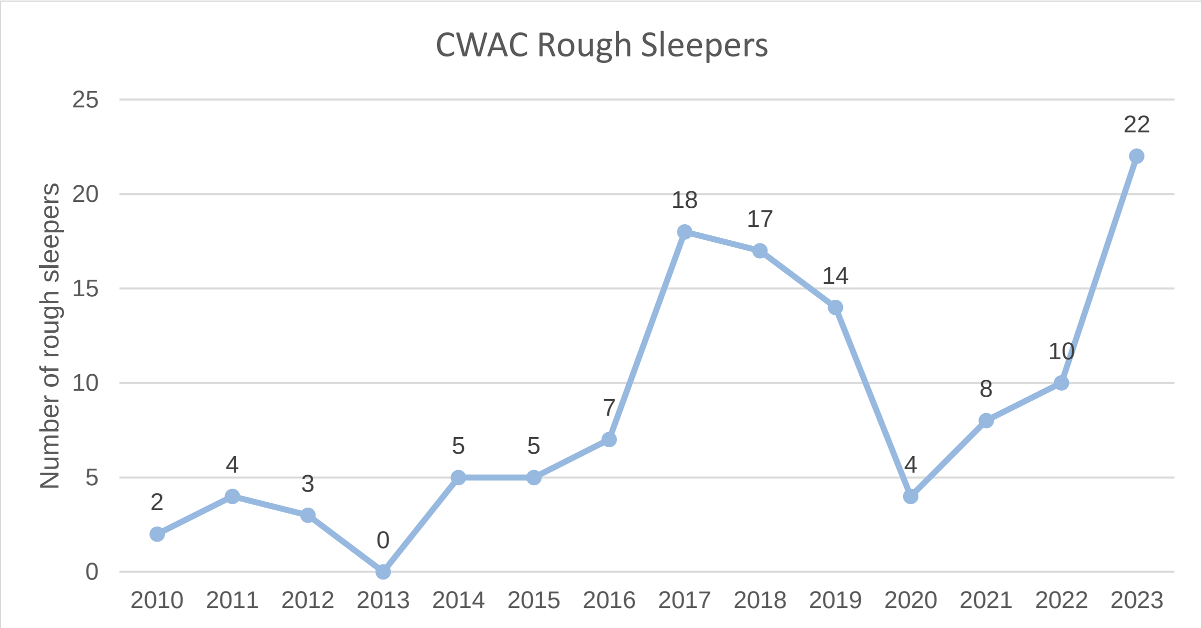
The graph below shows the number of people sleeping rough on a single night across England using the annual count/estimate. The graph below is taken from DLUHC Annual Rough Sleeping Snapshot Report 2023.

Estimated Number of People Sleeping Rough on a Single Night in Autumn since 2010



Source: Department of Levelling Up, Housing, and Communities

The graph below details the number of rough sleepers found/estimated since 2010 in Cheshire West and Chester on a single night in Autumn.



Source: Department of Levelling Up, Housing, and Communities

Last year, Cheshire West and Chester's autumn single-night snapshot of people sleeping rough that was taken on 9 November 2023 found 22 people sleeping rough, which was up by 12 people from 2022. This is a significant rise and unfortunately follows a national upward trend in the number of people living on the streets across England with every region seeing an increase in numbers on the street compared to the previous year. The number of people estimated to be sleeping rough in England on a single night in Autumn 2023 was 3,898. This was an increase of 829 people or 27% from 2022.

Even though the rough sleeping estimate in England for 2023 has risen from the previous year it remains lower than the peak in 2017 when 4,751 people were estimated to be living on the streets. The 2023 count is also lower than in 2019, before the COVID-19 pandemic, but remains higher than in 2010 when the snapshot approach was first introduced.

In Cheshire West and Chester, rough sleeping data for October and November 2023 shows an increase in the number of rough sleepers being found in any one day. In October numbers ranged from 5 to 24 (an average of 16 per day) and in November numbers ranged from 4 to 22 (an average of 11 per day). In December and January, numbers went down when they ranged from 2 to 10 (an average of 4 per day) and from 2 to 14 (an average of 7 per day).

Outreach data

The homeless support service, which includes outreach services, is provided by Forfutures on behalf of the Council. The Outreach team works to identify and support rough sleepers to access appropriate services, including the Housing Options team. The Outreach team currently operates on a rota basis 7 days a week. The Outreach team plans their sessions based on intelligence and will cover all areas of the borough, alongside a regular route through Chester City Centre.

The below table displays the areas within the borough where rough sleepers have been found, alongside the geographical spread. Chester City Centre has the highest number of rough sleepers due to good transport links, street activities, well-established services and charities available for rough sleepers to access.

Location	Number of confirmations (contacts not individuals) 23-24
Chester city centre	416
Chester outer	134
Ellesmere Port	140
Northwich	60
Winsford	23
Frodsham or Helsby	3
Neston	2
Malpas	1
Kelsall	1
Farndon	1
TOTAL	**781**

Source: CWAC data

Between April 2023 and March 2024, the Outreach team have made contact with 479 (different) people rough sleeping across the borough. The majority of rough sleepers are verified in Chester (60%), followed by Ellesmere Port (24%), Northwich (10%) and Winsford (5%). In line with the national statistics, the majority of rough sleepers in CWAC are male (82%) and females make up 18% of rough sleepers in the borough. The age range of rough sleepers is 17 to 73 and the average age of a rough sleeper in the borough is 37.

The average number of new rough sleepers each month was 30, whereas 7 were considered to be long term and 17 were defined as returners to rough sleeping. The number of people from outside CWAC, foreign nationals, and people leaving asylum seeker accommodation were all increasing towards the end of 23/24.

The Multi-Agency Rough Sleeping Partnership (MARS)

The Multi-Agency Rough Sleeping (MARS) project was developed in November 2020 to enable the Council and partners to provide a multi-agency approach to support those individuals experiencing street homelessness. MARS is a group made up of partners from statutory and third-sector agencies involved with entrenched rough sleepers in the borough.

The key focus of MARS is to build a person-centred trauma-informed approach with the right agencies to ensure that the best and most suitable outcomes for the clients are achieved, MARS works with those individuals who are not engaging with services and have the most entrenched behaviours. They are most likely to have several complex issues that require a joined-up and multi-agency response and action plan. The aim of the meeting is to agree on an action plan for each individual on a case-by-case basis looking at the best pathway to accommodation and support.
MARS originally ran as a pilot for six months, and following a review has been continued using Rough Sleeping Initiative (RSI) funding. The MARS review identified the following positive outcomes:

- Clients sustaining accommodation.
- Engaging with drug and alcohol services
- Working with Forfutures and the Housing Options team.
- Engaging with mental health services
- Attending medical appointments
- Increased bidding on West Cheshire Homes

Between April 2023 and March 2024, 105 cases were considered by the MARS partnership, of which over 50% have had positive accommodation outcomes. Only 12% were still rough sleeping at the end of the year.

SWEP (Severe Weather Emergency Protocol)

Although no legal duty or requirement there is a widely recognised humanitarian obligation on councils to do all they can to prevent deaths and serious harm on the streets, which is why councils and local partners, including faith and community groups, work together to provide emergency provision during periods of cold or severe weather. SWEP is a locally agreed procedure and offer to minimise harm or death to anyone who might be sleeping rough, through the provision of emergency accommodation to support someone off the streets immediately.

The principle aim of SWEP is to prevent loss of life and the suffering attached to living in extreme temperatures for people experiencing street homelessness. The secondary aim is to enable partner organisations to make the best use of the opportunity to engage with people experiencing long-term rough sleeping who are normally resistant to coming indoors. It normally operates between November and March; however, increasingly warmer summers are leading to SWEP provision during hotter months. In Cheshire West and Chester, SWEP is triggered when the forecasted 'feels like' temperature is zero degrees Celsius for at least a two-hour period for one night in either Northwich or Chester or severe warning warnings.

SWEP Provision

Between 2018 and 2020, the Council worked with partners and local churches in Chester to provide 'Pop Up' night shelters. Churches provided a suitable space that would accommodate up to 12 people with access to a kitchen and toilet facilities. Forfutures managed access to the shelters and provided staff overnight. Many volunteers assisted with providing an evening meal, breakfast, and hospitality. What developed was a positive joined-up partnership approach to tackling rough sleeping which supported one-to-one engagement with clients.

During the pandemic, the 'Pop Up' night shelters were deemed unsafe due to their communal nature, so they were stopped. Since then, the SWEP offer of accommodation has been hotel rooms and emergency beds within supported provision. Alternative provision and continued use of beds within supported accommodation are planned for use in winter 2024.

The below table illustrates the SWEP offers made over the past two winters.

	2022/23	2023/24
Number of times SWEP activated November	47	35
Total Number of people who were offered provision	114	137
Number of people who were offered and did not access provision	13	33
Number of people who accepted a SWEP offer at least once	101	104
Number of people with no local connection who accessed the provision	14	18

Source: Outreach data

No customer who required a SWEP offer was refused accommodation; this included our most complex customers who often have exhausted all previous offers.

Rough Sleeping Data Linking Research

The Council carried out a piece of research linking rough sleeping and homelessness data to explore user journeys between 1 January 2023 and 31 December 2023.

The research objectives were:

- To explore user journeys through statutory homelessness and rough sleeping activity, identifying system gaps in preventing rough sleeping and identifying if groups of people are not using support that they are entitled to.
- To identify whether any groups of people sleeping rough are systematically included/excluded from homelessness data.

The main findings were:

- 4860 households approached Housing Options for housing advice and homelessness support and were recorded in the homelessness dataset.
    - 3514 were single people.
- 2000 households made a homeless application.
    - 1286 were single people.
- 437 people were recorded in the rough sleeping dataset, of which 370 people (85%) were also recorded in the homelessness dataset.
- Of the 370 people recorded in both datasets:
    - 288 people (78%) approached the council for homelessness support before being seen by the rough sleeping outreach team.
    - 252 people (68%) made a homeless application.
    - 22 people (6%) were found to be in priority need and not intentionally homeless.
    - Of these 22, over half (13 people) approached the council for homelessness support again and went on to sleep rough again another 4 times on average
- 67 people were found on daily outreach patrols and recorded in the rough sleeping dataset but were not recorded in the homelessness dataset within the 12 months. There may have been contact outside the 12-month research period.

Gender analysis shows an equal split between males and females for all households that approach Housing Options for housing advice or a homeless application. When the household groups are split the data shows that for single people that make a homeless application you are more likely to be male and even more so if you are a rough sleeper.

Age analysis shows that the risk of rough sleeping goes down for the younger age groups 18-30 but goes up for ages 31 to 60. The risk is lower for the over 60 age group. The data shows that the 41-50 age group makes up a quarter of the people found rough sleeping who do not approach Housing Options which is much higher when compared with those that do approach Housing Options.

It is possible to show that people found rough sleeping are more likely to approach Housing Options for advice if they have been in a relationship breakdown, suffered violence, or were required to leave Home Office accommodation.

Most people in the research had approached the council for homelessness support before they went on to sleep rough. Only 48 people (11%) were known to the rough sleeping outreach team before they approached Housing Options for homelessness support. Overall, the research found an increased likelihood of going on to sleep rough after approaching the council for homelessness support for the following groups and circumstances:

- Males
- UK nationals
- Aged 31-40
- Family eviction led to homelessness.
- Mental health issues.

Hidden Homelessness

Many people who experience homelessness do not show up in official figures. This is known as hidden homelessness.

There is no government definition of 'hidden homelessness' but it can be described as people who may be considered homeless but whose situation is not 'visible' either on the streets or in official statistics. Examples could include:

- Households living in severely overcrowded conditions.
- Sofa surfing with friends or family
- Do not have the resource or financial means to avoid their current situation.
- Those who meet the legal definition of homelessness but have not been provided with accommodation by the local authority (because they do not qualify or because they have not approached a local authority for assistance)
- People on the margins of homelessness - those who are precariously housed in insecure and unsatisfactory conditions.

This definition captures a wide variety of situations ranging from sofa surfing to rough sleeping. People who are experiencing hidden homelessness frequently don't identify themselves as experiencing homelessness. This is often because they don't see themselves as a "stereotypical homeless person", typified by rough sleeping. An estimate by Shelter in 2018 records that while 4,500 people were sleeping rough in Britain, more than 300,000 were in hostels, temporary shelters or unsuitable and overcrowded accommodation. These figures do not include those sofa-surfing who are not registered by local authorities as needing housing assistance.

To measure the scale of hidden homelessness within Cheshire West and Chester, HCLIC data has been reviewed to consider the households that have approached the Council for assistance from an insecure housing arrangement. The table below displays the accommodation arrangements at the time of application for households over the past four years.

Accommodation at time of application	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Living with family	348	371	369	461
No fixed abode	361	393	330	283
Living with friends	149	154	121	185
Other / not known	157	144	60	82

Source: HCLIC data

Households that were living with family when they approached the Council for assistance increased by 32% between 2019 and 2023. Households that were living with friends when they approached the Council for assistance have increased by 53% over the last 12 months. Given that this data only records those who have approached the local authority for assistance, the scale of the hidden homelessness issue in the borough is likely to be much higher.

A further method to review hidden homelessness would be the housing register as it gives good insight into the level of housing need and circumstances in the borough. The latest Common Allocations Policy was introduced in April 2021.

The policy operates a reduced banding system. Band A continues to be awarded to those customers with the most urgent housing need and Band B is awarded to customers with a high housing need. A Housing Options Band (HOB) is awarded to those customers who are considered to have no statutory housing need; however, the group will be sent details about alternative housing options, including home ownership and social housing properties that have not been allocated to anyone in the bidding bands A and B.

Homeless customers benefited from the changes made to the policy, as regardless of priority need status, they will be awarded a priority Band B as long as they satisfy the requirements of the register. Previously homeless customers deemed non-priority would be awarded a Band C.

The below table displays the number of households registered on the housing register on 31 March 2024. The largest group is the households within the HOB banding (73%), this would be the banding that would capture some types of hidden homelessness.

Priority Banding	**Number of households**
Band A (urgent housing, medical need, or homeless)	240
Band B (high housing need, risk of homelessness, overcrowded, no access to facilities, high medical need)	1,589
Housing Options Band (no statutory housing preference)	4,906
Total	**6,735**

Source: CWAC data

Unfortunately, not everyone in housing need registers for social housing but looking at this data does indicate that there may be some people who are homeless but have found temporary solutions for their circumstances.

Future levels of homelessness

Future levels of homelessness are difficult to predict, however, research carried out in 2023 by charity Crisis predicts that baseline forecasts show core homelessness rising significantly in the immediate future, with overall core homelessness in 2024 one-fifth higher than 2020 levels. Current drivers of these increases relate primarily to inflation squeezing real incomes and increasing poverty and destitution, alongside rising private rents and evictions, and declining social rented lettings.

The latest annual statistics released by DLHUC for statutory homelessness assessments in England between 1 April 2022 and 31 March 2023, show homelessness is increasing nationally. Initial assessments in England for 2022/23 are up 7% from the previous year. Households who are owed a homelessness duty due to being threatened with homelessness or already homeless are up by 6.8% from the previous year, and this is also 3% above the pre-COVID level in 2019/20. Notably, there has been an increase in the number of households (with and without children) owed a homelessness duty due to the end of an assured shorthold tenancy. In particular, large increases were seen at the end of assured shorthold tenancies due to landlords wishing to sell or re-let properties. Consequently, the statistics are confirming that homelessness is on the increase.

During the pandemic, the government introduced emergency legislation and powers to protect and manage everybody affected by the pandemic, in order to protect those at greatest risk. In March 2020, the government provided a clear directive to ensure all people experiencing rough sleeping were accommodated under ‘Everyone In’. The initiative was undertaken to protect people experiencing rough sleeping, particularly those who were at increased risk of severe illness, with the aim of keeping them safe and reducing the wider transmission of COVID-19. In order to ensure that social distancing could be maintained, and people could safely self-isolate, it was necessary that any offer of accommodation should be self-contained. While the directive has come to an end nationally, Cheshire West and Chester have continued to operate locally an ‘Everyone In’, with local processes only changing in April 2024. The impact of the ongoing application locally of ‘everyone in’ has resulted in significant increases in the numbers of people accessing emergency accommodation. As we slowly return to pre-covid working arrangements we may see changes in demand.

Locally, the end of private rented accommodation for the last three years has remained the second main reason for homelessness in the borough. This is reflected nationally for households owed the prevention duty during 2022/23. Eviction action reduced significantly during the pandemic, but it has been rising since June 2021 when temporary measures to prevent evictions ended. There may be a further increase in private sector evictions ahead of the ending of no-fault evictions, whereby private landlords will no longer be able to seek possession of their property by serving a section 21 Notice. Not only could this lead to an increase in homelessness in the short term, but there is also a risk that there will be a reduction in the number of privately rented properties available as private landlords choose to leave the market.

The impact of the cost-of-living crisis is not yet fully known. However, research published by Crisis in March 2022 showed that families on low-level incomes are facing an average £372 deficit between their Local Housing Allowance and the costs of the cheapest rents in their areas. The Council will need to ensure that households at risk are able to access advice and information as early as possible, this will include making advice and information available to a wide range of households. If more people are encouraged to access the service, then it is essential that resources are in place to meet this increasing demand.

The situation in Syria, Hong Kong, Afghanistan, and most recently Ukraine, has mobilised the Government to set up schemes to support refugees from these countries to settle in the UK. At the time of completing this review, the statutory homelessness in England: October to December 2023 analysis has been published that illustrated an increase of 363.1% in homeless presentations from households required to leave accommodation provided by the Home Office as asylum support to 5,140 households. The longer-term impact of these resettlement schemes is not fully clear, but the data is clearly demonstrating the increased demand. This is likely to place increased pressure on the Housing Options team in the near future.

The political and economic landscape over the next few years is currently uncertain, and a change of government may happen at the general election in July 2024. The ongoing need for efficiencies and savings in local government will impact the support and services available locally.

Homelessness and Prevention Services
This section reviews the range of services available to people who are experiencing homelessness or threatened with homelessness.

Housing Options
The Housing Options service is delivered by the Council and the team is responsible for statutory homelessness duties. The service consists of a Triage team, a Temporary Accommodation team, a Case Management team, a Complex Needs team, and two resettlement officers. The Housing Options team is supported by three team leaders and two senior case management officers. The five teams are made up of 24 members of staff who are all agile workers. The Housing Options service undertakes detailed housing assessments under the homelessness legislation and develops personalised housing plans. The service is primarily delivered by telephone, however, appointments can be face to face when required.

The Choice Based Lettings team manage the housing register. The team is made up of 7 staff and a team leader. The team manage the administration of housing register applications as well as assisting our Registered Housing Providers to let their properties. The staff are agile workers, and the service is primarily delivered online.

The Housing Options service and the Choice Based Lettings team are managed by the CWAC Housing Options and Homelessness Manager and come under the Economy and Housing directive.

Help in Emergencies for Local People (HELP) scheme.
This is a discretionary scheme which is administered by the Council's Assessment Centre. An emergency payment can be considered to provide support in a crisis or emergency situation such as providing a foodbank voucher, or an energy top-up for pre-payment meters to help relieve the situation. Cash is not usually offered under the scheme but can be considered in exceptional circumstances at the discretion of the team.

The HELP Scheme can also consider support with household goods for people who are leaving accommodation where they received substantial care or supervision. Examples of this type of accommodation are:

- care home
- hostel
- local authority care
- prison or detention centre

The Welfare Support and Visiting Team include visiting officers who can provide welfare benefits advice and a debt officer for debt advice.

Discretionary Housing Payments
The Council holds a discretionary funding pot for Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP). DHP is discretionary support that can provide support towards the difference between the amount someone receives in Housing Benefit or Universal Credit and how much their rent is. It can also help towards housing costs, such as the costs of moving home or rent in advance. The current budget for the scheme is limited to £375,530, so support is not guaranteed if the budget is exhausted.

Forfutures Homeless Support Service
The homeless support service is provided by Forfutures on behalf of the Council. Customers are supported on a short-term basis until they have gained the skills needed to maintain their own homes. Referrals are made directly from the Housing Options team.

Forfutures also provides the Council's Outreach service as part of the wider homelessness and housing related support contract. The service works to identify and support rough sleepers and provide emergency accommodation when appropriate.

The homeless support contract covers:

- A range of supported accommodation
- Floating support service
- Mediation
- Services for those with complex needs
- Support for homeless applicants in temporary accommodation.
- Street outreach service for rough sleepers
- Direct access beds with 24-hr support
- SWEP delivery
- Daytime training and activities
- Advice and Information

The table below displays the number of households receiving support from Forfutures during 2023/24.

Support Service	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Homeless Prevention Advice and Information	36	43	42	24
Rough Sleeping Outreach	22	32	24	28
Stage 1 of Rough Sleeping Pathway	27	12	17	1
Emergency Accommodation - 205 B&B (No HRA Duty)	25	1	0	0
Temporary Accommodation (excluding B&B)	45	43	36	37
Supported Accommodation - 24 hour	59	59	57	48
Supported Accommodation - not 24 hours	86	90	87	127
Floating Support (Support for customers placed in hotels)	52	39	41	26
Floating Support (At point of referral had own tenancy which was at risk)	42	43	34	39
Refugee Resettlement and Assistance Services	34	52	47	0
Mediation Support	17	26	17	12

Households being supported by the Navigators who are living in accommodation not managed by Forfutures	17	22	22	22
New Tenancy Support	31	32	45	50
Resettlement Support	3	3	2	2
Housing First	9	8	8	8
Total	**505**	**505**	**479**	**424**

Source: CWAC data

The contract requires Forfutures to provide a range of supported accommodation options that suit the varying needs of different customers. This includes private and social housing and different delivery models of hostel-type provision to dispersed units.

Forfutures currently manages 198 units of short-term fixed supported accommodation. This is in addition to the 57 units of temporary accommodation (detailed earlier in the review). Support can range from on-site provision 24 hours a day to low-level visiting support.

The below table details the supported units available across the borough.

Chester Units			
Landlord	**Size and type**	**Client group**	**Number of units**
CWAC	12 flats	Single Homeless	12
Muir	7 self-contained flats	Single Homeless	13
Muir	1 shared house	Single Homeless	6
PRS	1 shared house	Single Homeless	8
PRS	1 shared house	Single Homeless Females Only	7
Sanctuary	6 dispersed flats	Single Homeless	6
Sanctuary	2 shared houses	Single Homeless	6
SHARE	1 shared house	Single Homeless	3
CWAC	7 dispersed flats	Single Homeless	7
		Total	**68**
Ellesmere Port Units			
Landlord	**Size and type**	**Client group**	**Number of units**

CWAC	2 shared houses	Single Homeless	12
CWAC	30 bedrooms shared facilities	Single Homeless & Emergency Provision	30
Riverside	12 self-contained flats	Single Homeless	12
PRS	2 shared houses	Single Homeless	8
PRS	1 shared house	Single Homeless Females Only	4
PRS	12 self-contained flats	Single Homeless	12
CWAC	8 dispersed flats	Single Homeless	8
		Total	**86**
Northwich Units			
Landlord	**Size and type**	**Client group**	**Number of units**
Muir	30 bedrooms shared facilities	Single homelessness & Emergency Provision	30
PRS	3 shared houses	Single Homeless	3
		Total	**33**
Winsford Units			
Landlord	**Size and type**	**Client group**	**Number of units**
CWAC	2 flats	Single Homeless	2
CWAC	3 shared houses	Single Homeless	9
		Total	**11**

Source: CWAC data

On 3 April 2024 there, were 79 people on the waiting list for supported accommodation.

It is acknowledged that there is a shortage of supported accommodation demonstrated by the waiting lists for the units currently available, the number of households in hotel accommodation and the number of people sleeping rough. However, increasing the range of supported accommodation is only part of the solution and needs to be progressed alongside work to increase homelessness prevention and the move-on options available to those in supported accommodation to improve throughput.

A detailed analysis was completed in January 2023 of those waiting for supported accommodation to inform the future requirements. It highlighted the gaps in provision for single/couple person households in Cheshire West and Chester however due to the snapshot nature of the needs data it is not possible to give an exact list of requirements and the information should be used as a basis on which to guide development.

- 52 (29%) households with high support needs were waiting for accommodation of which 34 (27%) were in hotels and 19 waiting for a Housing First unit.
  It is therefore suggested that between **35 to 50 units are required to meet the current demand for those with high support needs.**

- 92 (51%) households with medium support needs were waiting for accommodation of which 65 (51%) were in hotels.
  It is therefore suggested that **65 to 90 units are required to meet the current demand for those with medium support needs.**

- 35 (20%) households with low support needs were waiting for accommodation of which 28 (22%) were in hotels. It is therefore suggested that **30 to 35 units are required to meet the current demand for those with low support needs.**

Since this analysis was completed 59 new units of supported accommodation have been delivered or are on track to be delivered by March 2025.

Rough Sleeping Initiative
Cheshire West and Chester Council has been successful in securing Rough Sleeping Initiative (RSI) funding, the current funding stream ends March 2025. The grant funds received are detailed in the table below.

Rough Sleeping Funding	**2019/20**	**2020-21**	**2021-22**	**2022/23**	**2023/24**
Rapid Rehousing Pathway March 2019 to March 2020	365,000				
RSI 2 April 2019 to March 2020	185,180				
RSI 3 April 2020 to March 21		731,034			
Covid-19 one off payment paid April 2021			130,000		
RSI 4 Continuation Funding paid April 2021 to July 2021					
RSI 4 July 2021 to March 2022			700,365		
RSI 5 April 2022 to March 2025				868,250	693,250
Move On and Prevention Grant April 2023 to March 2024					128,536
Additional Targeted RSI Funding April 2023 to March 2025					146,750
Totals	**550,180**	**731,034**	**830,365**	**868,250**	**968,536**

Source: CWAC data

The RSI grant funds the specialist workers listed below:

- Rough Sleeping Coordinator
- Mental Health Nurse
- Mental Health Social Worker
- Substance Misuse Worker
- Engagement worker
- Trauma-Informed Counsellor
- Complex Needs Worker for Women
- Wraparound Support Workers x2
- Move-on Coordinator
- Housing First Workers x3
- Navigators x2
- Mulberry Centre Emergency Accommodation Manager and Support Workers x 8

Partner Services

WHAG
WHAG are the current provider of safe accommodation for the Council. The Council commissions WHAG to provide a service for people who are experiencing domestic abuse. Women and men can be referred to short-term accommodation in either a refuge or a dispersed property. Men will only be offered a place in a dispersed property. The refuge is staffed 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Support workers work with clients to look at their options and offer practical and emotional support for making and implementing decisions about the future (sorting out benefits, schools, GPs/health visitors, contacting legal services, liaising with housing departments). Resettlement support is also available for clients as they move on.

Sanctuary Scheme
Households at risk of domestic abuse often have to leave their homes because of the risk of repeat incidents of abuse. Refuges and other forms of safe accommodation can provide a safe and supportive environment for households fleeing domestic abuse, but many households do not wish to leave their homes or choose to return to their homes after a short stay in temporary accommodation despite the risks. Sanctuaries are an additional accommodation option for households at risk of domestic abuse which can, where suitable and appropriate, offer households the choice of remaining in their homes.

A Sanctuary Scheme is a multi-agency victim centred initiative which aims to enable households at risk of domestic abuse to remain safely in their own homes by installing a 'Sanctuary' in the home through the provision of support to the household. A 'Sanctuary' comprises enhanced security measures designed to enable households to remain safely in their homes. Alongside these physical safety measures specialist domestic abuse support will be provided.

Forum Housing
Forum Housing Association offer support and accommodation in Ellesmere Port for single people aged 16+ who are homeless and seeking independence. The Lock project offers eight self-contained flats for single, young people aged 16 to 21 with staff on site 24 hours a day. The Quays project provides eight self-contained flats for single, young people aged 18 to 25 moving to the next stage of independence who may have spent a period in The Lock project or been referred from other providers. Forum Housing also provides nine houses, offering more independent living in the community but with additional management in place to offer support if required. All accommodation provided by Forum is furnished and ready to occupy once allocated to a suitable person.

Forum Housing Association manage the Council's emergency bed provision for homeless 16- and 17-year-olds. The Housing Options team and Children's Services have access to two emergency beds when a homeless young person needs accommodation on a short-term basis whilst a joint assessment takes place.

Citizen's Advice Cheshire West
Citizen's Advice can provide advice on housing issues, rights and responsibilities, including advice on handling problems with a landlord and help to avoid losing a home. Advice can be found on the Citizen's Advice website or locally at one of the four offices in Chester, Ellesmere Port, Northwich and Winsford.

Bridge Foyer
The Bridge Foyer in Chester provides accommodation to young people aged 16-25 and gives them the chance to access training and employment opportunities all under one roof. It

consists of 31 flats. It is staffed 24 hours a day, 7 days a week Staff provide support around independent living, life skills, employment and move on. Residents not working or attending a college course must attend the in-house training programmes.

St Werburgh's Medical Practice for the homeless
St Werburgh's Medical Practice for the Homeless in Chester is an Inclusion Health General Practice for those experiencing homelessness. The service is based in central Chester and provides bespoke primary care health services with a team of professionals including GPs, a specialist Advanced Nurse Practitioner, a Practice Nurse, and two Registered Mental Health Nurses (one of whom works exclusively with those rough sleeping). The practice also has access to other professionals from Central Chester Primary Care Network including dietician, physiotherapist, podiatrist and counsellor. The practice adopts a flexible, holistic approach to patients to help overcome the barriers to accessing health care. The practice works alongside other agencies including Countess of Chester Hospital, Via - the drug & alcohol service, the Local Authority and voluntary agencies to provide every opportunity to help patients, who have complex and significant health needs, to engage and access comprehensive physical, mental health and wellbeing services.

Mid-Cheshire and West Cheshire Foodbank
The foodbank is part of the Trussell Trust's network of 1,200 foodbanks, working to tackle food poverty and hunger in local communities, as well as across the UK. In 2023/24, food banks in the Trussell Trust's network provided 3,121,404 three-day emergency food supplies and support to UK people in crisis. Of these, 1,144,096 were distributed for children. The foodbank works with a range of local agencies that meet people at risk of going hungry. Citizens Advice, children's centres and health visitors are just some of those who can refer people to the foodbank by issuing them with a foodbank referral.

Soul Kitchen
Soul Kitchen Chester is a volunteer-run registered charity that looks to create a positive future for those experiencing homelessness and hardship. They run a weekly open Drop In on a Saturday evening in Chester where they provide hot and cold food and drinks, toiletries, clothing and support. This is supplemented by the provision of food parcels where necessary during the week. Through food and support the charity builds relationships with those they help, which in turn allows them to offer better and more individual support.

The primary goal of the charity is to enable people to move away from life on the streets, and they currently run cookery groups three times a week which enable members to learn new skills and to grow in confidence with the long-term aim of obtaining employment.

Chester Aid to the Homeless (CATH)
CATH is a Chester city centre charity for homeless people offering support, encouragement, and a safety net to those in crisis. The Harold Tomlins Centre is open five mornings a week and provides support and assistance for those in crisis including shower and laundry facilities, free clothing store, medical services, benefit and accommodation information, advice and guidance, and volunteering opportunities. CATH also manages seven properties which provide shared accommodation with support. Referrals are considered from supporting statutory agencies.

SHARE
SHARE'S support families in crisis and people who are homeless in North Wales and Cheshire. They assist refugees fleeing for their lives, wherever they are in the world. The charity runs a day centre that is open, for hot meals, clothes, and toiletries. It is also a place that offers support, activities, and help to meet people's specific needs. The team offer daily basic aid, but also help to empower people to positively move

their lives forwards and engage with rebuilding their lives, or even volunteer on the SHARE team themselves.

Work Zones
Work Zones offer a range of services to support individuals into employment. This includes:

- One to one information, advice and guidance with the National Careers Service on options for learning and work
- Helping to identify, and work towards a person's aims for the future.
- Personal skills analysis and action planning
- Confidence building courses.
- Preparing for Employment qualifications
- English, Maths and IT skills
- Opportunities to gain qualifications, including functional skills in English and Maths

Activities that contribute towards securing accommodation.

Private Rented Sector
The Council has had some success in preventing and relieving homelessness through accessing private rented accommodation, however, the numbers are relatively small. The Housing Options team has had more success with bringing the prevention duty to an end in the private rented sector, rather than ending the relief duty in the private rented sector.

The Council currently operates a Bond Scheme for customers who are homeless or threatened with homelessness where the Council acts as a guarantor on behalf of the tenant and pays the landlord up to the value of the Bond for certain losses, such as rent arrears or damage to the property. The Bond is often used as a homeless prevention tool to secure a tenancy and can often be made alongside a rent in advance payment. The Bond is the equivalent of one month's rent but no more than the current level of LHA entitlement.

The Council's Landlord Incentive Project (LIP) runs until 31 March 2025. The project funds 1.5 members of staff in the Housing Options Team. They provide a single point of contact for landlords. The project offers a range of landlord financial incentives enabling access to new private rented sector tenancies for prison leavers who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. The LIP scheme commenced in December 2021 and so far, has enabled 37 tenancies in the private rented sector.

Pressures in the private rented sector (PRS) continue to increase and more households are at risk of homelessness. Supply is limited so competition is extremely high for suitable and affordable accommodation so further work is needed to help customers access the private rented sector.

The Council is introducing a range of incentives for landlords and to develop an in-house Private Rented Sector service in 2024. The proposed pilot is for an 18-month period during which time it will be reviewed to inform future service delivery The in-house service will be focused on preventing homelessness from the private rented sector and increasing the supply of good quality affordable housing. A dedicated team including a Team Leader, three Lettings Officers, an Accommodation Officer and a Support Worker will be based in the Housing Options Service.

The service will provide a range of incentives, to both prevent homelessness and increase supply. An enhanced focus on prevention and improved access to the private rented sector to end the relief duty and main duty will help with the flow of households through temporary accommodation. As the loss of private rented accommodation is one of the main causes of homelessness, it is essential that any offer to enable clients to access the private rented sector needs to be coupled with support for both landlords and tenants, with the ability for early intervention should any issues arise during the course of the tenancy.

Social housing
Social housing in Cheshire West and Chester is advertised and allocated via a Choice Based Lettings (CBL) system known as West Cheshire Homes. This is run in partnership with the Council's key local registered providers. The Council maintains and manages the Housing Register, including who can apply for housing and determines a person's priority. The latest policy was introduced in April 2021.

The current policy operates a reduced banding system. Band A is awarded to those customers with the most urgent housing need and Band B is awarded to customers with a high housing need. Homeless customers are awarded a priority Band B, regardless of priority need status, as long as they satisfy the requirements of the register. Customers who have been awarded main housing duty and are placed in emergency accommodation will be awarded Band A earlier in the relief duty to support the customer to move on quickly to reduce the demand and cost of hotel accommodation. As of 1 January 2024, there were 6,640 households on the housing register.

During 2023/24, the Choice Based Lettings team received 5,816 applications for the housing register. There were over 1,318 properties advertised through CBL during the 12 months and over 38,463 bids were received. Social housing properties have been let to 1,043 customers. 51% of these properties allocated have been let to customers who were in priority Bands A and B for homelessness. The table below illustrates the homeless priority bandings for those households who have been allocated social housing during 2023/24.

Allocations by Priority Banding	**Households**
Band A - Main Housing Duty	297
Band B - Homeless Relief Duty	24
Band B - Homeless Prevention	209
Total	**530**

Source: CWAC data

Consultation

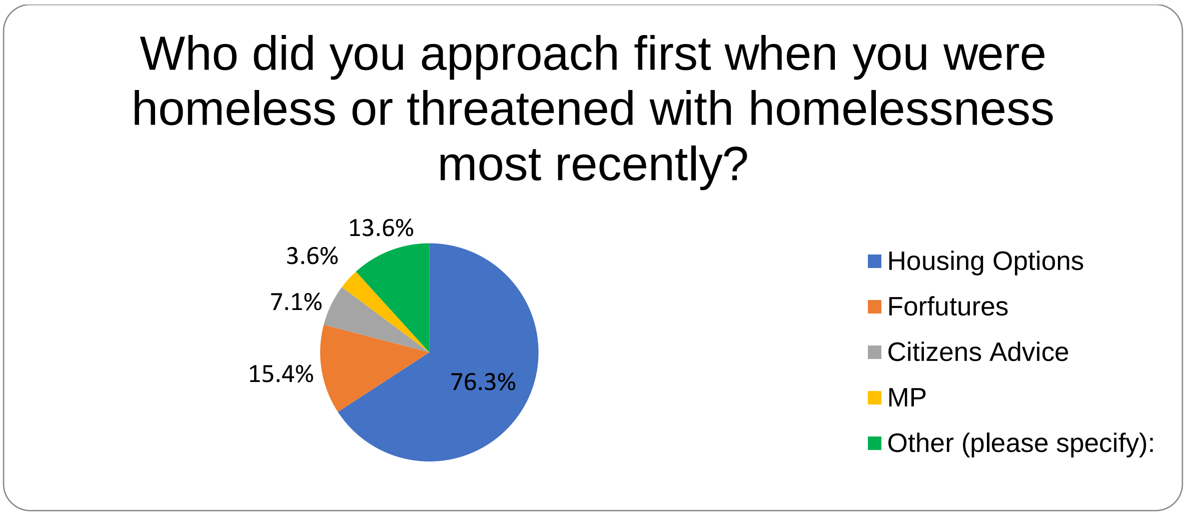
Consultation has been key to the development of this homelessness review and will continue to be an important element when developing the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy. Consultation has been undertaken with customers, partner agencies, stakeholders, and Housing Options staff.

Customer Survey

The survey sought the views of those who had experienced homelessness. The survey was sent to customers who had approached the Housing Options service between December 2022 and March 2023. 170 people completed the survey.

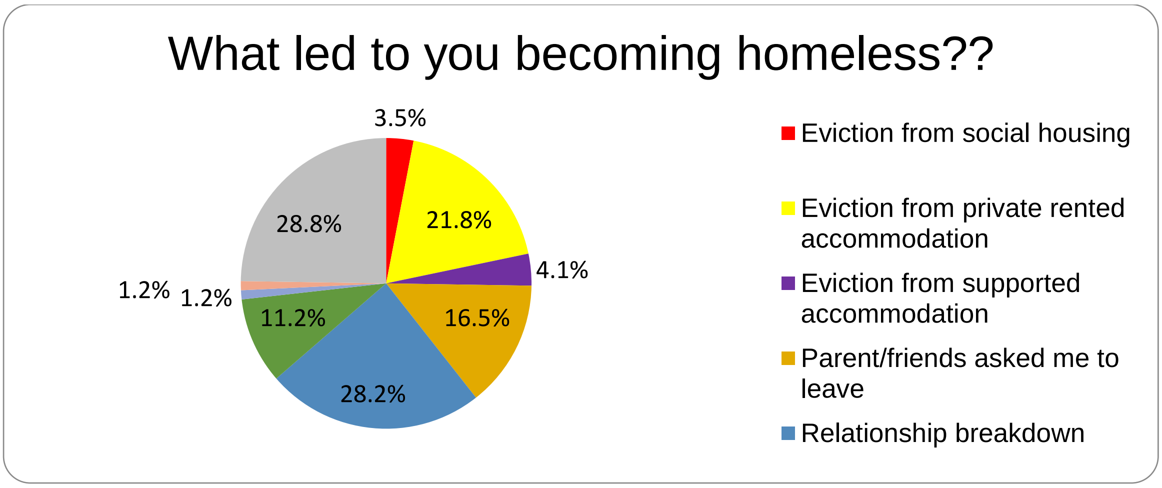
Approach

Customers were asked which organisation they approached first when they were homeless or threatened with homelessness. A total of 169 people responded to this question. The graph below shows which organisation customers approached first.



Homelessness

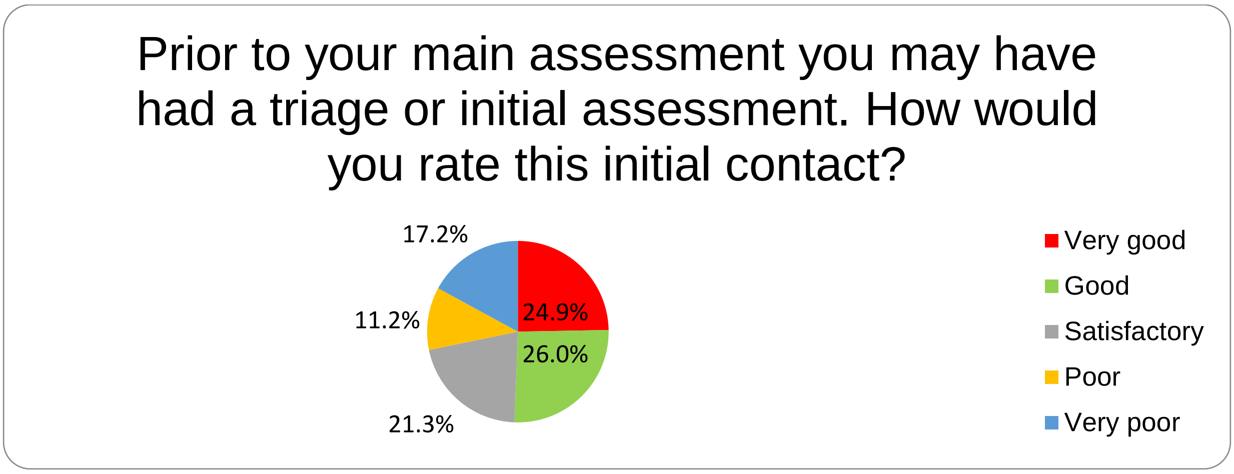
Customers were asked what led to them becoming homeless. 170 customers responded to the question and the graph below illustrates the responses.



The main reason that customers reported that led to them becoming homeless was due to relationship breakdowns (28.2%), this was followed by eviction from private rented accommodation (21.8%). Leaving the armed forces and prison release were the lowest reasons for homelessness (2.4%).

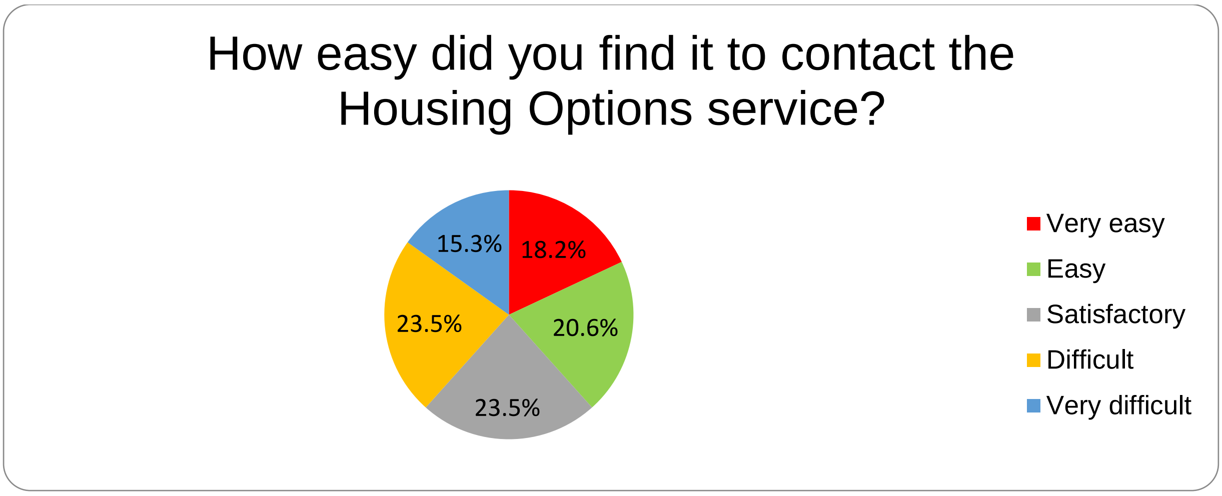
Support
Customers were asked if they knew where to go for help when they became homeless or threatened with homelessness. 59.4% of customers responded that they did not know where to go for help and 41.2% of customers reported that they did know how to access help.

Triage assessment.
Customers were asked how they would rate their triage assessment. The triage assessment is the first contact with Housing Options prior to their main housing assessment. The graph below shows the responses.



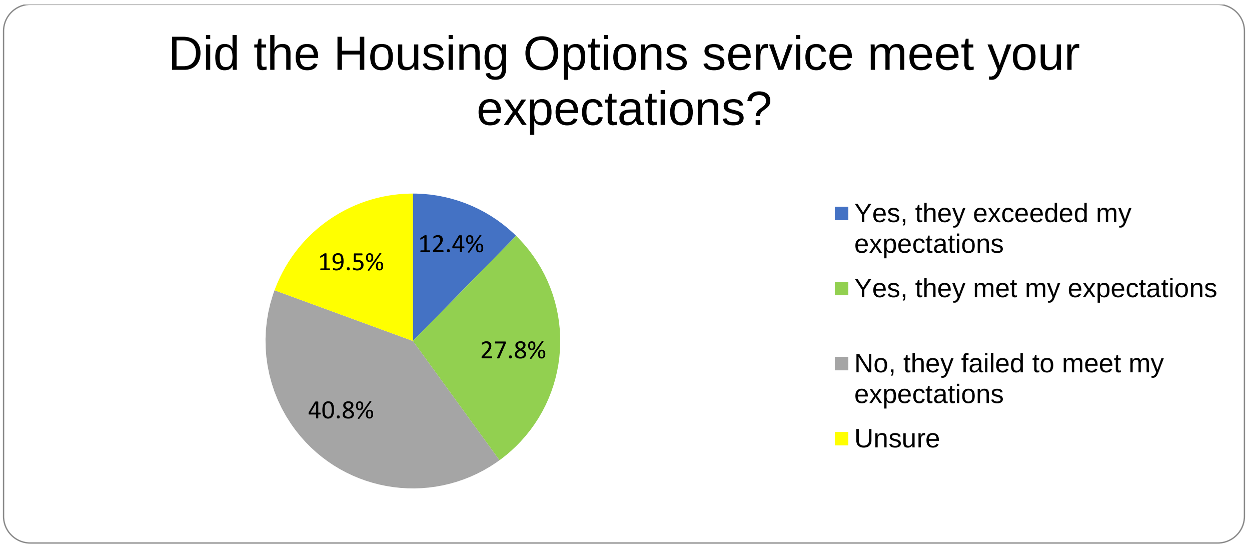
A total of 169 customers completed this question. Of those responses, 50.9% of customers felt that the triage assessment was very good or good, whereas 28.4% of customers felt the service received was poor or very poor.

Contacting the Housing Options service
Customers were asked how easy they found it was to contact the Housing Options service. The graph below shows the customer responses.



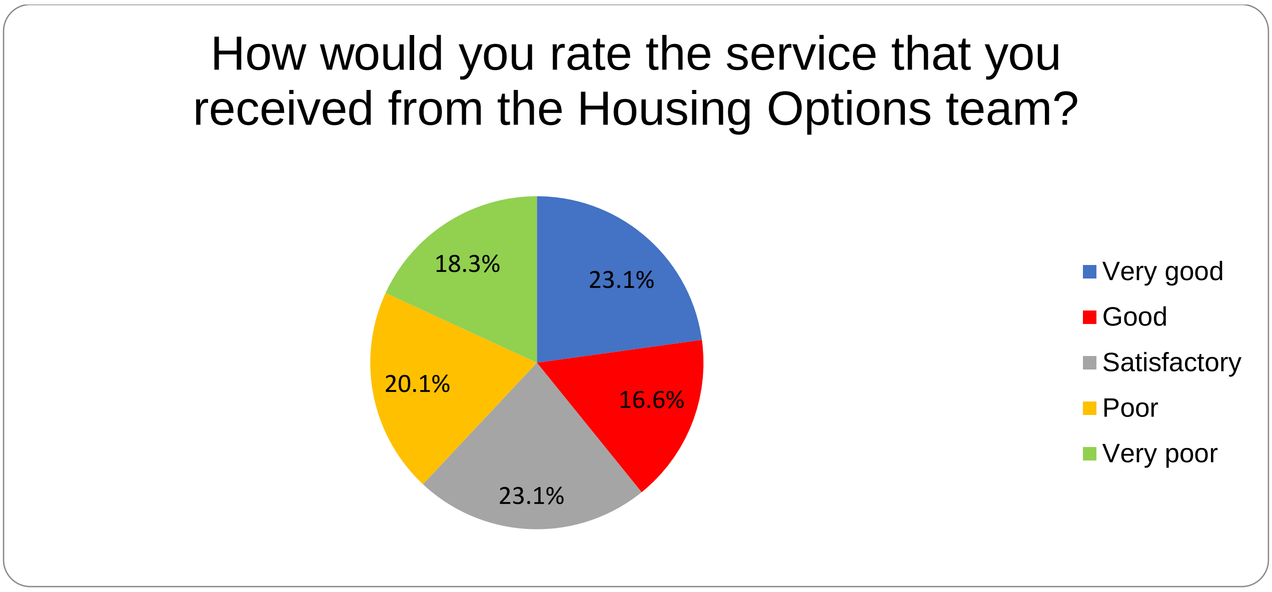
170 customers responded to the question. From the responses, 66 customers felt the Housing Options service was very easy or easy to contact and 66 customers felt the service was difficult or very difficult to contact.

Expectations
Customers were asked if the Housing Options service met their expectations. The graph below shows the responses.



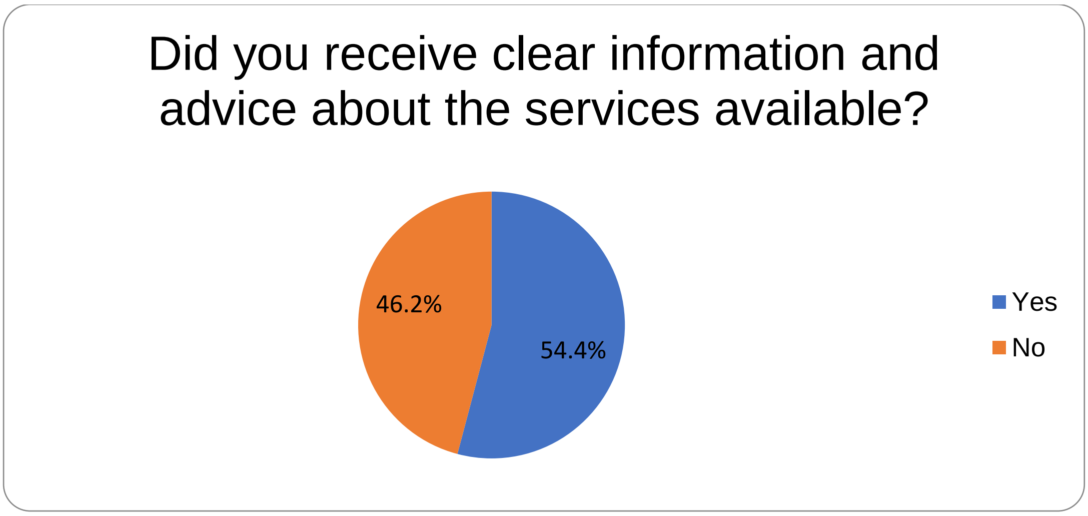
169 customers responded to this question. Of those respondents 69 customers reported that the service failed to meet their expectations and 21 customers reported that the service exceeded their expectations.

Rating the Housing Options service
Customers were asked how they would rate the service that they received from the Housing Options team. The graph below details the responses.



169 customers responded to this question. Of those respondents, 39.6% of customers rated the service they received as very good or good. 38.5% of customers rated the service they received as poor or very poor.

Services available
Customers were asked if they received clear information and advice about the services available to them. The graph below shows the customer's responses.



Staff knowledge
Customers were asked if they found the staff knowledgeable. 169 customers responded to this question. Of those respondents 61.5% felt the staff were knowledgeable and 39.6% reported that they felt the staff weren't knowledgeable.

Staff friendliness
Customers were asked if they found the staff helpful and kind. 169 customers responded to this question. Of those respondents, 66.3% felt the staff was helpful and kind and 36.1% reported that they did not feel the staff was friendly and kind.

Information
Customers were asked if they felt they received enough information from the Housing Options staff. 168 customers responded to this question. 54.8% of respondents felt they did not receive enough information and 47% of respondents felt they did receive enough information.

Customers were then asked if they felt they were kept informed of what was going on with their applications. 42.6% of respondents felt they were kept informed, compared with 58% of customers who felt they were not kept informed of the process.

Appointments
Since the pandemic, the service has moved to online and telephone appointments for assessments. As part of the customer survey, customers were asked what type of appointment style they would prefer with a Housing Options Adviser. The chart below details the responses.

Answer Choice		Response Percent	Response Total
1	Telephone appointment	53.0%	89
2	Face to face appointment	27.4%	46
3	No preference	25.6%	43
Please feel free to make any comments.			37
		answered	**168**
		skipped	**3**

Homeless prevention
Customers were asked if the Housing Options service prevented them from becoming homeless. 166 customers responded to this question. Of those respondents, 63.9% of customers reported that the team did not prevent them from becoming homeless and 39.2% reported that the team did prevent them from becoming homeless.

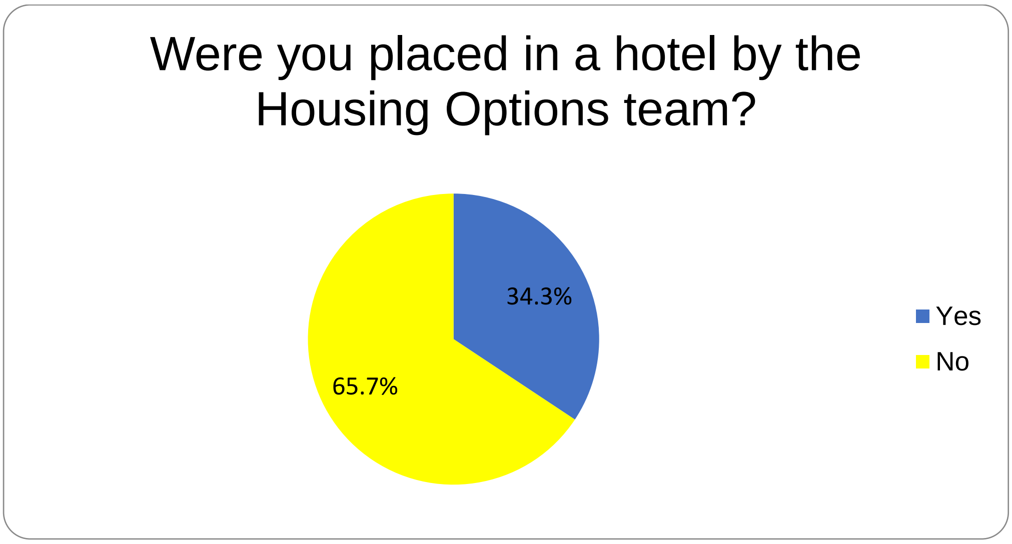
Improving the existing service
The respondents to the survey were asked what they think the Council could do to improve the existing services. 98 customers responded to this question. Key themes from the responses received are detailed below:

- Clearer information to help understand the housing process.
- Agree on regular contact times with customers.
- More access to face-to-face appointments
- Introduce one application form for all housing issues.
- Improved communication
- Support for customers who are computer illiterate.

Extra help and services
Customers were asked if there was any extra help or services that could have prevented them from becoming homeless in the first place. 74 customers responded to this question. Key themes from the responses are detailed below:

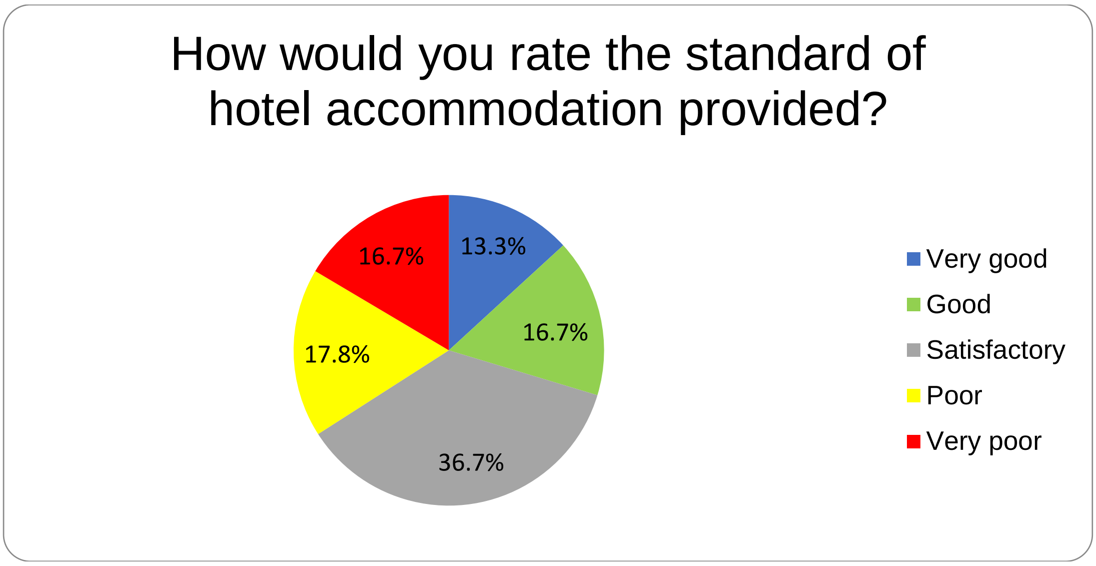
- Improved access and support to the private rented sector
- More awareness of the service
- Face to face appointments
- Improved response times

Temporary accommodation
Customers were asked if they were placed in a hotel by the Housing Options team. 169 customers responded to this question. The graph below shows the responses.



Customers were then asked if the hotel was suitable for their needs. 117 customers responded to this question and of those respondents, 75.2% of customers reported that the hotel was not suitable for their needs.

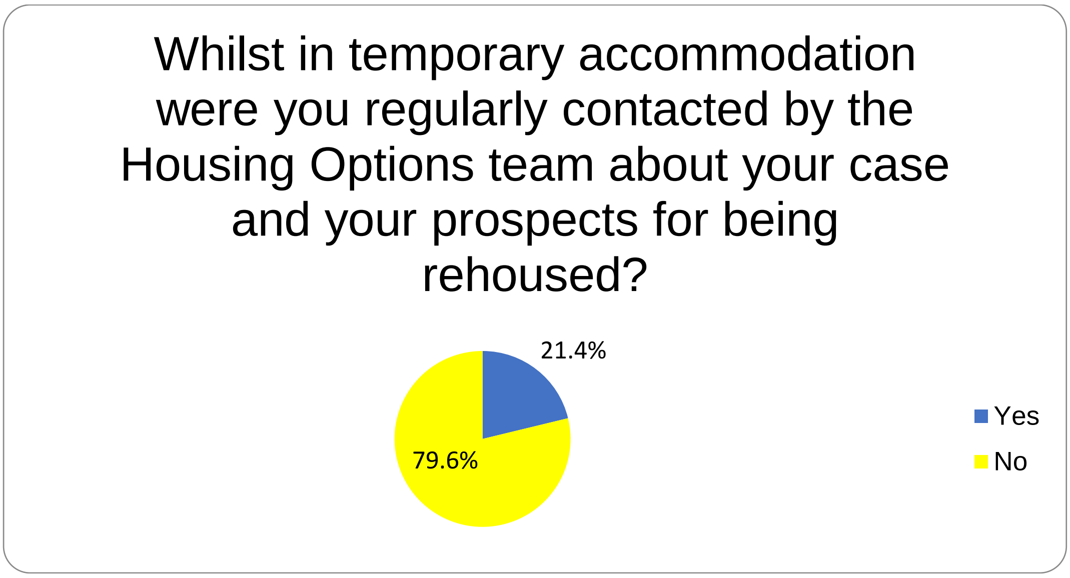
Customers were then asked to rate the standard of hotel accommodation provided to them. 90 customers responded to this question and the graph below displays the results.



Customers were asked if whilst they were placed temporarily in a hotel their stay in the hotel necessitated them having to give up work, change children's schools, or affect any other support that they received (e.g., GP, midwife etc). 105 customers responded to this question. Of those respondents, 78.1% of customers reported that their stay in a hotel did not affect their usual networks.

Customers were then asked if they were placed in other temporary accommodation (not hotels) by the Housing Options team. 165 customers responded to this question with 11.5% of those customers reporting that they were placed in other accommodation and not a hotel.

During customer's stays in temporary accommodation, the survey asked if customers were regularly contacted by the Housing Options team about their case and their prospects for being rehoused. 98 customers responded to the question. The graph below displays the responses.



Customers were asked if they felt that they were provided with adequate support whilst in temporary accommodation. 95 customers responded to this question. Of those respondents, 76.8% of customers felt that they were not provided with adequate support and 24% of respondents felt they did receive adequate support.

Additional services in Cheshire West and Chester

Customers were asked what additional services they think are needed in the borough to either prevent or respond to homelessness. 90 customers responded to this question. Suggestions from the feedback are detailed below:

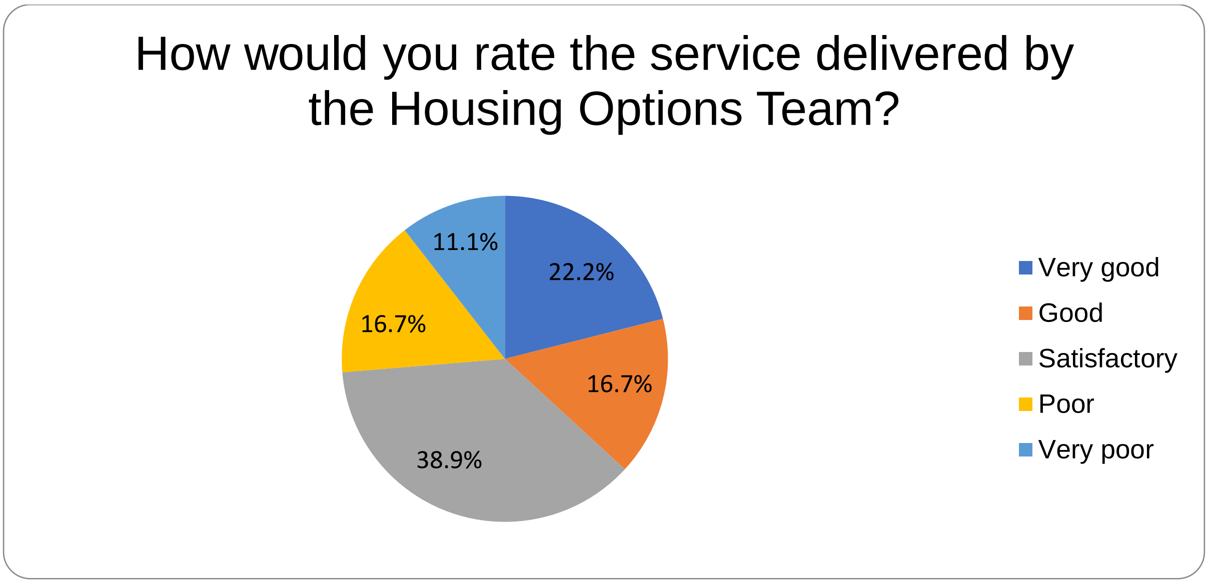
- More supported housing
- Hubs for customers to access support.
- Only advertising properties that are ready for let.
- Improved access to the private rented sector
- Clearer system and processes to access housing.
- Face to face appointments

Stakeholder Survey

Consultation with partner agencies was seen as essential to the review process, particularly where there is a need to work more closely with other agencies to ensure a joined-up approach to homeless prevention.

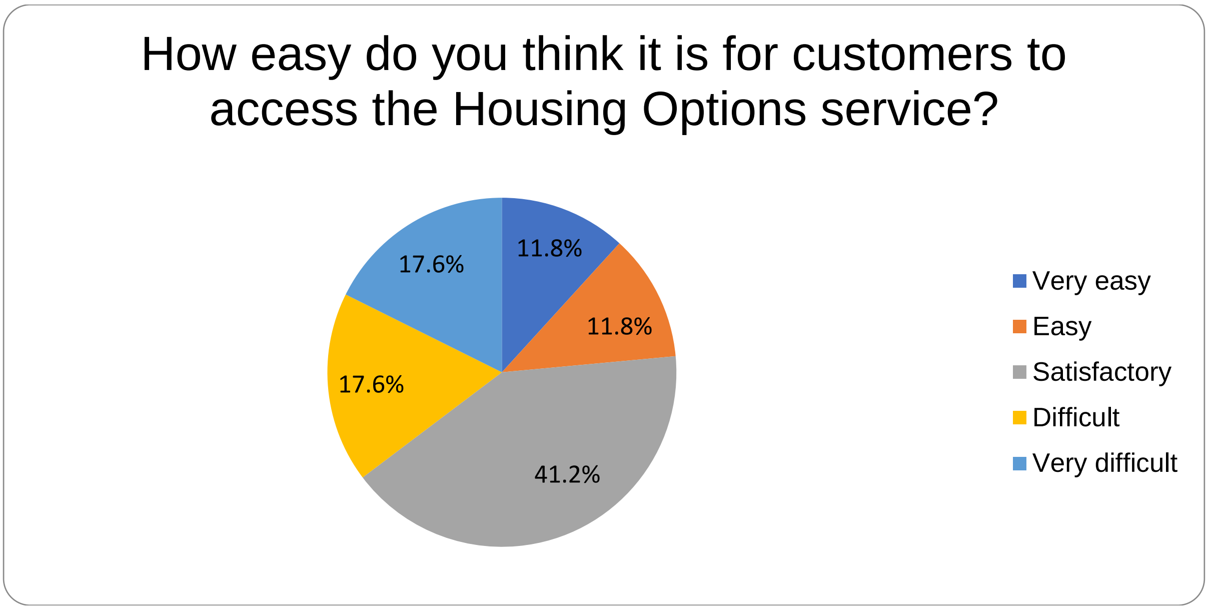
An online questionnaire was developed and sent out to key partner agencies throughout Cheshire West and Chester, seeking feedback on the housing options service, and identifying gaps in the county's response to homelessness. Eighteen organisations completed the survey.

Service Delivery
Stakeholders were asked how they rate the service delivered by the Housing Options Team. The graph below shows the responses.



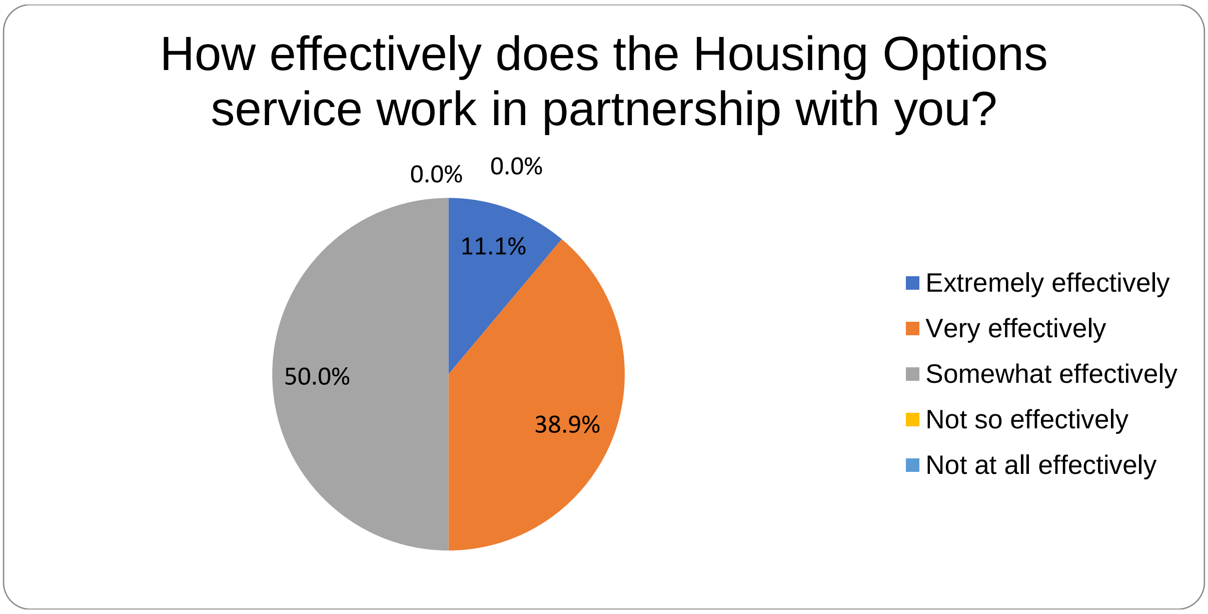
Seven stakeholders that responded to the questionnaire felt that the service delivered by the Housing Options Team was 'satisfactory' and only four felt the service was 'very good'. Two stakeholders considered the delivered service was 'very poor'. Comments across the survey indicated that stakeholders felt communication needed to be improved and that sometimes contacting the team was difficult. One stakeholder reported that they felt they would provide relevant information on behalf of customers, but this was not acknowledged, or receipts provided to evidence that the information had been received.

Customers accessing the Housing Options service.
Stakeholders were asked how easy they think it is for customers to access the Housing Options service. Seventeen stakeholders responded to the question and the graph below displays the responses.



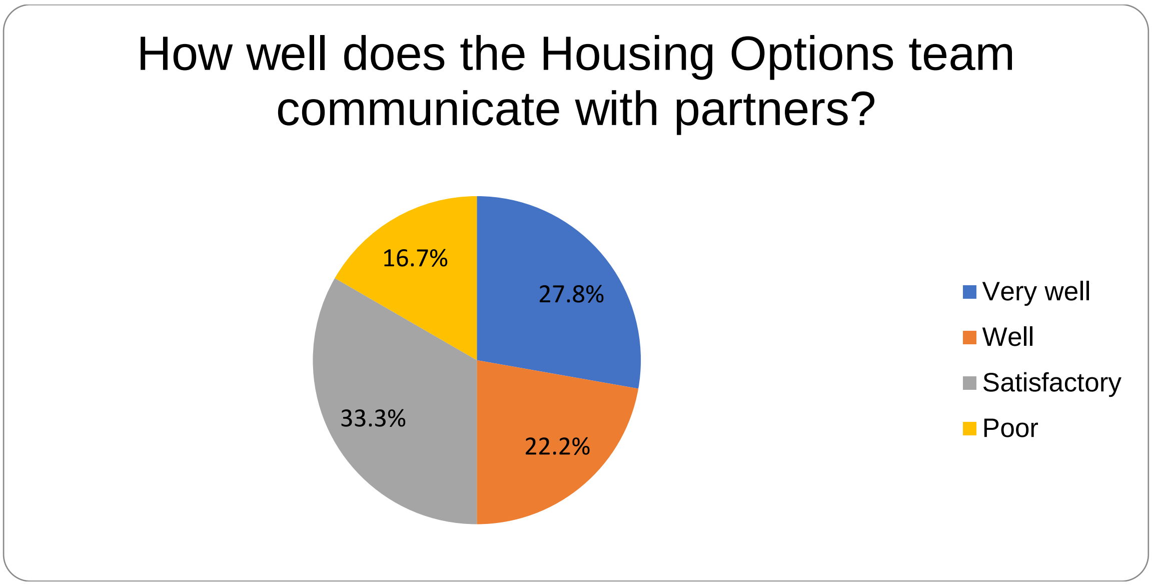
Four stakeholders considered it very easy or easy for customers to access the Housing Options service, and six stakeholders considered it to be difficult or very difficult for customers to access the services. Seven stakeholders considered it satisfactory overall to contact the service. There were no significant variations in the stakeholder's responses.

Partnership Working
The stakeholders were then asked how effectively the Housing Options service works in partnership with their organisations. Eighteen stakeholders responded and the graph below displays the responses.



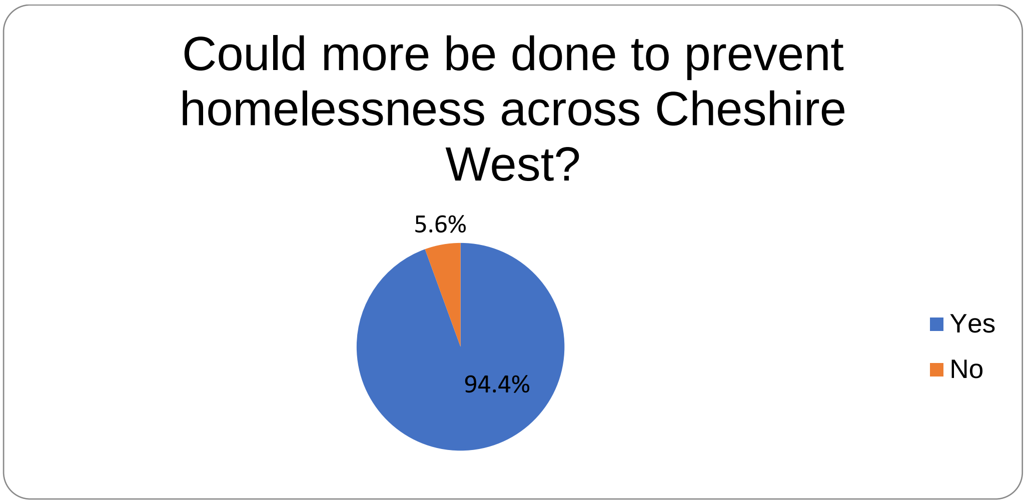
In order to support customers who are homeless or threatened with homelessness there is a need to maximise multi-disciplinary and partnership approaches to effectively support our customers. Nine stakeholders felt that the partnership between their organisation and Housing Options was ‘somewhat effective’, and nine stakeholders considered the partnership between them to be ‘extremely effective or very effective’. The overall response from stakeholders indicated that partners generally thought partnership working was effective, although it was identified that communication could improve in some areas.

Communication with partners
Stakeholders were asked how well the Housing Options team communicates with its partners. Eighteen stakeholders responded to the question. The graph below shows the responses.



A total of five stakeholders felt the Housing Options team communicated very well with its partners, and four stakeholders felt the team communicated well. Three stakeholders reported that they felt the communication from the Housing Options team was poor. Six stakeholders felt the communication was satisfactory.

Homeless Prevention
Stakeholders were asked if more could be done to prevent homelessness across Cheshire West and Chester. Eighteen stakeholders responded to the question and the graph below shows the stakeholder's responses. Seventeen stakeholders responded 'yes' that they felt more could be done to prevent homelessness and one stakeholder responded 'no' that more couldn't be done to prevent homelessness. Thirteen stakeholders provided their views on what more could be done in the borough to improve homeless prevention.



Stakeholders were then asked what additional services, schemes or projects should either the Council or other agencies provide to prevent people from becoming homeless. Responses included:

- More supported housing and specialist provision in the borough
- Night shelter for rough sleepers
- Improve support for customers to maintain tenancies.
- Review the length of stay that customers are allowed to remain in supported housing for.
- Provision for younger people
- Improved data sharing
- Female only direct access
- Advertise advice surgeries or hubs for people who are threatened with homelessness.

Key findings

The review has illustrated an increase in footfall on the Housing Options service of 62% over the last five years whilst the number of homeless duties owed have increased by 12% over the same period. A significant number of approaches to the Housing Options service are for advice-only cases, and during 2023/24 this represented 39% of approaches to the service.

Over the last four years, the majority of customers were owed a relief duty compared with the prevention duty. During a consultation with customers, 59% of respondents advised that they did not know where to go for support when experiencing homelessness. This percentage would indicate the reason for more customers presenting to the service at a crisis point when prevention work cannot be completed. In the future consideration needs to be given to how demand can be managed more appropriately through improved advice and information.

During 2019/20 the ratio between prevention and relief cases was equally split and this was mirrored by the North West statistics. However, the last four years data illustrates those customers presenting at prevention stages have consistently been less than customers presenting at the relief stage and lower than the North West average prevention rate. This illustrates that work is needed to raise awareness of the service and encourage customers to access the service at the earliest opportunity. Customers accessing the service earlier allows for more opportunities for prevention work to be maximised.

The Housing Options team have recently been reconfigured to help meet customer demand, staffing requirements, and staff wellbeing. The analysis of the data included in the review will be used to inform future service delivery and develop the Prevention Toolkit for the team. This will include an enhanced focus on prevention, and early intervention, including enabling customers to keep their existing accommodation.

Since 2021 the main reason for homelessness in Cheshire West and Chester is due to family or friends no longer willing or able to accommodate. The Prevention Toolkit should be developed to improve mediation services to help customers remain in their current accommodation whilst a planned move is established. Homelessness should not be seen as the route to access social housing and managing customer's expectations is vital to prevention work.

Over recent years the service has been much more successful at assisting households to secure alternative accommodation, rather than enabling households to remain in their existing accommodation. In 2022/23, of those cases prevented from homelessness, 82% were helped to secure alternative accommodation, this reduced to 74% during 2023/24. Developing the Prevention Toolkit to include more interventions that focus on enabling customers to retain their current accommodation is required.

The end of private rented accommodation for the last three years has remained the second main reason for homelessness. For 2023/24 this accounted for 25% of households and has increased by 5% over the last three years. Developing the Prevention Toolkit to include a consistent approach to preventing homelessness from the private rented sector and developing a competitive landlord offer to increase access to the private rented sector. Consultation with customers and stakeholders also indicated that they would welcome better access to the private rented sector.

The homelessness impacts of the Ukrainian and Afghan refugee crises, and wider asylum dispersal pressures, are demonstrated in the increase in households presenting at both the prevention and relief stage. This may be due to the household being required to leave accommodation provided by the Home Office as asylum support, or the breakdown of sponsorships. During 2021/22, 'Non-UK: Granted refugee status' represented just 0.4% of the reasons for eligibility for homeless assistance. The latest figures for 2023/24 demonstrate that 'Non-UK: Granted refugee status' now represents 11% of customers eligible for homeless assistance. Overall, during 2023/24 eligibility due to a refugee status represented 16% of all homeless households owed a duty. The longer-term impact of resettlement in the borough is not clear but the increase in refugees indicates that demand for homelessness services will continue to rise for the foreseeable future.

Over the last three years, single person households owed a homeless duty has remained a significant problem in the borough. In total, single people accounted for 64% of all households owed a prevention or a relief duty in 2023/24, and 63% the previous year. During the last 12 months, 75% of relief duties owed were to single person households, demonstrating the demand for emergency accommodation at crisis point. The high numbers of single person households in hotel accommodation and the analysis of the single person households on the supported housing waiting demonstrate the urgent need for different types of temporary and supported accommodation in the borough.

There is still a reliance on the use of hotel accommodation to provide emergency accommodation for homeless households. The spending on hotel provision has increased by 341% over the last five years. The review illustrates not only the shortage of temporary and supported housing but also the importance of throughput within supported accommodation to maximise the number of units available. For the service to recover from the lasting impacts of the pandemic, there is the need for more temporary and supported accommodation, and more long-term housing options to improve move on from supported accommodation.

Cheshire West and Chester's autumn single-night snapshot of people sleeping rough taken on 9 November 2023 found 22 people sleeping rough, which was up by 12 people from 2022. Rough sleeping data for October and November 2023 shows an increase in the number of rough sleepers being found in any one day. In October numbers ranged from 5 to 24 (an average of 16 per day) and in November numbers ranged from 4 to 22 (an average of 11 per day). The majority of people experiencing rough sleeping are found in Chester City Centre. Consultation with stakeholders identified that there was a need for more specialist support and provision for rough sleepers in the borough.

The review details the range of services available across the borough. These services play a vital role in preventing, supporting, and accommodating homeless households. The analysis from the review will be used to inform the next Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy. The strategy will be underpinned by a robust action plan that will be updated annually and be flexible in responding to any emerging needs, trends, and policy changes.

Next Steps

In order to ensure that the information within the review is an accurate picture of homelessness within the borough, the review will be made available to partners and stakeholders for comments.

Any comments can be made to: housingstrategy@cheshirewest.gov.uk

Following this review, the Council will produce and publish a Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy. It is expected that consultation for the strategy will start summer 2024 and run for three months. Following this consultation period, the strategy will be presented to cabinet for approval early 2025 and run from April 2025 to 2030.