



# North Herts' Housing Strategy

2024 - 2029



**North  
Herts**  
Council

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# Foreword

It gives me great pleasure to introduce our latest Housing Strategy for North Hertfordshire. This is an ambitious document that sets our priorities and objectives over the next five years.

Housing is a fundamental human right that not only provides shelter and security but also plays a vital role in determining the overall well-being and prosperity of our residents.

In recent years, North Herts has experienced the far-reaching impacts of the housing crisis, including rising housing costs and limited availability of affordable homes.

This Housing Strategy provides a robust response to these challenges and sets out how we will maximise the supply of affordable housing, ensuring that we work closely with developers to achieve up to 40 percent affordable housing on new sites, as outlined in our Local Plan.

This document also outlines a multifaceted approach to housing that will help bring properties back into use, prevent homelessness, and provide continued support to meet the needs of our most vulnerable residents.

Moreover, this Strategy recognises the importance of strengthening partnerships within all sectors to influence resources and expertise in pursuit of our housing goals.

As we implement this Strategy, we must remain mindful of the ever-evolving nature of the housing landscape. We must remain flexible and adaptable, and strive for continuous improvement as we work to address emerging needs and challenges.

Finally, I would like to express my gratitude to all the residents and stakeholders who shared their views throughout the consultation process. Your input has been invaluable in shaping this strategy, and your ongoing engagement will be vital to its success.



Councillor Sean Prendergast

Executive Member for Housing  
and Environmental Health

# Purpose of the Housing Strategy

North Herts Council, as the local housing authority, is responsible for working to meet the housing needs of our local residents. This is a wide remit, ranging from tackling homelessness to delivering new affordable housing to overseeing housing standards in the district.

Our Housing Strategy sets out our main areas of focus for the coming five years, namely:

- **maximising delivery of genuinely affordable homes**
- **ensuring high standards of housing**
- **preventing and managing homelessness**

Experience of the past few years has shown us that our Strategy needs to be agile, so that we can respond quickly and effectively to changes in legislation and shifting national and local issues as they develop.

This Housing Strategy is therefore purposefully high level, with detail about how we will achieve our priorities set out in an Action Plan which we will publish each year.

Homelessness and housing are inextricably linked and we have therefore incorporated our Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy for 2024-2029 within this Housing Strategy. Please see also the accompanying review into homelessness in North Herts, which informs the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy.



# The Housing Strategy in context

A decent, affordable home is so much more than just a roof over a person's head – it provides safety and stability from which people can lead healthy, productive and fulfilling lives.

Housing is therefore a core thread which runs through the council's work, overlapping across other key policy areas including health, economic development, climate change, equality and inclusion and safe and sustainable neighbourhoods.

Our Housing Strategy will support the delivery of the four key themes that have been identified in the Council Plan 2022-2027 as areas of focus for the next five years:



**Our environment:** a duty to protect and a commitment to tackle climate change



**Our local economy:** supporting our towns and rural areas to thrive and grow



**Our places:** creating spaces and infrastructure to meet the needs of our residents and a commitment to providing affordable housing



**Our services:** welcoming and accessible and a commitment to invest in our staff

It also sits within the framework of the district's Local Plan 2011-2031 which sets out how and where new homes will be delivered in the district and is a key delivery route for additional affordable housing. Also particularly relevant are the council's Tenancy Strategy, which sets out recommendations for local housing providers on tenancies and rents, the Environmental Health Enforcement Policy (an appendix to the council's Enforcement Policy) and the Policy for Licensing Houses in Multiple Occupation. The Tenants' Charter is being developed to provide information and clearly state the roles and responsibilities of all those involved in the residential rented sector. It has been recognised that many in this sector, both as tenants and housing providers either do not know their rights or obligations, or try to hide behind this lack of knowledge to avoid their responsibilities; the Tenants' Charter will help to mitigate this.

The council's work on homelessness and housing standards in particular are tightly governed by legislation<sup>1</sup> which sets out the council's duties (what it has to do) and powers (what it may choose to do).

<sup>1</sup> Primary homelessness legislation is contained within the Housing Act 1996. It is amended by the Homelessness Act 2002, the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 and the Domestic Abuse Act 2021. The Housing Act 1988 also addresses the end of tenancy arrangements.



## Equality and diversity

The council also has legal obligations to fulfil under the Equality Act 2010. In our work across all service areas, we are committed to promoting equality of opportunity, to eliminating discrimination and to fostering good relations between diverse groups in our community.

## Strong local partnerships

The council does not own or manage any housing and we therefore rely on strong partnerships with local housing providers, government bodies, statutory services (such as health and social care) and a range of voluntary and other third-sector organisations to help us to deliver our priorities.

Annex 1 provides a broad overview of our key relationships.

## Resourcing

Realistically, resourcing will always be the ultimate limiting factor to the extent of our ambitions. We are doubtless all aware of the enormous pressures on local government funding and the demand for council services. This is compounded by the typically short-term nature of funding settlements from government which makes it extremely difficult to plan strategically for the longer-term.

The council legally has to provide certain services, such as accommodation for priority homeless households and disabled facilities grants for eligible applicants, and these will always be prioritised where resources are short. However, with the help of our local partners, and by pursuing additional funding opportunities and new ways of working where they arise, we will aim to achieve more, as set out in this strategy.

# Housing in North Herts

North Herts is a predominantly rural district with four main settlements (Baldock, Hitchin, Letchworth Garden City and Royston) and about 40 villages and hamlets. Its current population is estimated at just over 133,000<sup>2</sup> and this is projected to grow by around 6,600 by 2031.<sup>3</sup>

The vast majority of growth is expected to stem from increases in the older population, with people aged 80-84 the largest growing group (by 43%<sup>4</sup>). Overall, North Herts is an attractive place to live and work, with good rail and road connections and house prices reflect this.

<sup>2</sup> ONS, mid-2021 population estimates.

<sup>3</sup> North Herts District & Stevenage Borough Councils Strategic Housing Market Assessment 2023, Opinion Research Services.

<sup>4</sup> NONS, 2018-based subnational population projections.

**Table 1** – Median house prices, year ending March 2023

	North Herts	Herts	East	England
All house types	£407,000	£460,000	£342,500	£290,000
Detached	£675,000	£830,000	£480,000	£440,000
Semi-detached	£451,375	£550,000	£350,000	£264,000
Terraced	£370,000	£422,500	£310,000	£240,000
Flats	£226,555	£261,000	£210,000	£232,000

Source: House Price Statistics for Small Areas, ONS September 2023

Affordability of home ownership was identified as a key challenge in our previous housing strategy and it remains a significant hurdle, with house prices over nine times average annual earnings<sup>5</sup>.

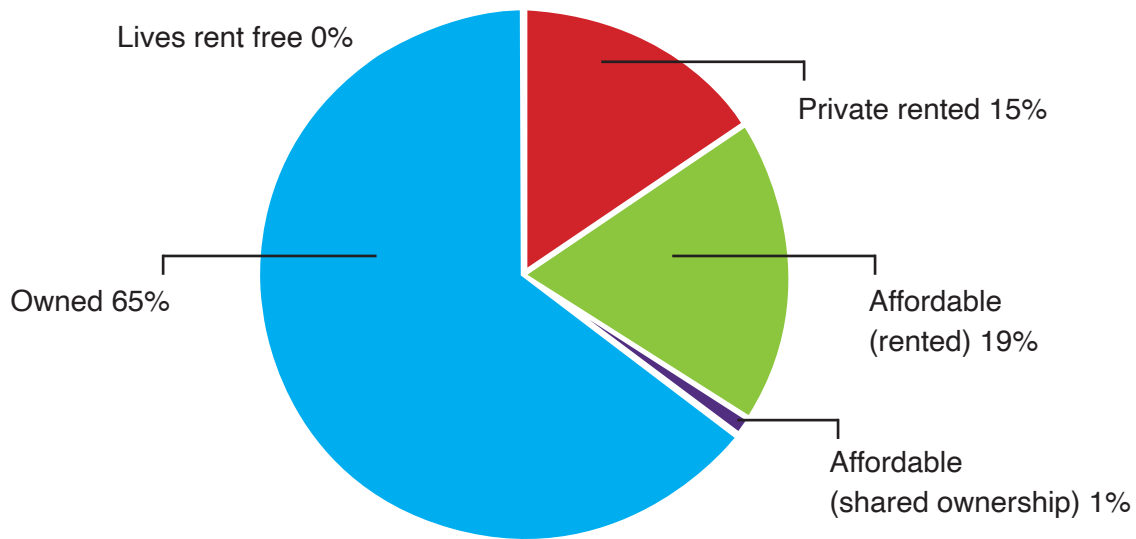
A small and in-demand private rental sector means that there are also stark affordability issues here, with most low-income households priced out of the sector due to

benefit levels (local housing allowance) not keeping up with market prices (see our Tenancy Strategy for further detail).

The sector is furthermore characterised by small-scale or ‘accidental’ landlords, making the local supply of rental properties more sensitive to changes in landlords’ personal circumstances and any uncertainties that may accompany legislative reform of the sector.

<sup>5</sup> ONS house price to residence-based earnings ratios 2022.

## Household tenure in North Herts



Source: Census 2021, ONS

Affordable (also known as social) housing in North Herts is owned and managed by registered providers of social housing, with the Regulator for Social Housing overseeing the sector. settle Housing Group is the largest provider of social housing in the district, but there are over 30 in total. Demand is consistently high for affordable housing, with generally around 2,500 households on our register for affordable housing at any one time(see statistics on our website, updated annually).

In total, there are around 59,000 homes in North Hertfordshire <sup>6</sup>. The vast majority of these are in generally good condition with no obviously large concentrations of poorly performing dwellings in the district. Latest data <sup>7</sup> however suggest that over 10% of households in the district suffer from fuel poverty and are unable to afford to heat their homes sufficiently. A housing condition survey is due to be carried out during 2024 which will look at a number of relevant key housing

associated criteria, including the tenure, the state of the property, the type and extent of the heating, housing alteration needs, etc., all of which contribute to the affordability and suitability of the home for the occupant. A significant proportion of homes in the rented sector are owned and managed by registered providers, and partly due to the increasing pressures on these landlords, it is likely that they will face an increasing challenge as they try to meet their obligations whilst working with an ageing housing stock.

There are around 200 Houses in Multiple Occupation in the district, with the council having licensing responsibilities for just under 40 of these. There are also a small number of park homes which offer an alternative to the main housing stock.

We have conducted a detailed review of homelessness in the district to inform our Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy.

<sup>6</sup> Census 2021.

<sup>7</sup> Sub-regional fuel poverty data in England 2023 (2021 data), Department for Energy Security & Net Zero.



# Maximising delivery of genuinely affordable homes

## Key priorities

- Maximise delivery of new affordable housing to meet local needs
- Wherever possible, seek to champion the delivery of social rented homes
- Work with local communities and partners to identify housing needs in rural areas and bring forward new affordable housing in line with this
- Ensure affordable housing is allocated to those in most need

## The need for more affordable homes

Affordability of local housing for our residents remains a key challenge, with house prices over nine times average annual earnings. By 2031, over 3,000 additional local households will be in need of affordable housing, with 29% of newly forming households estimated to be unable to afford to rent or buy on the private market locally <sup>8</sup>.

Affordable housing is defined within the national planning policy framework <sup>9</sup> and refers to homes let at social and affordable rents, typically 50-80% of market rents. It also includes a range of intermediate housing products which are homes for rent or sale above social /affordable rents but below market levels. In North Herts, intermediate housing is generally provided via shared ownership. Affordable housing is also known as social housing.

The council's Local Plan for 2011-2031 aims to deliver at least 11,600 net new homes to meet the district's needs for market and affordable housing. The Local Plan provides for 33% of all homes over the plan period to be delivered as affordable housing, with targets of 40% affordable housing on the largest sites <sup>10</sup>. We will negotiate with developers to ensure that maximum viable affordable housing is delivered on new sites to meet the district's identified housing needs. In instances where on-site provision of new affordable housing is not possible or appropriate, planning obligations <sup>11</sup> set out requirements for off-site provision or an equivalent financial contribution (commuted sum) from the developer, in lieu, which is used for the delivery of additional affordable housing on other schemes.

<sup>8</sup> North Herts District and Stevenage Borough Councils Strategic Housing Market Assessment 2023, Opinion Research Services.

<sup>9</sup> National Planning Policy Framework, December 2023.

<sup>10</sup> See also Developer Contributions Supplementary Planning Document, January 2023.

<sup>11</sup> Developer Contributions Supplementary Planning Document | North Herts Council ([north-herts.gov.uk](http://north-herts.gov.uk))

It is important to recognise that the availability of land locally is extremely limited and is a key constraint on the provision of additional affordable housing. The lack of viable sites outside of those identified in the Local Plan means that we are largely reliant on planning gain for the delivery of new affordable housing.

Whilst the majority of the district's overall need for affordable housing should be met by planning gain if the Local Plan targets are achieved (and taking account of homes already delivered), developer activity is dependent upon prospects for the economy as a whole.



## Housing for older people and vulnerable households

Our population is ageing. By 2031, people aged 65 and over will account for almost one-quarter (23%) of the district's projected population. Fortunately, we are living longer, healthier lives and most older people will continue to live independently in their own homes or to do so with a minimum of support. We recognise the need to develop a range of attractive housing options for older people to suit how people wish to live now and in the future.

We set out in the next section options for those who wish to stay independent in their own homes for longer.

The Local Plan includes provision for a range of newbuild older persons housing. On certain development sites, this may include bungalows or smaller homes which meet accessible and adaptable standards. Larger sites will be able to support some sheltered housing (some of which will be affordable homes, in line with planning requirements), which is usually designed specifically for those over the age of 55 and provides for independent living with modest levels of support.

The Local Plan also sets out requirements for older people who require higher, specialist, levels of support in supported accommodation. Specialist supported housing may in fact be required by people of all ages, who have physical or mental health requirements or other support needs such as substance abuse issues or being at risk of violence or abuse.



The provision of supported accommodation is primarily a Hertfordshire County Council function and they also have key responsibilities for providing practical support to help people to live independently and stay safe and well. We will continue to work closely with the County Council to assess the accommodation needs of local residents, and bring forward opportunities to meet these.

The new Supported Housing (Regulatory Oversight) Act 2023 introduces changes to how certain supported accommodation is regulated. It allows for the government to create new national supported housing standards and introduces a requirement on local authorities to review supported accommodation in their area and publish a supported housing strategy. This additional area of work will be covered in our Action Plan, once further detail is available from government.

## Ensuring genuinely affordable housing

Affordable rents, which are set at up to 80% of market rents, and therefore, unlike social rents, are not linked to local incomes, are increasingly unaffordable for local households especially those reliant upon welfare benefits. Our Tenancy Strategy sets out our concerns in detail and provides guidance based on latest available evidence on affordability for housing providers operating in North Herts. This includes a core requirement that rents should be no higher than Local Housing Allowance (LHA) levels for the area.

However under the national planning policy framework, the majority of rented homes delivered through planning gain are for affordable rent rather than social rent as these are more viable for developers. As more new homes are delivered, and older stock is replaced, so affordable rent is likely to make up an increasing proportion of our total affordable housing stock. In 2022/23, properties let at affordable rent made up 20% of lets compared to only 8% in 2019/20 <sup>12</sup>.

## Affordable housing completions in North Herts

	Social rent	Affordable rent	Intermediate	Total
2019/20	0	38	40	78
2020/21	71*	47	41	159
2021/22	2	83	50	135
2022/23	54*	39	5	98
2023/24 (estimate)	0	95	41	136

Source: NHC monitoring. \* independent living units for people aged over 55.

The council will promote the delivery of genuinely affordable homes, supported by up-to-date evidence including that provided by our latest Strategic Housing Market Assessment. In many instances, evidence shows this will be through the delivery of social rented properties and keeping all rents within LHA rates. Whilst most affordable housing is delivered through the planning

system, we will continue to work in partnership with local housing providers and other partners to bring forward other affordable housing sites where opportunities become available and where funding can be secured whilst also considering enforcing options when housing obligations remain undelivered.

<sup>12</sup> NHC analysis of lettings.

## Working with rural communities

There are unique challenges around the provision of affordable housing in our rural areas, where affordability is often the most challenging and homes scarce. Without sufficient affordable housing for young people in particular, rural communities will struggle to remain sustainable into the future.

We will continue to work with Community Development Action, parish councils and registered providers to identify housing needs in rural areas and bring forward new affordable housing for local people as appropriate through a programme of rural housing needs surveys.

## Allocation of affordable housing

With many households unable to afford to rent or buy a home on the private market, there is high demand for affordable housing and often long waits for those registered for rented affordable housing.

The council, together with settle Housing Group, manages and operates the Common Housing Allocation Scheme for North Herts. This sets out who can apply for rented affordable housing and how households meet local connection criteria and are prioritised for housing. We keep the allocation scheme under regular review in order to ensure that it

remains up-to-date (for example following changes in legislation) and that affordable homes continue to be allocated to those in most need.

We recognise that some affordable housing is under-occupied, mostly by couples (both of pensionable age and younger) who no longer have children living with them. We will continue to review options to encourage people to downsize where appropriate, although the lack of attractive alternative housing options is a particular barrier.



# Ensuring high standards of housing

## Key priorities

- Help residents to remain in their homes for longer
- Reduce the negative impact of homes in disrepair or causing nuisance to the community
- Review housing conditions in the district and use the information to better target resources
- Ensure houses in multiple occupation are safe and of good quality

## Help to remain in the family home

It is now well recognised, that as well as wishing to live in their family home for longer, people also tend to remain healthier for longer if they are able to do so. Unfortunately, as we become older or less able, this preference to remain independent becomes harder to achieve.

Providing targeted grants to assist residents to maintain homes in a good state of repair and to improve their energy efficiency is one way in which the owners of these homes can be helped to remain independent for longer, thereby allowing more of our residents to remain in their community for longer. The council will work with our communities to make available as much grant aid as practicable, not just for the benefit of current residents, but to prolong the effective lifespan of the homes, thereby helping the community and improving the living conditions for more people into the future.

Grants are limited, targeted and means-tested, but are available to help different sectors within our community if they

have a qualifying need. Disabled Facilities Grants are available to help facilitate adaptations and alterations to a dwelling to allow the beneficiary to continue to live with greater independence. Housing Repairs Assistance Grants are available to help address relatively minor matters including disrepair, again to help keep the property suitable to live in for longer.



## Empty homes

Within the district, there are a significant number of empty homes, which for a number of reasons, have been removed from the housing sector, whether for a short or long-term period. Homes which are vacant for a short period of time, especially if they are undergoing repair or are mid-sale, are an essential, albeit small part of the private sector housing establishment.

However, there is a small but significant number of private houses which have been kept vacant by the owners for many months (including second homes), and often for many years, and these are known as long-term

vacant dwellings. We wish to engage with the owners of these homes to better understand why they are not being brought back into use, and ultimately to increase the housing stock within the district. The council adopted an Empty Homes Strategy at the start of 2024 and this will form the basis of a targeted intervention (alongside increased Council Tax premiums) to better manage this resource, helping owners to make available a valuable commodity and at the same time, reducing the impact of any unwanted blight and nuisance caused by vacant homes left to fall into disrepair.

## Enforcing housing standards

It is recognised that homes, just as everything else, deteriorate over time. It is also accepted that homeowners have the responsibility to repair their homes, at least in the manner and to the standard they wish, although in certain aspects, e.g., electrical defects, structural issues, etc., minimum legal standards exist and defects or repairs falling below this minimum limit, or adversely affecting neighbours may require a more formal intervention to facilitate the repair.

Homes in the rented sector also mirror the above points, with the owner again responsible for ensuring a minimum standard of housing conditions, albeit, for the comfort and safety of their tenant, rather than themselves. Due to the nature of this type of tenure, there is a greater focus on the roles and responsibilities of both the landlord and the tenant although the objective remains the same. Unfortunately, for many reasons, many tenants do find they are living in homes not

fully meeting the minimum standards, and whilst they often have a contractual means of redress, when the defects fall below legal standards, regulatory agencies can act on behalf of the tenant to ensure those standards are achieved.

The council's Environmental Health service has championed this response for many years, and will continue to do so where the defect poses a risk to the health of the occupant or others, or a statutory breach is the problem. However, recently, the Government has developed and introduced a range of first tier judicial agencies who look at specific areas of the law and aim to resolve disputes faster and in a more focused way. The Housing Ombudsman is one such agency, and they aim to resolve tenancy disputes, including the failure of the landlord to provide a home at least meeting minimum reasonable standards of repair.

## Reviewing housing conditions

It is important that the council has a good understanding of the nature and characteristics of the housing stock in the district, especially when associated with the demands of the community. Through their normal daily interaction's officers understand this and use this information to better target any formal response to complaints and interventions, but a more formal assessment of the local housing conditions, will be via a Housing Stock Condition Survey.

The survey is due to take place during 2024 and will review a high number of characteristics associated with our housing stock and allow us to identify and better target our resources and service delivery to accommodate our housing conditions needs. Previous surveys have helped the council focus its service delivery to the greater need, and it is expected that this survey will do the same.

## Energy efficiency

It has long been recognised that our housing stock is not as energy efficient as it could be, meaning that it costs more to effectively heat and run our homes, when compared to the best standards which are already available, but tend not to be incorporated into homes. Even new build housing, although more energy efficient than previous homes, still fall far behind many European neighbours' housing standards or what is also available in the UK, albeit at a higher initial cost. Add to this an energy crisis of rapidly escalating fuel costs, for the first time in many years, more people are becoming increasingly conscious that changes to their homes, or heating practices need to be made to improve matters.

As part of an assistance programme to address at least some of the issues linked to this, the Government has, for many years, made available grant funding targeted and aimed at the more vulnerable household.

This is currently in the form of the Eco Grants Scheme, and works with the larger energy companies funding a private sector scheme working to improve residential energy efficiency, including in North Herts.

In addition to the Eco schemes, subject to the limitations of the other grants, the Housing Repairs Assistance Grant can also contribute to improving energy efficiency matters, but only insofar as replacing defective systems, but this too continues to be available for qualifying residents.

With regards new development, planning obligations promote the reduction of energy consumption and low carbon and renewable energies.



## Provision of safe and good quality houses in multiple occupation

Houses in multiple occupation (HMOs) provide an essential resource for those who are otherwise unable to secure private housing by themselves or need to live affordably in a location for a short time but are unwilling or unable to occupy a whole house, e.g., single people, transient workers or students. HMOs are essentially privately rented homes occupied by more than one household, living with a substantial degree of separation between the households, but sharing facilities such as a kitchen, a bathroom or the living area.

Currently in the UK, there are legally two types of HMOs, those, which due to their household size and composition are required to be licensed before they can be occupied, and those which are smaller HMOs, which do not require a licence. The council will work with all those involved in this sector to ensure that all HMOs are legally compliant, that they are safe and in a good state of repair, and that their impact on the local community is controlled and beneficial, and that they too can also be a valuable commodity to the local housing sector.

## Park homes

Park homes are a small but important part of the housing sector. All park home sites are required to be licensed; a licence can only be obtained once planning permission has been given for a park home site. The council has sought to promote good standards on park home sites over the years. All sites are periodically inspected and the council adopted new model standards in December 2013.



# Preventing and managing homelessness

## Key priorities

- Prevent homelessness in all its forms
- Increase provision of good quality accommodation and support for homeless people facing multiple disadvantage, including people sleeping rough
- Support victims and survivors of domestic abuse
- Improve access to affordable, local housing options



## Homelessness prevention work

Preventing homelessness from occurring in the first place is key to tackling homelessness and its causes in North Herts. Homelessness is devastating for the individual and can have long term impacts upon health, wellbeing and other life outcomes, particularly if it is repeated. Children are especially hard hit with potential disruption to education, support networks and the stability that comes from a safe, secure home.

Homelessness takes many forms, from highly visible street homelessness (or rough sleeping), to 'sofa surfing' where someone moves between a series of family and friends' homes because they have nowhere else to stay.

The council has legal duties to prevent and relieve homelessness as well as accommodation duties towards certain, priority groups of people including families with dependent children and individuals who are vulnerable due to physical or mental health needs for example. As summarised in our review of homelessness for the district, last year(2022/23), we owed duties to prevent or relieve homelessness to over 400 households. In addition, we owed a main housing duty to secure accommodation for just over 120 households.

We work closely with local partners to provide prevention services, including specialist support and advice for young people and those fleeing domestic abuse (more below) and advice and a range of support to tackle affordability issues (e.g. benefit advice, affordable loans, mediation with landlords) and help people stay in their homes.

However, more people continue to approach us for help at the point of homelessness, rather than earlier, when more can be done to help. This is despite well-publicised, easy-to-access online assistance being available through the council's website and the range of prevention services delivered through specialist organisations. Two-thirds of those who approach at the point of crisis are single households and they are most likely to approach because they are being asked to leave accommodation by family or friends or because they are fleeing domestic abuse. We are committed to ensuring that our services are approachable and accessible to all and will continue to look at ways to improve this. We will also work to strengthen and develop our local partnerships to improve early identification of people at risk of homelessness and pre-crisis intervention.

## Supporting people facing multiple disadvantages

A growing number of people who approach the council for homelessness assistance face multiple disadvantages, a combination of support needs including homelessness. Over half of the single people that we placed into temporary accommodation in 2022/23 for example had two or more support needs. Mental health issues are extremely prevalent, and poor physical health is also very common. Many of the people we work with are also at risk of, or have experienced abuse of different forms (including domestic abuse), have histories of substance misuse and/or contact with the criminal justice system. Many have experienced repeated cycles of homelessness, including rough sleeping, with accommodation placements often failing due to unmet support needs. In recent years, the council has also faced additional accommodation demands from refugee households as a result of global conflicts (most notably in Ukraine, Syria and Afghanistan) and the government's asylum dispersal policy.

People who sleep rough typically face a complex range of issues, with many having had multiple spells of street homelessness, interspersed with spells of sofa surfing and other temporary accommodation arrangements. About half of this group will have been previously refused entry or evicted from local supported housing schemes or affordable housing as a result of their behaviour and multiple support needs.

We are striving to put an end to the revolving door of homelessness. The complexities of peoples' support needs however, which span a range of services outside of housing, including adult social care, health services and the criminal justice system, mean that we

cannot fix this on our own. That is why we are committed to the Herts Making Every Adult Matter partnership, which brings together the range of local services to provide a person-centred approach to help people move on with their lives. Our rough sleeping outreach service operates on similar principles, helping individuals not just into emergency accommodation but also to access appropriate support across the range of services.

Availability of good quality, local accommodation-based support is a core element of the pathway out of homelessness and towards independence, providing safe, suitable accommodation from which people can receive the support they need. We have worked hard during the pandemic and since to increase provision of this type of accommodation, however some of the provision is temporary and demand continues to outweigh supply. We will continue to seek to secure additional accommodation, wherever funding is available, in order to stabilise provision.

People on the pathway are supported by housing related support services commissioned through Hertfordshire County Council, including specialist mental health and substance abuse support. We will be working closely with the County Council in the commissioning of services into the future, ensuring that residents' support needs are met. Timely and relevant support services also have an important prevention role, reducing the risk of future, repeat homelessness.

## Supporting victims and survivors of domestic abuse

There has been a notable increase over the last few years in people facing homelessness due to domestic abuse, making up 15% of cases in 2022/23. Unfortunately, the national picture is similar, with restrictions during the covid-19 pandemic serving to isolate victims and the current cost of living crisis adding to tensions in many homes.

The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 introduced, amongst other measures, a statutory definition of domestic abuse (emphasising that it is not just physical violence, but can also be emotional, controlling or coercive, and economic abuse) and provided that victims of domestic abuse automatically have a 'priority need' for homelessness assistance.

As part of the Hertfordshire Domestic Abuse Partnership, we are committed to preventing

domestic abuse wherever possible, and where it is not, supporting victims and survivors to stay safe and rebuild their lives. We have worked with Survivors Against Domestic Abuse (SADA) for many years in order to do so, offering advice, emotional and practical support and crisis intervention where necessary (including Safe Space emergency accommodation).



## Limited affordable, local housing options

A shortage of accommodation that is affordable in the district is a significant underlying reason behind homelessness in North Herts. Whilst home ownership is out of reach for many local people, especially the young, our private rental sector is small and in high demand. Affordable housing is in constant high demand with generally around 2,500 households registered at any one time for rented affordable housing.

Our review of homelessness identified tenants in private rented accommodation as being at particular risk of homelessness, with almost one quarter of homeless cases in 2022/23 due to private rented tenancies coming to an end. Many of these cases are due to tenants falling into rent arrears but some are also because landlords are selling their properties or wish to take them back.

For some of the people we work with however, who do not qualify for affordable housing locally (due to outstanding debt or criminal convictions for example), the private rented sector is their only housing option. We will be working to engage more intensively with local landlords to try and improve access to the sector for groups such as these.

For those for whom affordable housing is an option, our Common Housing Allocation Scheme provides reasonable preference for people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. The Scheme is therefore an important homelessness prevention tool, offering an alternative pathway to resettlement that avoids the upheaval and negative consequences of extended periods in temporary accommodation.

Our work to maximise delivery of genuinely affordable homes will also go some way to increasing the housing options available to local people.

## Annex 1: working with our partners to deliver for North Herts

### Registered housing providers

Own and manage housing stock in North Herts (general needs, retirement living and supported housing).

### Homes England

Funds affordable housing.

### Regulator of Social Housing

Promotes a viable, efficient and well-governed social housing sector.

### Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation

A key landowner in the district.

### Herts Home Improvement Agency

Provision of home adaptations.

### Community Development Action Herts and parish councils

Meeting rural housing needs.

### Hertfordshire County Council

Responsible for provision of supported accommodation and housing related support for homeless and vulnerable households. Also a key landowner in the district. Lead for resettlement work with refugee households.

### East of England Strategic Migration Partnership

Coordinates and supports delivery of national refugee programmes and regional migration priorities

### Other Herts local authorities

Partnership working and sharing best practice across housing and homelessness.

### North Herts Housing Partnership

Manages and administers the allocation of affordable housing in the district.

### Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements

Brings together key agencies to manage offenders.

### North Herts Council:

- maximising delivery of genuinely affordable homes
- ensuring high standards of housing
- preventing and managing homelessness

### Multi-disciplinary team arrangements

Brings together key agencies and services to discuss complex cases

### Homelessness Advisory and Support Team (DLUHC)

Provides targeted advice and supports delivery of homelessness services.

### Herts Making Every Adult Matter partnership

A coordinated approach to helping people with multiple disadvantage.

### North Herts and Stevenage Homeless Forum

Central forum for all partners and stakeholders involved in delivery of local homelessness services, including:

Beam  
 Black Squirrel Credit Union  
 Change Grow Live (CGL)  
 Citizens Advice Bureau  
 DWP  
 Emerging Futures  
 First Garden Cities Homes  
 Herts County Council  
 HertsHelp  
 Herts Mind Network  
 Hertfordshire Constabulary  
 Herts Young Homeless  
 Housing brokerage service  
 Keystage Housing  
 Metropolitan Thames Valley Housing  
 NHS  
 No More service  
 North Herts Council  
 One YMCA  
 Peabody housing  
 POhWER  
 Probation Service  
 Resolve  
 Safer Places  
 settle  
 Stevenage Borough Council  
 Survivors Against Domestic Abuse (SADA)  
 Turning Point

### NHS trusts

Deliver healthcare and community based services