

## Annex 1.

# Bracknell Forest Homelessness Review 2021

December 2021

# Bracknell Forest Review of Homelessness December 2021

## Contents:

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>2</b>
The Covid -19 pandemic and the Review of Homelessness and Rough Sleeping	3
Changes to the homelessness legislation that will inform this Review	4
<b>Section 1: The local housing context and data available on homelessness</b>	<b>6</b>
General information about Bracknell Forest’s social and economic context	6
An overview of the housing market in Bracknell Forest	10
Homelessness casework records and other local sources of data	17
Rough Sleeping	38
Temporary Accommodation	41
What legislative or policy changes might impact on levels of homelessness for particular groups in Bracknell Forest	45
<b>Section 2: The current activity and resources available to prevent and relieve homelessness in Bracknell Forest</b>	<b>50</b>
Financial resources	50
Services and joint working to prevent or relieve homelessness and rough sleeping	52
Accommodation options to prevent and relieve homelessness	59

## Introduction

The Homelessness Act 2002 requires all local housing authorities to compile a Homelessness Strategy and to renew the strategy at least every five years. In order to do that, a review of homelessness needs to take place, which informs both the development of the new strategy and the action planning needed to deliver the objectives within the strategy.

The issues surrounding homelessness in any local area are multi-faceted and complex. This document sets out a wide range of information about homelessness in Bracknell Forest, which will inform our new Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy and the action plan.

Since the last Homelessness Strategy was published in 2015 there have been some significant changes nationally which have had an impact on homelessness and the services to assist people at risk of homelessness in Bracknell Forest:

- The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 with new burdens funding and a number of other short-term funding schemes.
- The Government commitment to end rough sleeping by 2024 and a funding programme to support this aspiration, including more recently, the 'Everybody In' directive in response to the Covid-19 pandemic
- The Covid-19 pandemic and its impact on local communities, the economy and public services

This review of homelessness will focus in particular on understanding the local context, homelessness patterns, local service delivery, including our partnership working over the last 3 years, given some of the significant changes in that period, as outlined above.

We have followed the Government's Homelessness Code of Guidance in preparing this review. Chapter 2 of the Code sets out the minimal requirements that a review should cover. Based on this we have split the review into 2 sections:

- 1) The local housing context and data available on homelessness
- 2) The current activity and resources available to manage homelessness services

The housing context and data section will cover much of the detail set out in the Code of Guidance:

- General information about Bracknell Forest's social and economic context
- Homelessness casework records and other local sources of data
- Trends in homelessness approaches and in underlying causes
- Which cohorts may be more likely to become homeless or be threatened with homelessness
- The profile of households who have experienced homelessness
- Equality monitoring data, including that relating to homelessness applications and outcomes
- The range of factors that may affect future levels of homelessness in Bracknell Forest
- The personal and structural factors that may contribute to people becoming homeless
- Any planned legislation or local policy changes that are likely to impact on levels of homelessness for particular groups in the district.

The part which outlines current activity and resources will cover the following:

- Financial resources within the Council specifically for homelessness

- Other services to support homeless people, not provided directly by or on behalf of the Council
- What do we do now to prevent homelessness?
- Types of accommodation available to people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness
- What we know about our prevention work – which activities are the most successful, are there gaps and which groups are easier to assist and why?
- How do we assist people rough sleeping to come off the streets and into recovery and support services?
- What types of temporary accommodation are available in Bracknell Forest and use of temporary accommodation outside Bracknell Forest

The information contained within the review come from a range of sources:

- Government and local authority information and statistics that are available in the public domain
- Relevant policy and research documents for a number of different agencies, as well as key directives, guidance and communications which Bracknell Forest or the Government have published
- Consultation in late 2019 with people in Bracknell Forest who have lived experience of homelessness, with other organisations, and with Bracknell Forest housing officers

Whilst there are specific legal duties placed on local housing authorities in England in terms of homelessness, which are outlined below, it is useful to note that this is not the whole picture, in terms of the services delivered by different agencies and services. Many of the services that can prevent homelessness occurring in the first place or support people who are recovering from homelessness do not sit within a legal framework and whilst of these are some are delivered by Bracknell Forest Council, some are delivered by other organisations.

## **The Covid -19 pandemic and the Review of Homelessness and Rough Sleeping**

The purpose of the homelessness and rough sleeping review is to inform a future strategy by understanding and learning from what has happened recently, highlighting through data, other service specific information and consultation what is working well, progress, pressure points and gaps in services. The last 3 years are of most significance for the purposes of this review, in terms of the commencement of the new homelessness legislation and the Covid-19 pandemic.

Because the last year has been significantly impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic, in terms of national lockdowns and changes to Government policy as a result of the pandemic, the review notes the changes over the last year, 2020/21. Bracknell Forest Council continues to assess the impact of the pandemic on the local authority area, with residents and partner agencies, including Health agencies, Thames Valley Police, the Fire and Rescue Service, local businesses, landlords, including housing associations, faith organisations and the voluntary and community sector.

We want to pinpoint the short and medium term impacts of Covid-19 on homelessness and rough sleeping, which are likely to be directly affected by, for example, any slowdown in the economy, resulting unemployment or an increase in low waged households, or changes in the housing market.

In some data the 2020/21 statistics are shown separately, in order to offer some commentary on the last year of the pandemic and any likely reasons for the differences.

Projecting into the future is challenging for all organisations and there can be no assumption that, in terms of homelessness, things will return to normal, as there have been constant shifts in trends and policy changes which indirectly and directly impact on homelessness. The medium term impact of the Covid-19 pandemic is another change to factor into the new Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy for Bracknell Forest.

## **Changes to the homelessness legislation that will inform this Review**

The homelessness legislation changed on the 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2018, when Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996 was amended to incorporate the Homelessness Reduction Act (HRA) 2017. This is a significant change, with many commentators describing it as the biggest change in homelessness for 40 years.

This Act does not replace the previous legislation but adds into Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996 some new duties. These aim to ensure local authorities intervene earlier to prevent homelessness and to take 'reasonable steps' to assist people who are eligible to prevent homelessness or 'relieve' their homelessness.

It is important to set out the basic elements of the legislation at this point in the Review, so the reader can then understand some of the tables and data set out later in this document.

The overall aims of the Act are to reduce homelessness by:

- Improving the quality of the advice available
- Refocusing local authorities on prevention work and within a new legal framework
- Increasing support for single people
- Joining up services to provide better support for people, especially those leaving prison/hospital and other groups at increased risk of homelessness, such as people fleeing domestic abuse and care leavers

### **The Act requires local authorities to give free information and advice on:**

- Preventing homelessness and securing accommodation when homeless
- The rights of people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness
- How to get help
- Information on tenants' rights, rights to benefits, advice on debt, rent and mortgage arrears, help for people at risk of violence and abuse and advice on how to obtain accommodation in the social sector and private rented sector.

### **There is a new 'Prevention Duty':**

Local Authorities' must take reasonable steps to prevent homelessness for any eligible applicant, at risk of homelessness within 56 days, regardless of priority need. This can involve assisting them to stay in their current accommodation, or helping them to find a new place to live

### **There is also a new 'Relief' Duty:**

Local authorities have a 56 day duty to take 'reasonable steps' to help the applicant to secure suitable accommodation. Help could be, for example, providing a bond guarantee, funding a rent deposit, or working with a private landlord to make properties available. Where an eligible applicant who is homeless, has or may have, a 'priority need' for accommodation they must be offered temporary accommodation.

If the relief duty activity fails after 56 days, and the applicant is still homeless, the tests of priority need, and intentionality are applied to ascertain if the person is owed the 'main' homelessness duty. If they are not owed the main duty, the 'relief duty' can continue at the discretion of the local authority.

### **Assessments and Personal Housing Plans:**

Councils must carry out a holistic assessment of the applicant's housing circumstances, their housing needs and any support needs they have which need to be addressed for them to be able to sustain accommodation in the future. This assessment will result in developing a Personal Housing Plan with them, that sets out the 'reasonable steps' that the Council and the applicant and, if applicable, other professionals, will take in order to prevent or relieve their homelessness.

### **A new 'Duty to Refer' on some public bodies:**

Some public bodies must refer (with consent) details of any person they are aware of who is at risk of homelessness, within 56 days, to the housing department. The list of the public bodies is:

- prisons
- youth offender institutions
- secure training centres
- secure colleges
- youth offending teams
- probation services (including community rehabilitation companies)
- Jobcentre Plus
- social service authorities
- emergency departments
- urgent treatment centres
- hospitals in their function of providing inpatient care
- Secretary of State for defence in relation to members of the armed forces

### **Prevention and relief duties can be ended in a number of ways including:**

- The 56 days of prevention or relief duty has expired

- If an applicant becomes homeless during the ‘Prevention Duty’ stage, that duty ends and a new ‘relief’ duty would be owed for 56 days
- Refusing an offer of suitable accommodation that is likely to be available for 6 months or more
- Deliberate and unreasonable non-co-operation with the Personal Housing Plan, after a formal warning notification
- Becoming intentionally homeless from accommodation provided as a ‘reasonable step’
- Securing suitable accommodation that has a reasonable prospect of being available for a minimum of 6 months
- No longer being ‘eligible’
- Withdrawal of the homelessness application.

### Care Leavers

In addition to having a local connection to the authority who looked after them, a care leaver will also have a local connection with an area if they have lived there for 2 years, including some time before their 16th birthday.

More detail on this can be found on the Government website, where there is an overview of the legislation and what it means in practice in the MHCLG Homelessness Code of Guidance. See here for the link:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/homelessness-code-of-guidance-for-local-authorities>

## Section 1: The local housing context and data available on homelessness

### General information about Bracknell Forest’s social and economic context

The borough of Bracknell Forest is situated in Berkshire and is 28 miles from London. Wokingham, West Berkshire, Reading, Slough and Windsor and Maidenhead are neighbouring areas.

The population of Bracknell Forest at the 2011 census was 113, 205. The most recent Office of National Statistics data published in 2019 estimates there has been a rise of almost 10,000 since 2011 to 122,549. The population is projected to continue to rise and the proportion of people aged over 65 is expected to rise the most significantly. Changes in population affect the housing needs of any area. In terms of an increase in the proportion of people aged 65 and over, this will have significant implications for health and social care provision, as well as the types of housing which will be needed for older people with more limited mobility.

The local housing need will change over the next 15 years based on the estimate and projections set out in the table below.

**Table 1: The estimated and projected population of Bracknell Forest 2019 – 2036**

Age band	Population 2019 (estimate)	Population 2036 (projection)	Change	% Change
----------	-------------------------------	---------------------------------	--------	----------

Under 5	7,412	8,1648	734	9.9%
5-9	8,309	8,371	62	0.7%
10-14	8,251	8,878	627	7.6%
15-19	7,081	8,667	1,586	22.4%
20-24	6,326	7,138	813	12.8%
25-29	7,256	8,695	1,399	19.2%
30-34	8,654	8,552	-102	-1.2%
35-39	9,318	9,354	36	0.4%
40-44	8,707	9,504	802	9.2%
45-49	9,134	9,543	409	4.5%
50-54	9,153	9,252	99	1.1%
55-59	8,364	8,871	507	6.1%
60-64	6,582	8,025	1,443	21.9%
65-69	5,289	7,732	2,443	46.2%
70-74	4,888	6,923	2,035	41.6%
75-79	3,116	5,431	2,315	74.3%
80-84	2,447	3,885	1,438	58.7%
85+	2,247	4,399	2,152	95.7%
Total	122,575	141,372	18,797	15.3%

Taken from the Icenii Bracknell Forest Housing Needs Report July 2020 and the Office of National Statistics website :

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationprojections/datasets/localauthoritiesinenglandtable2>

In 2019, of the estimated total population of 121,676, 49.6% were male and 50.6% were female.

The ethnicity of the population of Bracknell Forest has changed slightly since the 2011 census, based on estimates from the Office of National Statistics:

**Table 2: The ethnic composition of the population in Bracknell Forest**

Ethnicity by ONS groupings	White British	Other White	Mixed/multiple ethnic groups	Asian /Asian British	Black/African/ Caribbean/ Black British	Other ethnic group
2011 Census	84.9%	5.7%	2%	5%	1.9%	0.6%
2016 (estimate)	83.1%	6.7%	2.5%	4.2%	2.5%	0.8%
2017 School Census	78.9%	6.4%	5.5%	5.8%	2.8%	0.6%

The 2011 Census indicated that Bracknell Forest has levels of limiting long-term illness which are below the regional and national averages, at 12.3%, compared with 15.7% at a regional and 17.6% at a national level. It is likely that there will be a rise in the people living in the area with long-term illness as the numbers of older people increase.

In the 2019 Indices of Multiple Deprivation, out of the 317 authorities, Bracknell Forest is ranked at 284 and is one of the least deprived areas in England. The table below shows where Bracknell Forest rank compared to neighbouring boroughs, with the least deprived boroughs at the top.

**Table 3: Bracknell Forest and neighbouring authorities ranked by their IMD score**

Local authority area	Overall ranking in the Indices of Multiple Deprivation
Wokingham	316
Windsor and Maidenhead	304
West Berkshire	289
Bracknell Forest	284
Reading	141
Slough	73

The Indices scoring is based on a combination of:

- **Income Deprivation:** the proportion of the population experiencing deprivation relating to low income. The definition of low income used includes both those people that are out-of-work, and those that are in work but who have low earnings.
- **Employment Deprivation:** the proportion of the working-age population in an area involuntarily excluded from the labour market. This includes people who would like to work but are unable to do so due to unemployment, sickness or disability, or caring responsibilities.
- **Education, Skills and Training Deprivation:** the lack of attainment and skills in the local population. The indicators fall into two sub-domains: one relating to children and young people and one relating to adult skills.
- **Health Deprivation and Disability:** the risk of premature death and the impairment of quality of life through poor physical or mental health. The domain measures morbidity, disability and premature mortality but not aspects of behaviour or environment that may be predictive of future health deprivation.
- **Crime:** the risk of personal and material victimisation at local level.
- **Barriers to Housing and Services:** the physical and financial accessibility of housing and local services. The indicators fall into two sub-domains: ‘geographical barriers’, which relate to the physical proximity of local services, and ‘wider barriers’ which includes issues relating to access to housing such as affordability.
- **Living Environment Deprivation:** the quality of the local environment. The indicators fall into two sub-domains. The ‘indoors’ living environment measures the quality of housing, while the ‘outdoors’ living environment contains measures of air quality and road traffic accidents.

The domain which indicates higher levels of deprivation than any of the others is ‘Barriers to Housing and Services’. Affordability of housing is a key feature within Bracknell Forest which has a direct impact on levels of housing need and homelessness.

There is more information about the levels and types of deprivation in Bracknell Forest here:

<https://bracknell-forest.berkshireobservatory.co.uk/deprivation/>

The full set of information can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/english-indices-of-deprivation-2019>

Arguably, the ranking of whole authorities can be a rather blunt instrument for those wishing to address poverty within local authorities. In order to understand in greater detail levels of deprivation within smaller areas of a local authority, Lower Layer Super Output Areas (LSOAs) are used, each of which have between 1,000 to 1,500 people within them. They have been designed to improve reporting and assist with more targeted intervention and support. In 2019, there was a ranking exercise of the 34,753 LSOAs in England. Bracknell Forest is one of the least deprived areas, with no areas within the local authority boundaries which have a score placing them in the top 10% of most deprived LSOAs in England. This is also the case for surrounding local authority areas of Wokingham, West Berkshire and Windsor and Maidenhead. Whilst half of all households in Bracknell Forest are in the top 20% of least deprived areas, 16% of neighbourhoods are ranked as more deprived than the national average.

Through each of the 75 LSOAs in Bracknell Forest, the domain which, with 2 exceptions, indicates the highest levels of disadvantage are Barriers to Housing and Services, followed by Education and Skills. See here for more detail on this: <https://bracknell-forest.berkshireobservatory.co.uk/deprivation/report/view/0fcbbad5f33b48b7be56949ad2228bea/E01016252>

Rates of economic activity amongst the 16 – 64 age group are relatively high in Bracknell Forest. Taken from data across the 12 months of 2020, the rates were 83.7%, compared to 81.6% in the South East region and 79.1% of England.

Not everyone who is economically inactive is seeking employment. Some people are retired or are students or are caring for children or relatives. In Bracknell Forest 30.9% (3,900) of the people who were economically inactive did want to find employment, which is a significantly higher proportion of residents wanting to work when compared to the South East (18.4%) and England overall (20.0%). Supporting people into employment can help reduce the risk of homelessness by increasing their ability to afford and sustain accommodation.

The number of people aged 16 – 64 in Bracknell Forest claiming out of work benefits has increased since the Covid-19 pandemic started in April 2020, reflecting the national trend.

**Table 4: Claimant rates before and during the Covid-19 pandemic**

Month	Bracknell Forest % (and numbers)	South East %	Great Britain %
April 2019	1.4% (1,075)	1.7%	2.7%
April 2020	3.1% (2,470)	3.9%	5.1%
March 2021	4.4% (3,510)	5.4%	6.5%

Young people have been disproportionately affected by the Covid-19 pandemic in terms of their employment status. In March 2021, the claimant rate for 18 – 24 year olds is higher than for any other age group.

**Table 5: Claimant rates in March 2021 by age**

Age group	Bracknell Forest % (and numbers)	South East %	Great Britain %
16/17s	0.3% (10)	0.2%	0.4%

18 – 24s	6.8% (610)	7.8%	9.1%
25 -49s	4.6% (1,975)	5.8%	7.1%
50+	3.8% (915)	4.2%	5.1%

This is of importance as young people’s ability to access housing away from their parental home is likely to be more restricted generally than for older adults due to their relative low incomes and inexperience as young tenants.

Ill health and long-term sickness levels are lower in Bracknell Forest than nationally and regionally. 2,100 people aged 16 – 65 who were economically inactive in 2020 had long term health issues. This represents 17.1% of economically inactive working age people in the area. Across the South East region and Great Britain the proportions are higher, at 19.9% and 23.6% respectively.

### **An overview of the housing market in Bracknell Forest**

Whilst the causes of homelessness are complex and multi-faceted, spanning a range of underlying structural factors and individual circumstances, the availability of decent and affordable local housing is a key factor in protecting many households from homelessness altogether and quickly resolving homelessness if this occurs.

The diversity of the local housing market, in terms of types of housing available and levels of affordability, determine the ability of residents to find and keep a suitable home and local authorities to prevent and resolve homelessness.

The breakdown of tenure types within the housing stock across Bracknell Forest has only changed marginally, based on the most up to date statistics.

**Table 6: Tenure of housing in Bracknell Forest**

Tenure Type	Bracknell Forest		South East	National
	Census 2011	ONS estimate 2019	Census 2011	Census 2011
<b>Owner Occupier</b>	68.5%	70.5%	67.6%	63.4%
<b>Private Rented</b>	12.5%	13.8%	16.3%	16.8%
<b>Social Rented</b>	16.8%	15.65%	13.7%	17.7%

Some of the more detailed work on housing supply, demand and need is contained within the new Bracknell Forest Local Plan which sets out the main areas of policy and planning up to 2037, based on local housing needs and aspirations for the area in the longer term.

The demand for and cost of housing in Bracknell Forest and surrounding areas is relatively high, reflecting the relatively strong local economy and the close proximity of the borough to London. Whilst average incomes locally are higher than regional or national averages, within the local authority area there are affordability pressures for those on low incomes.

The changing housing market based on local needs for housing is a core element of the Local Plan. This is informed by more detailed work, including the [Bracknell Forest Housing Needs Assessment report](#) by Icen Projects Limited, published in July 2020. The headline findings from this report outline that:

- The number of households in Bracknell Forest will have risen from a position of 51,068 in 2019 to 55,759 in 2029
- In order to meet overall housing need, an additional 4,691 homes are needed, equating to 469 new homes per annum. By calculating a cap for new homes in the area, which is set out in MHCLG Planning guidance at a maximum of 40% above the level required, this rises to 615 homes per annum
- Of the future additional need for housing, the report identifies the need for 376 affordable homes per annum, around two thirds to be available for renting and a third for low cost ownership
- A range of housing products are needed to meet the changing needs of the population. Whilst some of the new provision is needed for newly formed households, a need was identified for housing which is suitable for older people to move in to as an alternative to their current home.

Bracknell Forest Local Plan, which will guide development up to 2037, sets out the following affordable housing planning policy requirements:

- 35% of all stock to be affordable to those households on low incomes. This is a significant rise from the current policy of 25%.
- Within the development of new affordable housing, 69% to be earmarked for rent and 31% for affordable home ownership. This is similar to the current policy mix of 70% Affordable Rent and 30% shared ownership
- Of the 69% for rent, 50% would be set at a social rent, which is no more than 60% of the local market rent, and the remaining 50% would be affordable rents, capped at Local Housing Allowance levels or up to 80% of the market rent, whichever is the lower.

### Home Ownership

Around 70% of homes in Bracknell Forest are owner occupied. The proportion of home ownership in the borough has slightly increased since 2011.

The table below sets out the increase over the last 20 years on the proportion of income which households in the middle and lower income brackets in Bracknell Forest would need to spend on home ownership. The proportion of income needed to afford home ownership rises for those in the lower quartile of earnings, with the ratio almost doubling over the last 20 years.

**Table 7: Home ownership and proportions of income required for lower income households**

	England		South East		Bracknell Forest	
Year	Median House Price (and ratio to median earnings)	Lower Quartile House Price (and ratio to LQ earnings)	Median House Price (and ratio to median earnings)	Lower Quartile House Price (and ratio to LQ earnings)	Median House Price (and ratio to median earnings)	Lower Quartile House Price (and ratio to LQ earnings)
2000	£76,500 (4.00)	£51,000 (3.70)	£102,000 (5.10)	£83,750 (4.93)	£199,950 (4.80)	£94,950 (5.45)
2010	£181,000 (6.89)	£127,000 (6.77)	£224,950 (8.18)	£165,000 (8.45)	£220,000 (6.26)	£180,000 (7.84)

<b>2020</b>	£240,000 (7.55)	£158,500 (6.91)	£320,000 (9.70)	£240,000 (10.00)	£335,000 (8.02)	£280,000 (9.80)
-------------	--------------------	--------------------	--------------------	---------------------	--------------------	--------------------

The ability of both working households and those not working on low incomes to own a property is limited. The affordable housing requirements set out in the draft Local Plan affordable housing policy will result in an increase in low cost home ownership units available over the plan period.

### Shared home ownership

Approximately 1% of all houses in England are shared ownership. This is a 'help to buy' product but with a low market share it is not currently a common tenure type. There were reported to be 412 shared ownership properties in Bracknell Forest as of March 2020 (see Table 8 below).

Designed for households on low incomes who cannot afford the cost of a deposit and a mortgage, shared ownership is aimed predominantly at first time buyers who are unable to afford to purchase on the open market.

The costs of a property are split into rental element and a mortgage element. The proportions of equity and rental costs can vary but the minimum share a buyer can purchase of a Shared Ownership home is 25%. However, the government's new model for the scheme will see this lowered to 10%.

Based on the 2019 – 2036 Housing Needs Assessment for Bracknell Forest, the local authority is proposing new affordable home options would be targeted at those on incomes between £28,300 and £57,000 (at 2020 values) and would in the main be for 1 and 2 bed housing, as larger homes are less affordable to those on lower incomes.

### Social and affordable rented housing

There are around 20 different Registered Providers in Bracknell Forest. The table below provides an overview of the different providers, their portfolios of properties and their percentage of the social housing market within Bracknell Forest as of March 2020.

**Table 8: Overview of registered providers in Bracknell Forest March 2020**

	Total stock	% of total stock	General needs	Supported housing	Low cost home ownership
<b>A2Dominion South Limited</b>	59	0.7%	59	-	-
<b>Ability Housing Association</b>	37	0.4%	8	29	-
<b>Accent Housing Limited</b>	20	0.2%	20	-	-
<b>Advance Housing and Support Limited</b>	14	0.2%	-	12	2
<b>Anchor Hanover Group</b>	41	0.5%	-	41	-
<b>Catalyst Housing Limited</b>	5	0.1%	-	-	5
<b>Clarion Housing Association Limited</b>	263	3.0%	211	-	52
<b>First Priority Housing Association Limited</b>	8	0.1%	-	8	-
<b>Heylo Housing Registered Provider Limited</b>	1	0.0%	-	-	1
<b>Home Group Limited</b>	271	3.0%	160	6	105
<b>Housing 21</b>	69	0.8%	-	69	-
<b>Housing Solutions</b>	14	0.2%	3	-	11
<b>London &amp; Quadrant Housing Trust</b>	349	3.9%	332	5	12

Look Ahead Care and Support Limited	83	0.9%	-	83	-
Metropolitan Housing Trust Limited	612	6.9%	308	-	304
Moat Homes Limited	2	0.0%	-	-	2
Notting Hill Home Ownership Limited	2	0.0%	-	-	2
One Housing Group Limited	32	0.4%	32	-	-
Places for People Homes Limited	1	0.0%	1	-	-
Places for People Living+ Limited	7	0.1%	-	7	-
Portal Housing Association Limited	90	1.0%	89	1	-
Sage Housing Limited	16	0.2%	12	-	4
Shepherds Bush Housing Association Limited	1	0.0%	-	-	1
Silva Homes Limited	6,160	69.3%	5,572	443	145
Southern Housing Group Limited	423	4.8%	373	39	11
Sovereign Housing Association Limited	68	0.8%	48	8	12
Stonewater Limited	48	0.5%	35	-	13
The Swaythling Housing Society Limited	26	0.3%	25	-	1
Vivid Housing Limited	6	0.1%	-	-	6
Yarlington Housing Group	158	1.8%	60	63	35
<b>Total</b>	<b>8,886</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>7,348</b>	<b>814</b>	<b>724</b>

In 2007/08 Bracknell Forest Council's social housing stock, comprising of approximately 5,640 homes, was transferred under a Large Scale Voluntary Transfer (LSVT) arrangement to Bracknell Forest Homes, which is now Silva Homes. Within this arrangement, the Council has 100% nomination rights into the general needs stock transfer voids in Bracknell Forest within the Silva Homes portfolio.

There is no common Housing Register through which all social and affordable rented properties are let based on need. Bracknell Forest Council has 100% of nominations on first lettings for new developments and 75% of nominations for subsequent lettings.

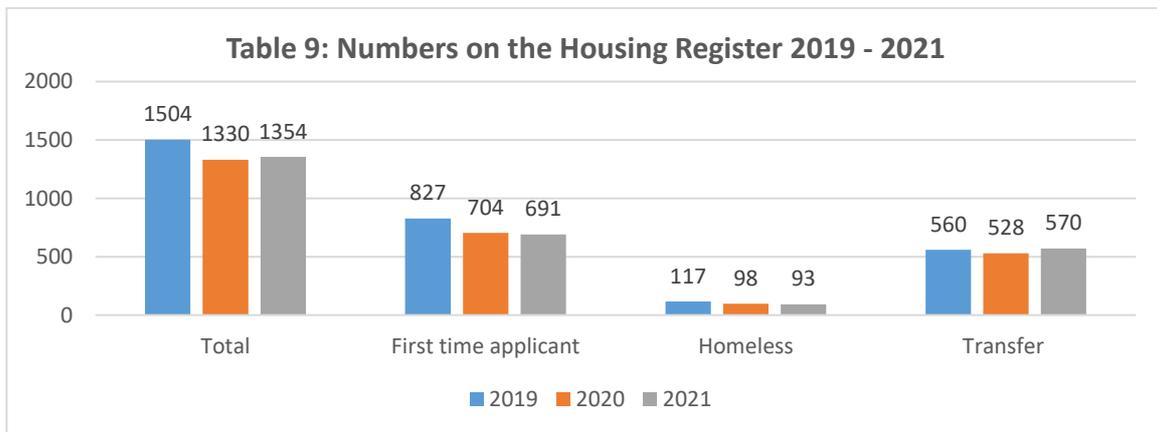
Households can apply for social and affordable rented housing via the local authority's Housing Register, BFC My Choice, if they have a housing need. There is a 4 year residency requirement to join the Housing Register. Applicants that qualify are placed into one of 4 bands, based on their level of housing need.

The demand for social housing is shown below over the last 3 years. During 2020/21 and to date, the Covid-19 pandemic is reported to have had an impact on demand overall and the types of demand in many local authority areas. This is due to a combination of 3 factors: the restrictions on processing of possession orders, which moved from a 6 to a 4 month notice period on 31st May 2021; the demand for 1-bed room accommodation as a result of the 'Everyone In' programme to rehouse people who have been sleeping rough during the pandemic; and the slow-down in lettings generally as a result of the pandemic.

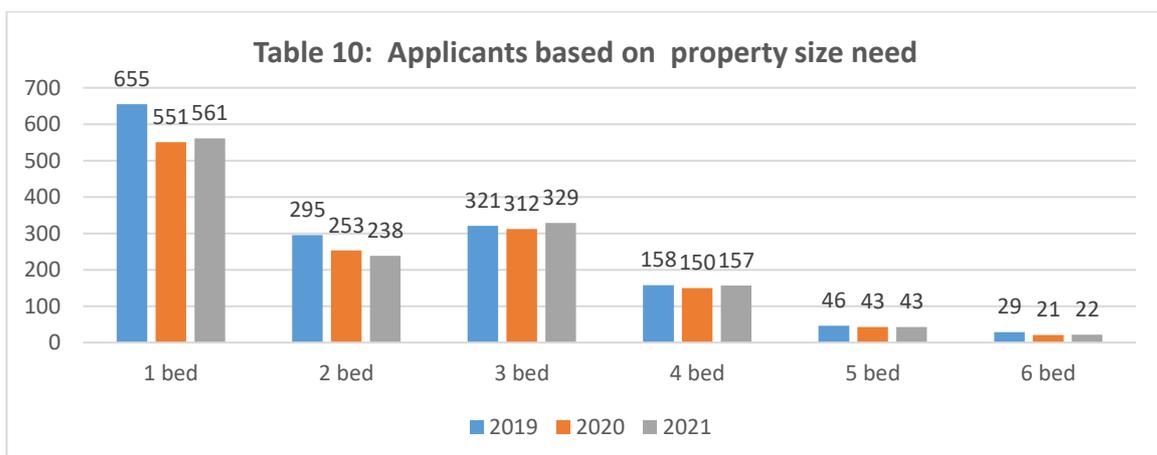
The chart below sets out the numbers of applicants on the Housing Register and the basis for their request, in broad terms. The overall numbers have reduced between March 2019 and March 2021, with lower numbers of homelessness and first time applicants.

The reduction in numbers is relatively small but the reasons for lower numbers are not conclusive. These cannot be attributed to Covid-19 alone as the numbers began to reduce in the year before the pandemic. A review is underway of all homelessness cases, with a particular focus on those in Temporary Accommodation, to ensure they have all applied to join the Housing Register. Alongside this is more targeted work to support move-on into settled accommodation for those living in Temporary Accommodation.

An update to the Allocations Policy was implemented in April 2021 for homeless applicants owed the prevention or the relief duty. It is anticipated that this will help to ensure that all homeless households are on the Housing Register.



The chart below provides a breakdown of the numbers of households on the Housing Register in the highest need (Band A-C) by property size over the last 3 years. As with the overall numbers shown above, there is no particular ‘spike’ which indicates an impact attributable to the Covid-19 pandemic. There is a slight rise in demand for 3-bedroom properties and a drop in demand for 2-bedroom properties. This corresponds to the waiting times for different property sizes, as shown in Table 12 below.



The numbers of households re-housed through the Housing Register determines Bracknell Forest’s ability to manage the demand and supply tensions effectively. There has been a slow down in the rate of lettings in the year 2020/21, coinciding with the period of the Covid-19 pandemic.

**Table 11: Lettings per year**

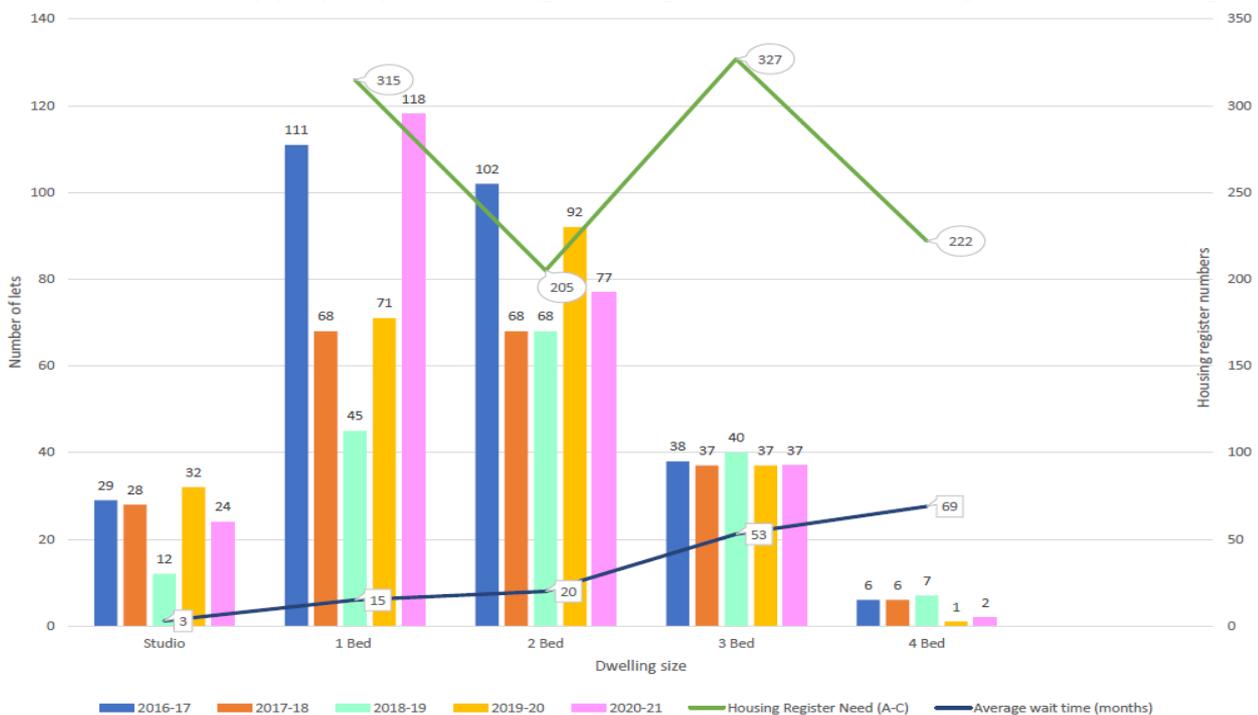
Year	Number on the Housing Register	Number re-housed through the Register	% re-housed through the Housing Register
March 2019	1,504	339	22.5%
March 2020	1,330	361	27.1%
March 2021	1,354	313	30.5%

**Table 12: The average waiting times for households on the Housing Register between April 2020 and March 2021**

Property size	Average of Days	Average of Months	Average of Years
1 Bed	456.9	14.6	1.2
2 Bed	633.6	20.2	1.7
3 Bed	1635.5	53.2	4.4
4 bed	2117.0	69.0	5.8
Studio	87.6	2.5	0.2
<b>Average time waiting (all)</b>	<b>598.1</b>	<b>19.2</b>	<b>1.6</b>

The table above and the chart below indicate that average rehousing times vary for different property sizes. Although the demand for one bed properties is high, the supply of these is relatively high compared to the number of larger properties becoming available to let. For homeless households placed in temporary accommodation, the average wait for a 3 bedroom property is 4 years, compared to less than a year for a one bedroom property, with the wait for a four and five bed property very much longer.

**Table 13: Demand by property size, average waiting times and new lettings of social housing**



All of the households on the Housing Register in Bracknell Forest have a housing need. 'Reasonable preference' is awarded to some households based on their circumstances. Households are then grouped based on the reason for awarding reasonable preference. Some people within the 'reasonable preference' groups are given a higher priority, or 'additional preference' due to the urgency of their situation. The numbers of homeless households in the table below are relatively low compared to the numbers owed prevention, relief, or main duties under Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996. This is in part because the Allocations Policy was not, until 2021, updated to reflect the new duties which came in through the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, and also in part because households in Temporary Accommodation have not routinely been making applications to the housing register. This is now being addressed.

**Table 14: Numbers on the Housing Register by Reasonable Preference Group**

Reasonable Preference awarded		Homeless within meaning of Part VII of Housing Act, regardless of whether there is a statutory duty to house them	Owed a duty by a housing authority under S190(2), S193(2) or S195(2) or are occupying accommodation secured by any such authority under the Act	Occupying insanitary or overcrowded housing or otherwise living in unsatisfactory housing conditions	Need to move on medical or welfare grounds, including grounds relating to a disability	Need to move to a particular locality in the authority, where failure to meet that need would cause hardship (to themselves or to others).	And of the households in reasonable preference groups, how many have urgent housing needs & are given additional preference	of which, how many are members of the Armed Forces community
Numbers waiting on the Housing Register with 'reasonable preference'	2018/19	22	45	1,108	167	14	97	1
	2019/20	14	52	960	165	7	102	1

### Private rented accommodation

As well as challenges for lower income households, in terms of saving for deposits and obtaining a mortgage, it was noted in Bracknell Forest's Housing Needs Assessment that for family sized households on lower incomes in particular, the ability to meet their housing needs in the private rented sector was very limited, often on account of the benefit cap. The report noted that there were significant instances where such households were unable to budget appropriately leading to a failure to pay housing rental charges when they were due.

Given the cost of purchasing a property and the relative scarcity of social rented housing (see below), the private rented sector is an option for some households. The affordability pressures have reportedly resulted in increased levels of overcrowding and sharing and there is some 'churn' within the private rented sector. As will be highlighted later in this review, the second most common cause of homelessness is the loss of accommodation due to the ending of an Assured Shorthold Tenancy in the private rented sector.

Since the 2011 Census, the Office of National Statistics has estimated that there has been a rise of around 3% in private rented accommodation in Bracknell Forest, reflecting the market conditions for those who cannot afford to get on the housing ladder. There remains a relatively low proportion of privately rented property in Bracknell, however, compared with the region/nationally (See Table 6 above).

**Table 15: The LHA rates for Bracknell Forest and estimated lower quartile rents**

BMRA area	LHA rates PCM for Bracknell Forest 2019/20			LHA rates PCM for Bracknell Forest 2020/21			ONS Lower Quartile Rent in Bracknell Forest (Oct 19 – Sep 20)
	Reading	East Thames Valley	Blackwater	Reading	East Thames Valley	Blackwater	
<b>1 room in a shared house</b>	£352.57	£341.36	£347.27	£389.99	£449.99	£375.86	£375
<b>1 bed</b>	£684.84	£698.41	£632.15	£795.00	£800.00	£700.02	£750
<b>2 bed</b>	£868.18	£893.95	£767.20	£950.00	£1,000.01	£875.00	£925
<b>3 bed</b>	£992.63	£1,096.04	£915.54	£1,150.01	£1,274.98	£1,100.00	£1,150
<b>4 bed</b>	£1,369.27	£1,453.18	£1,355.71	£1,549.99	£1,600.00	£1,450.01	£1,450

Where households need welfare support to pay their rent, the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) sets out local entitlement. The Chancellor announced in March 2020 that from April 2020 the rates of LHA would be revised so housing support from the benefits system would be sufficient to cover the cheapest 30% of all rental properties. Rates have now been frozen again at the 2021/22 levels and there is no indication of when this will change.

In some areas this has helped address the reductions made by the Government to the LHA levels since 2012, when the rates increased with inflation until 2015, and then were subject to the four-year nominal freeze that affected most means-tested benefits.

The levels of benefit payable for housing are set through a Broad Rental Market Area (BRMA) assessment of rental costs. Bracknell Forest spans 3 different BRMAs, Reading, East Thames Valley and Blackwater.

The table above/below outlines the increase from 2019/20 to 2020/21 against the lower quartile market rents and shows the affordability of accommodation based on the old and new levels of LHA, with green signifying that rents should be affordable to those claiming housing costs.

From a position where before 2020/21, the LHA levels did not cover the lower quartile rents, it appears from the published rates, that there is a much better match between the LHA levels and the lower quartile market rents.

However, based on the experience of the Housing Options Service and the Rough Sleeping Team in Bracknell Forest, whilst the differential has reduced, there is no discernable difference in terms of the ability of low income households to access the private rented sector, due to the operation of the benefit cap.

## Homelessness casework records and other local sources of data

For this review, we are drawing on a range of information sources:

- **Casework information from work under statutory duties.** Since April 2018, when the Homelessness Reduction Act commenced, a new system, called 'H-CLIC' has been used in England to record statutory homelessness. See below for more information on this.
- **Any other information recorded outside the H-CLIC requirements.** This included any information

about people with a housing need, including numbers of people who are sleeping rough in Bracknell Forest where a homelessness application was not taken.

- **Other information** on services available in Bracknell Forest

Alongside the new duties to prevent and relieve homelessness for everyone who is eligible and homeless, or threatened with homelessness within 56 days, from the 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2018 new case level information collection requirements were set out for local housing authorities to follow. All cases where a homelessness application is taken should be reported to the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) through a quarterly return, known as H-CLIC.

H-CLIC replaced the previous system known as the P1E as the means for local authorities to report updates on all new statutory homelessness assessments and cases from April 2018. Because this is a relatively new system for recording and the legislation has changed so significantly, the Government's statutory homelessness statistics are still classed as 'experimental'.

The key point to note for the purposes of this review is that much of the data which was recorded prior to the changes to the homelessness legislation cannot be compared directly to data recorded for H-CLIC after the Homelessness Reduction Act changes commenced in April 2018. Where it is possible to make some comment on the data trends across the different data sets we will do so.

### **What do we know about how many households in Bracknell Forest are threatened with homelessness or actually homeless?**

The changes to the homelessness legislation were introduced 3 years ago, in April 2018, to offer earlier assistance to prevent people who are at risk of homelessness. The period a household can be assisted if they are at risk of homelessness has moved from a 28 day threshold to 56 days threshold and in some instances local authorities can use their discretion and take applications over 56 days.

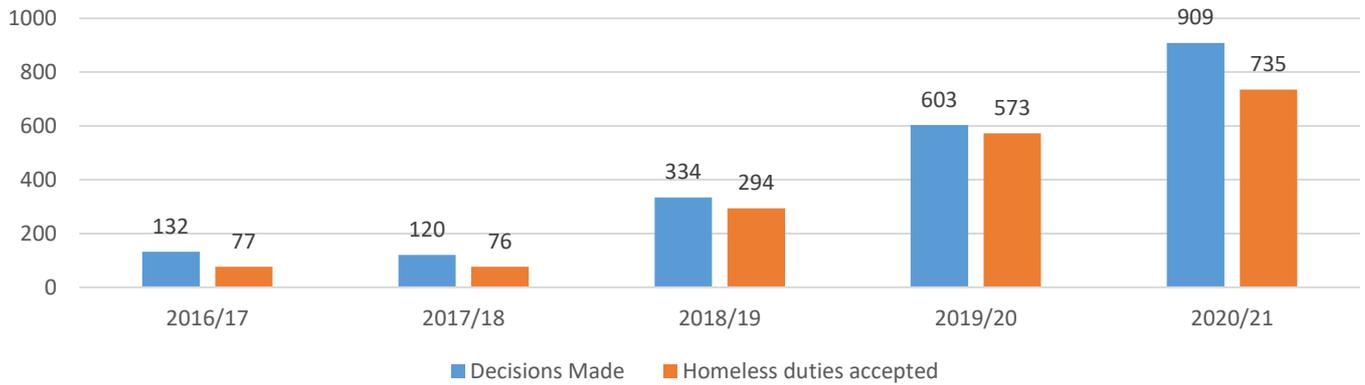
In addition, the change in the law gave more statutory assistance to eligible single people and childless couples, in terms of preventing or relieving their homelessness, as the test to assess if someone has a 'priority need' or not is applied later in the process, giving more time to assist people.

These factors mean that comparing quarterly or annual data sets before April 2018 and any after that point is not straightforward. The rise in numbers of applications has risen, but particularly single people may well have been getting assistance before April 2018 through advice and assistance outside the homelessness legislation.

It should be noted that there is likely to be some unreliable or inaccurate reporting in 2018/19, the first year of the Homelessness Reduction Act. This is not necessarily the case for Bracknell Forest, but this caveat applies to every housing authority in England. The general view is that by 2019/20 most housing authorities had adjusted to the new case management and reporting requirements and data in the public domain has been more reliable since this point.

The first table shows the numbers of homelessness decisions made and the numbers owed a statutory duty. Note this includes households who are threatened with homelessness.

**Table 16 : Bracknell Forest Homelessness Decisions and Duties Accepted between 2016/17 and 2020/21**



The changes introduced were intended to assist more people and different tests are applied at different points, so the data is not, by itself, easily comparable, as many people may have been getting assistance outside the legislative framework in Bracknell Forest before April 2018.

There has been a significant rise in applicants since the commencement of the Homelessness Reduction Act, most notably numbers have increased in the last year.

Of the 603 households who made a homelessness application in Bracknell Forest and had a decision in 2019/20, 95% were then owed a statutory duty. This is in line with England and South East positions. In 2020/21 of the 909 households who made a homelessness application, a lower proportion, (81%) were then owed a statutory duty, compared to 2019/20.

Another way of showing the rate of homelessness is to calculate the rates per 1,000 households in any area. The table below shows 3 years of homelessness, including before the change in the homelessness legislation and the first two years of the new homelessness legislation. The rates are not directly comparable due to the changes in the legislation, but what they do show is a far higher proportion of households seeking assistance.

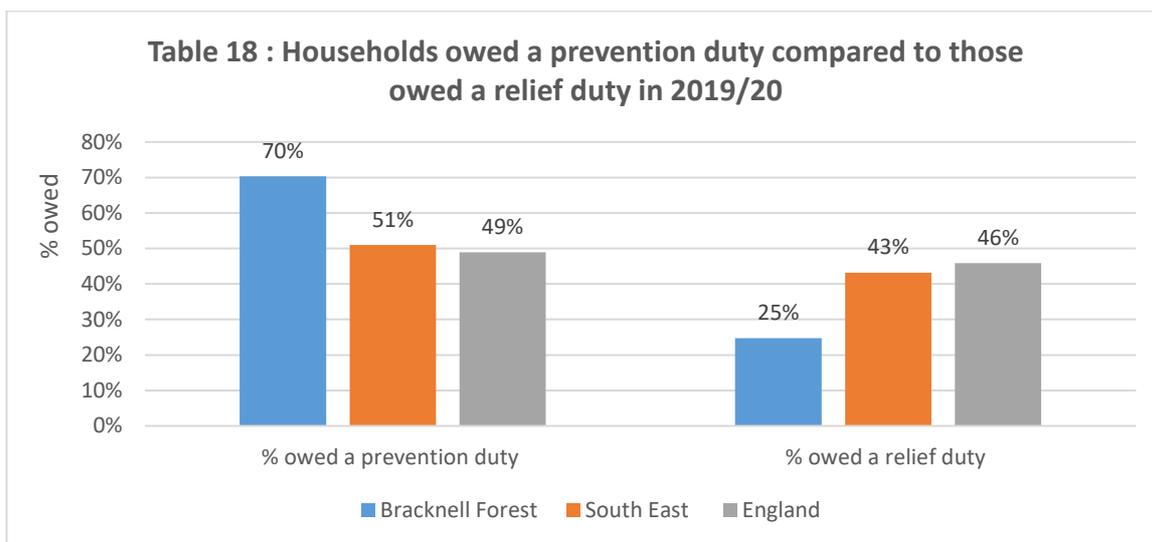
**Table 17: Rates of homelessness per 1,000 households**

Year	2017/18			2018/19			2019/20		
	Bracknell Forest	South East	England	Bracknell Forest	South East	England	Bracknell Forest	South East	England
Rate of homelessness per 1,000 households	0.38	0.51	0.60	5.96	9.91	11.52	11.42	10.58	12.25

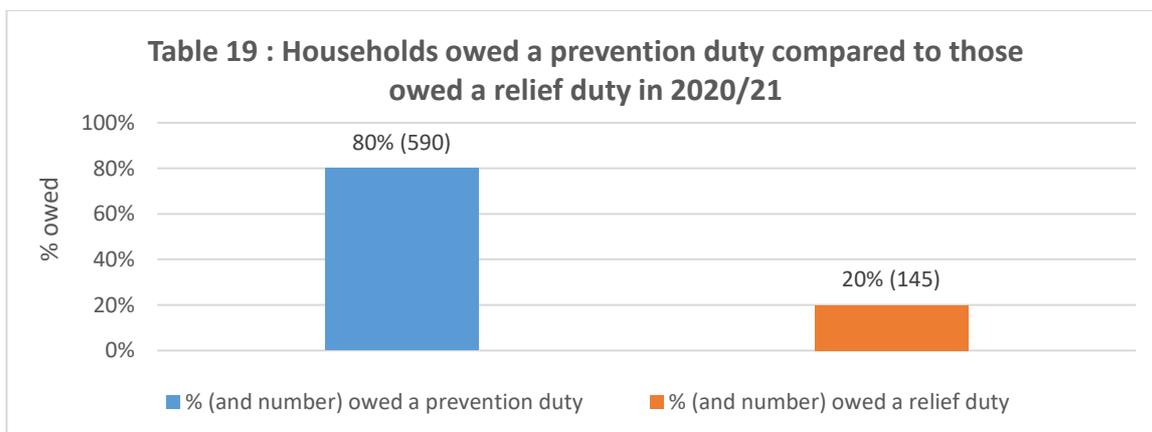
Table 17 shows the marked difference in the rate of applications taken between 2018/19 and 2019/20 in Bracknell Forest. This reflects a new way of working with a focus on prevention and encouraging people to come for housing advice and assistance earlier.

People who come to ask for help, or are referred for help, before they are homeless are offered support under the ‘prevention’ duty, Section 195 of the Housing Act 1996, and households who are already homeless are offered support under the ‘relief’ duty, Section 189B of the same Act.

Table 18 below shows the percentage of households owed a prevention duty in comparison to those owed a relief duty. This shows that a significantly higher proportion of households present when they are threatened with homelessness in Bracknell Forest when compared to the South East overall and England. This is generally viewed as a positive signal that people are approaching earlier, before they are actually homeless, which will give the local authority more time to find solutions to resolve a housing issue.

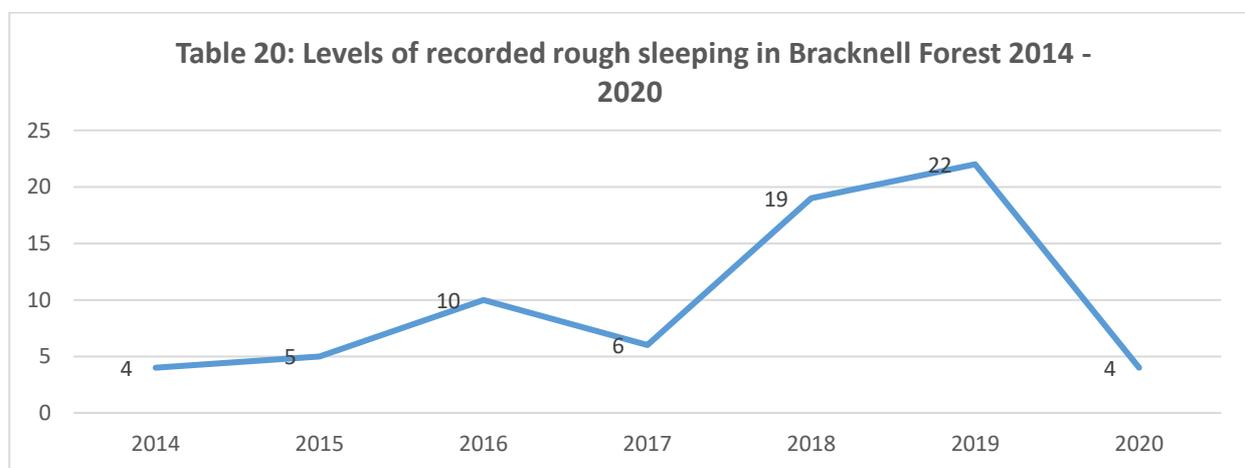


At the time of undertaking this review, there was no data available in the public domain which enabled any comparison to the England or regional positions for 2020/21. In the table below, the Bracknell Forest position for 2020/21 is positive, in that a higher proportion of people are approaching the Council before they are homeless. The increase in numbers may suggest a need to review and refine the availability of prevention options and resources to ensure continued effectiveness in preventing homelessness in the face of increasing demand.



The most acute form of homelessness is rough sleeping. In most local authority areas not everyone who is rough sleeping has approached the Council for help and therefore they may not appear in the statutory homelessness statistics set out in Table 18 and 19 above.

Later in this document there is more detail on what we know about rough sleeping in Bracknell Forest and what we and our partners are doing about this currently. But to give an overview of rough sleeping numbers at this point, Table 20 sets this out. The Council are required to complete a count of people rough sleeping or provide an estimate each year to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG). In Bracknell Forest an estimate is made based on a range of local information and using a nationally agreed methodology. This takes place in November each year. Table 20 sets out the numbers estimated in Bracknell Forest over the last 6 years based on this methodology. The estimates are only as robust as the intelligence which supports them. It may be that before the new Rough Sleeping Team was established in 2018 there were actually higher numbers than are reflected below, but there was limited capacity within the local authority to identify people who were rough sleeping through regular outreach work.



The significant drop in numbers recorded as rough sleeping in the 2020 ‘snapshot’ count can, in part, be attributed to the work of Bracknell Forest Council and partner agencies in reaching and supporting people sleeping rough to come off the streets and into accommodation. This has been through the ‘Everyone In’ programme, a Government led initiative over the first lockdown in England from March 2020 into the summer. However, some of the groundwork to enable the Council to work effectively with people sleeping rough was prepared well before the Covid-19 pandemic and this ensured that prompt action could be taken. This is covered in more detail later in this document.

### **How successful is the Council at preventing homelessness?**

To determine this with as much accuracy as possible in ‘normal’ circumstances, the 12 months of data from 2019/20 has been used. In the 12 months prior to this, the new legislation was ‘bedding in’ and is much less reliable. More recent data, which is shown underneath, should be viewed through the lens of the Covid-19 pandemic and the possible impact of this and policy changes on numbers, types of households getting assistance and changes in causes of homelessness.

In 2019/20 19% of households at risk of homelessness subsequently became homeless, reflecting the national position. In the South East region 21% of applicants owed the prevention duty then became

homeless, indicating Bracknell Forest is successfully assisting more people as a proportion than the regional average.

Between April 2019 and March 2020, 306 households owed a prevention duty had the duty ended. This is set out in Table 21 below. For 57% this was a positive outcome, in that they secured accommodation. This position for Bracknell Forest exceeds the target which was set in the Council Plan and is 2% higher than the South East region prevention rate and is slightly lower than the all-England figure of 58.5%.

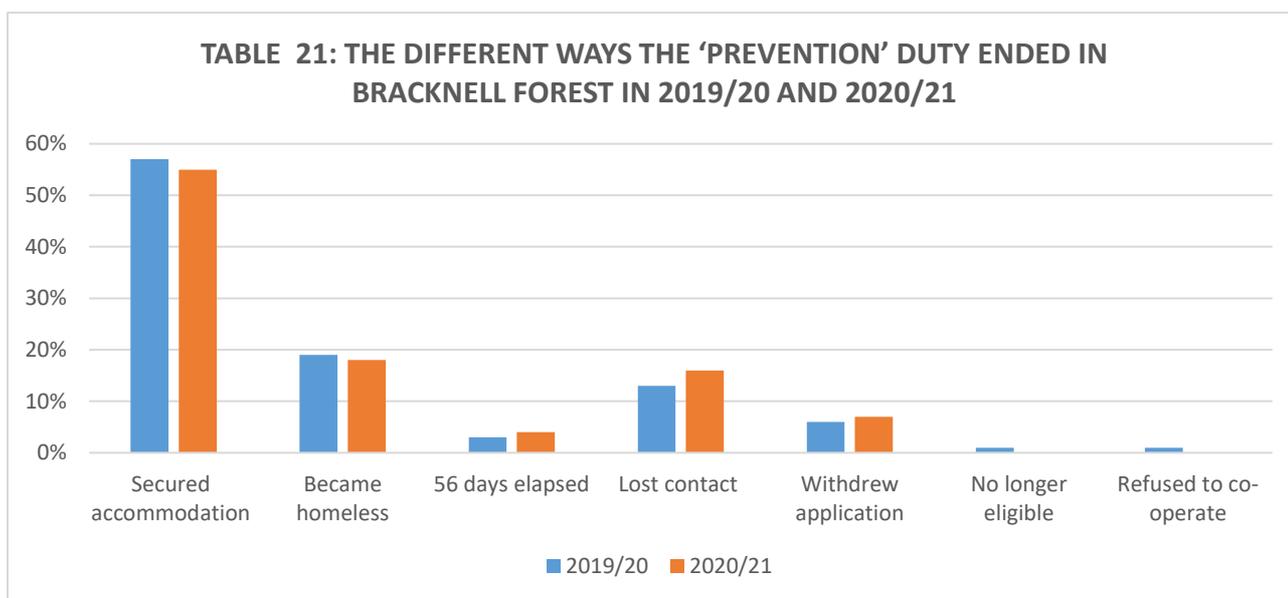
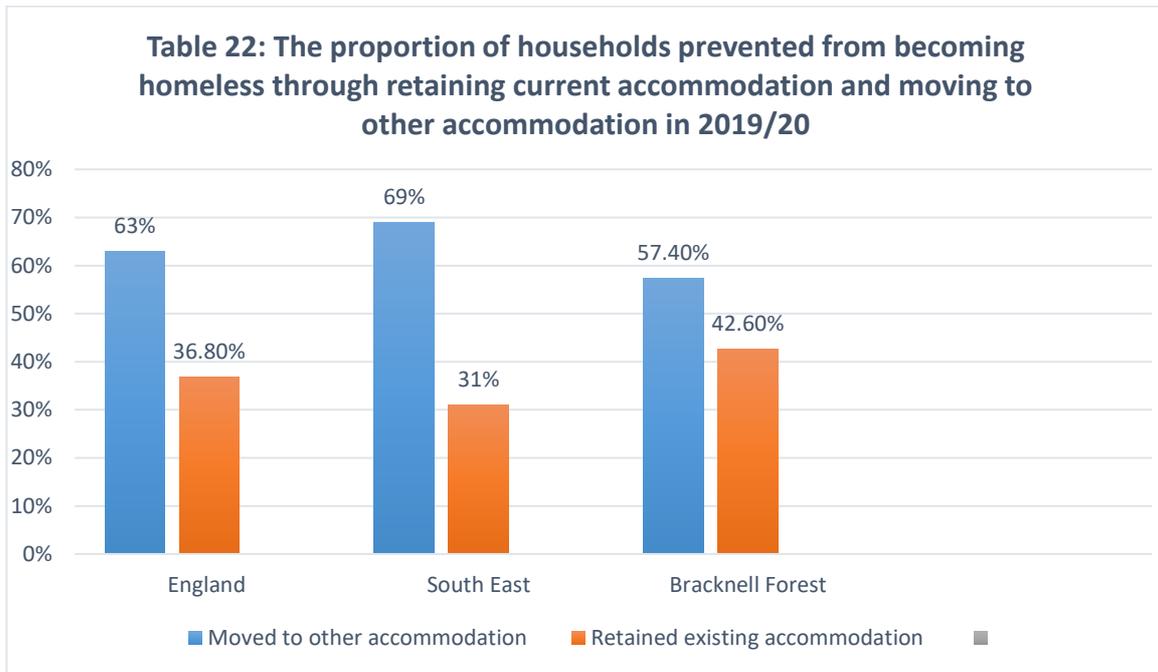


Table 21 also shows the 2020/21 outcomes. Bracknell Forest Council had set a target to prevent 55% of all cases where people were threatened with homelessness. This was met, despite the pressures of the Covid-19 pandemic and the significant rise in numbers.

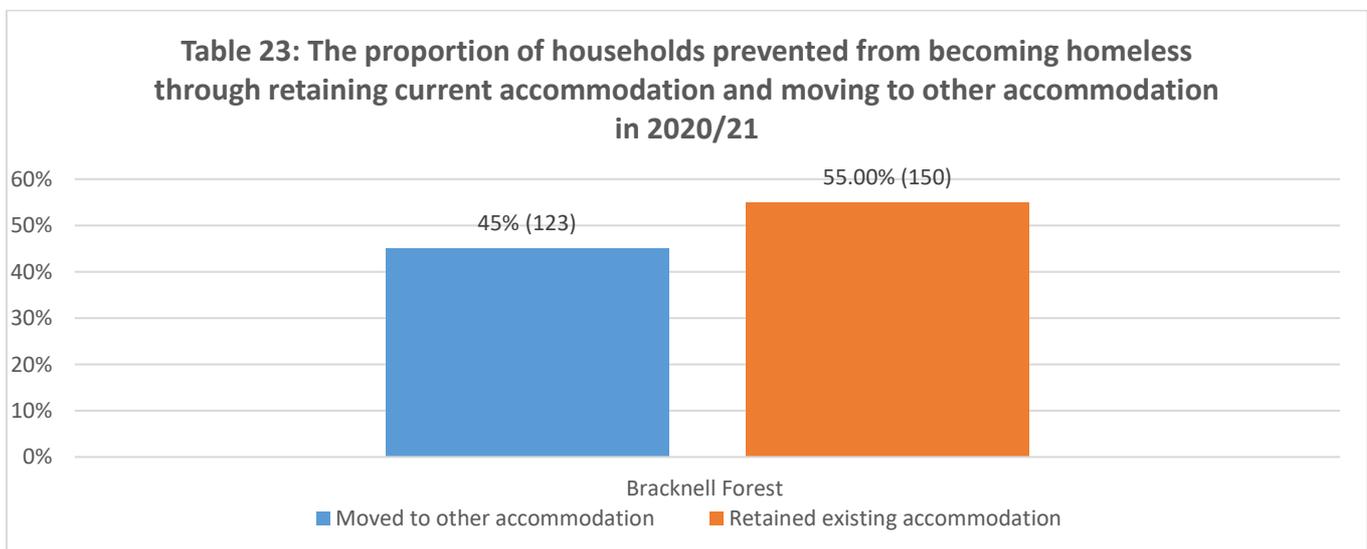
Note that the prevention duty can also be lawfully ended through two other means, the 'refusal of a suitable offer' which applied to 1 applicant over the 2 year period and 'Not known', but this was not used by Bracknell Forest over this period.

Assisting an applicant to secure accommodation can be broadly split into two sub-outcomes: the applicant is assisted to move to new accommodation, or they retain their current accommodation because they are assisted to resolve whatever was the underlying cause(s) of the threat of homelessness. In both scenarios, the accommodation must be suitable, and the local authority need to be satisfied that this has a 'reasonable prospect' of being available for six months or more.

Bracknell Forest has a higher rate of success than both the South East overall and England, in terms of assisting people to stay in their own accommodation. This is viewed as the most positive outcome for people to be assisted and is an indication of timely, pro-active prevention work.



At the time of preparing this review, the last quarter of 2020/21 homelessness statistics had not been published by the Government, so it is not possible to replicate the chart above for 2020/21 in terms of the regional and national positions. However, we can make a comparison with Bracknell Forest activity over the 2 years, which shows that Bracknell Forest has continued to improve in terms of retaining of accommodation in 2020/21, with a higher proportion and number of households being assisted to stay in their accommodation. This is very positive and is likely to be higher than both the regional and national positions.

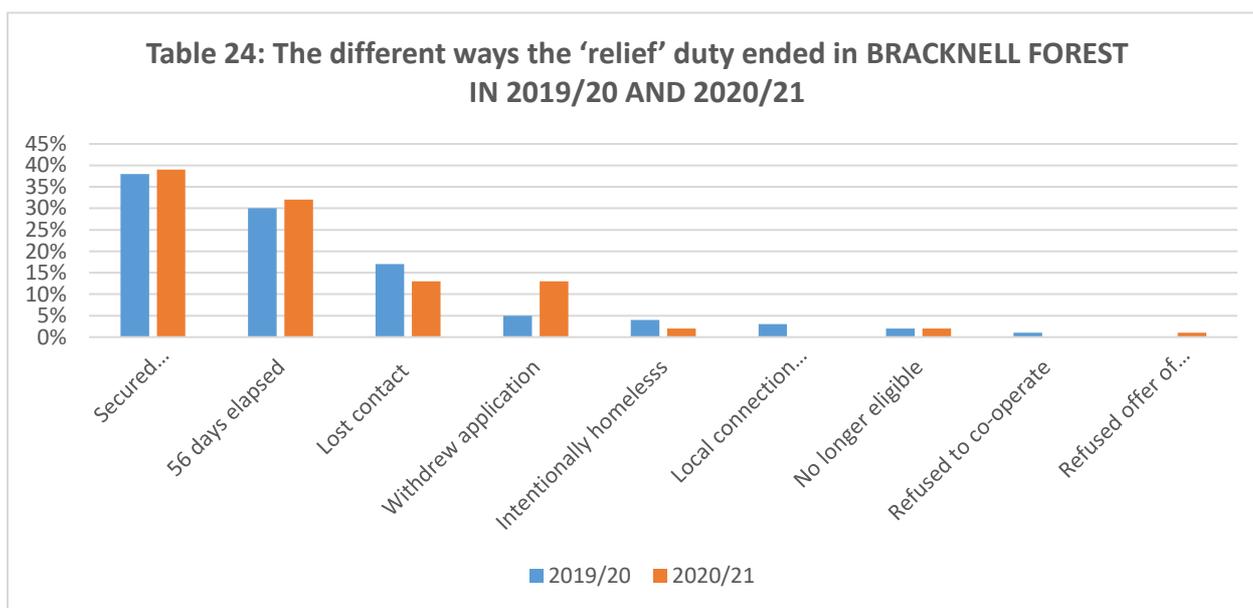


There has been a national suspension of court action to evict tenants over the last year as part of the Covid-19 protection measures and this may explain in part the high levels of performance, but this is also explained by the re-focussing on prevention work in the Housing Options Service.

**How successful is the Council at relieving homelessness?**

Between April 2019 and March 2020, 207 households who were owed a 'relief' duty had the duty ended. Table 24 below sets this out, in terms of how the duty was ended. For 37.7% this was a positive outcome, in that applicants who were homeless were assisted to secure accommodation. Overall, in the South East region 31.8% of applicants had their homelessness relieved, whilst nationally, 40% of applicants had. Given the housing market pressures in Bracknell Forest and the South East generally, it appears that Bracknell Forest is performing comparatively well.

The relief duty can also be lawfully ended through other means which are not shown on the table below. This is because either the category was not used (for 'non-co-operation' and 'not known') or it was used only once in the year (for 'refusal of a final offer', 'no longer eligible' and 'intentionally homeless for accommodation provided').



The number of households accepted as owed the 'main' homelessness duty has fallen in England because of the change in legislation, which brings the 'prevention' and 'relief' options in as stages to go through before the 'main' duty is applied. Every household is therefore assisted for at least 56 days, if not longer, before they reach the 'main' duty point. This makes any direct comparisons to the year 2017/18 difficult.

The chart below starts with the year immediately before the commencement of the new legislation. Numbers have dropped by 40% over the last 4 years, because all applicants will be getting assistance well before the point of a main duty decision.

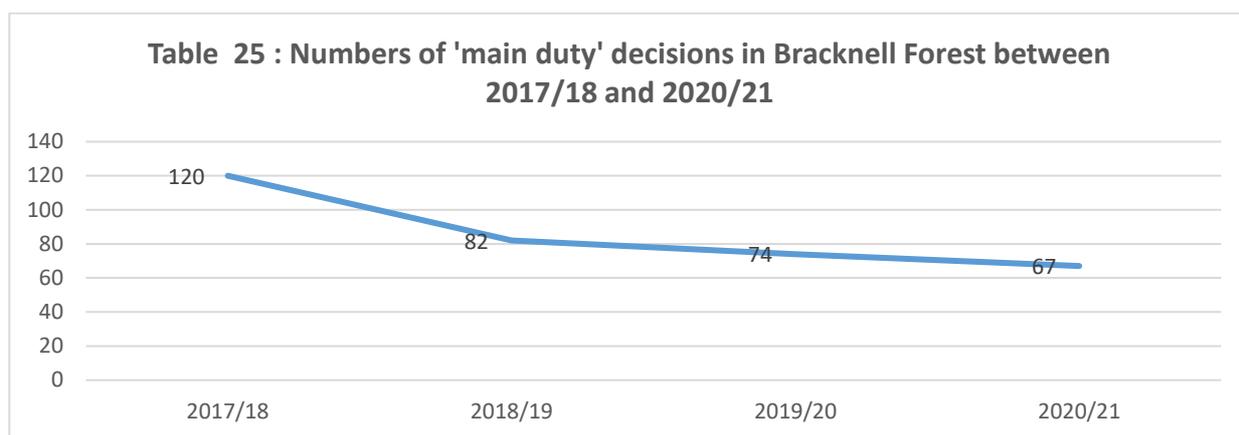
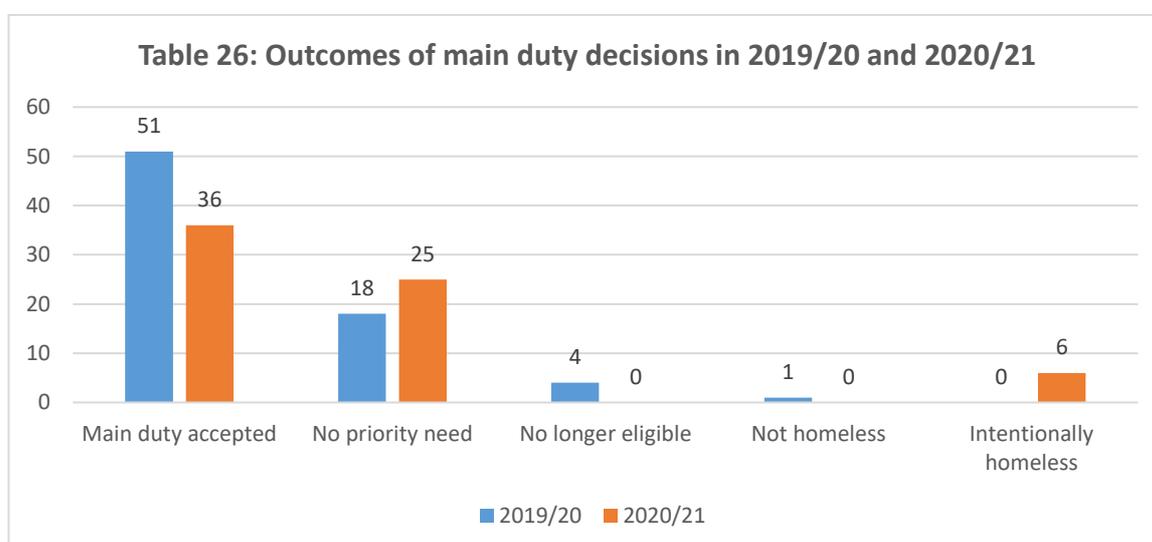


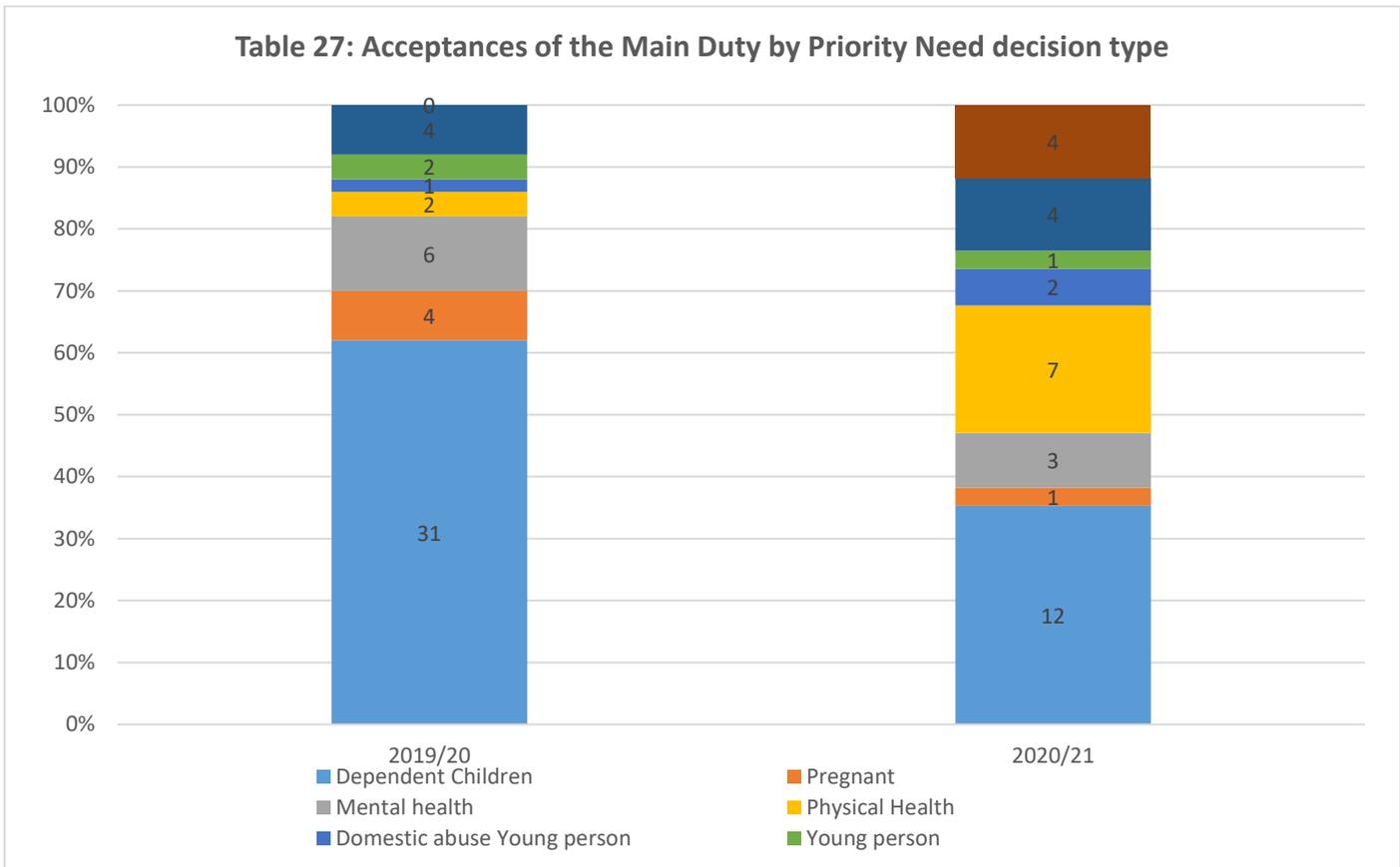
Table 26 below sets out the decisions made at the 'main duty' point in Bracknell Forest over the last 2 years. In 2019/20 69% of applicants were accepted as being owed the 'main duty', a significant change from 2017/18 when 38.7% were. This is positive as it suggests that the majority people are getting help before a negative decision at 'main duty' stage. The number of households where the main duty decision is that they are intentionally homeless remains low, although it rose slightly in 2020/21.

The lower number of main duty acceptances in 2020/21 is likely to be a consequence of the temporary restrictions on evictions during the Covid-19 pandemic. In the same year, a higher number of 'no priority need' decisions were made, which may be due to proactive work with single people who were homeless, including those rough sleeping, during the Covid-19 pandemic under the 'Everyone In' initiative.



It is helpful to understand the profiles of those people or households who were accepted as being owed main duty. This provides insight into which groups may need more assistance at an earlier point and could suggest a need to take more pro-active action in some instances. The sharp reduction in main duty acceptances of households with dependent children in 2020/21 shown in Table 27 below is likely to be a result of the Covid-19 pandemic and the temporary restrictions on evictions, as well high rates of prevention and relief assistance which resolve homelessness prior to the 'main duty'.

**Table 27: Acceptances of the Main Duty by Priority Need decision type**



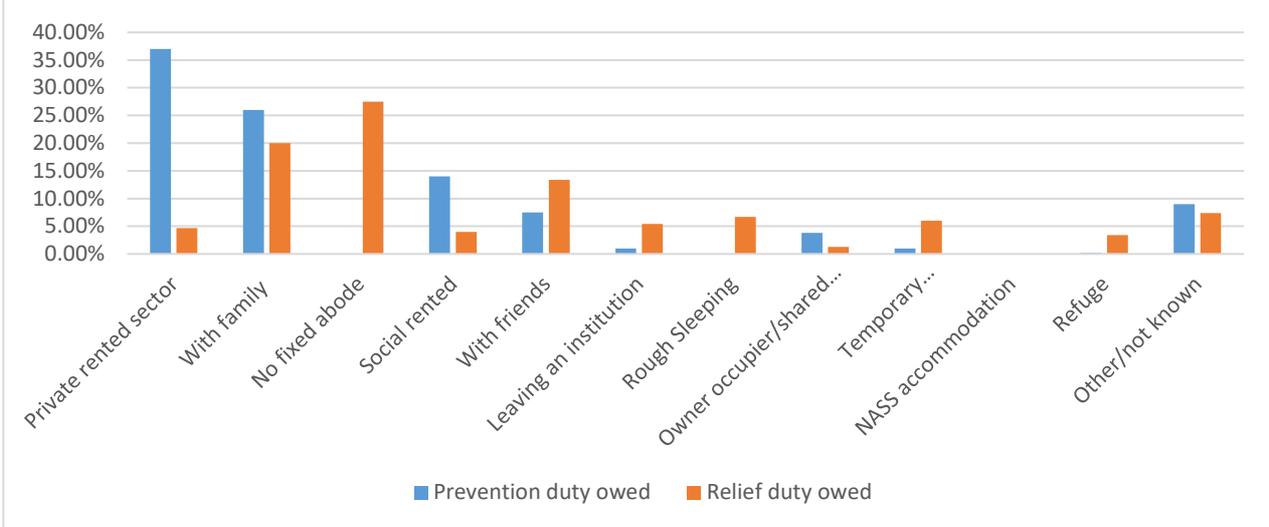
Note: there are 2 new categories which MHCLG has designated which are not clear in terms of decision making. These are the 'Vulnerable with Children' and 'Other' categories. These are not priority need groups as such, but does indicate that some families have particularly complex needs. MHCLG are trying to address the misreporting with local authorities across England.

**Where were people living at the time they became homeless or were threatened with homelessness?**

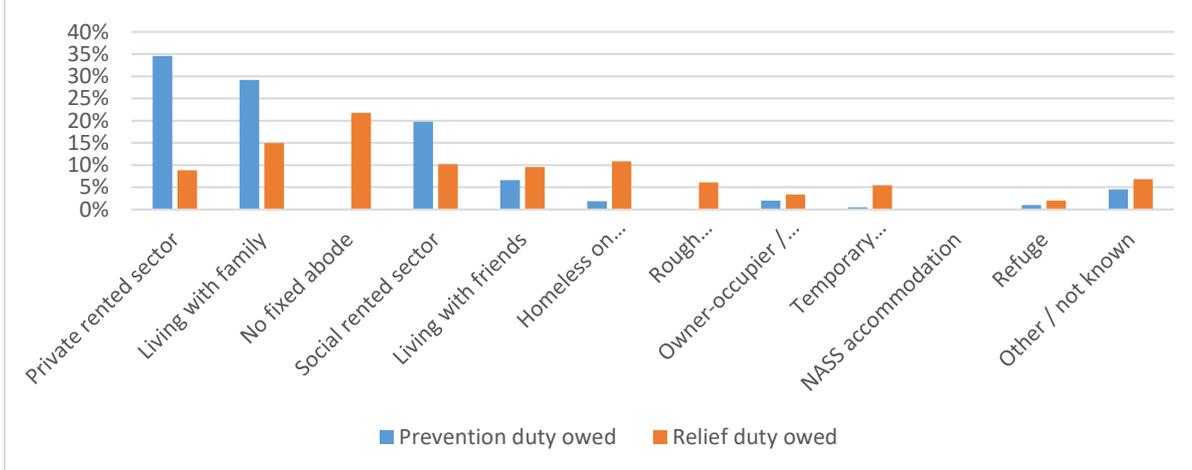
To understand the causes of homelessness, there are several data sources in the H-CLIC statistics to draw on. Firstly, data on where applicants were living at the point they approached the Council can give some context to what has driven their homelessness, although this alone does not tell us why someone became homeless or is threatened with homelessness. This information is based on the assessment of an applicants' housing circumstances.

The two charts below show that those owed a prevention duty (i.e. were not actually homeless when seeking assistance) were overwhelmingly likely to be living in the private rented sector, with family or in social housing. By contrast, those owed a relief duty because they were actually homeless were more likely to have been rough sleeping, or had no fixed abode, or living with friends, or have left an institution. This illustrates the point that people living in more temporary or insecure situations are more likely to seek only once they have become homeless.

**Table 28: Accommodation at the time of an acceptance of a prevention or a relief duty in 2019/20**

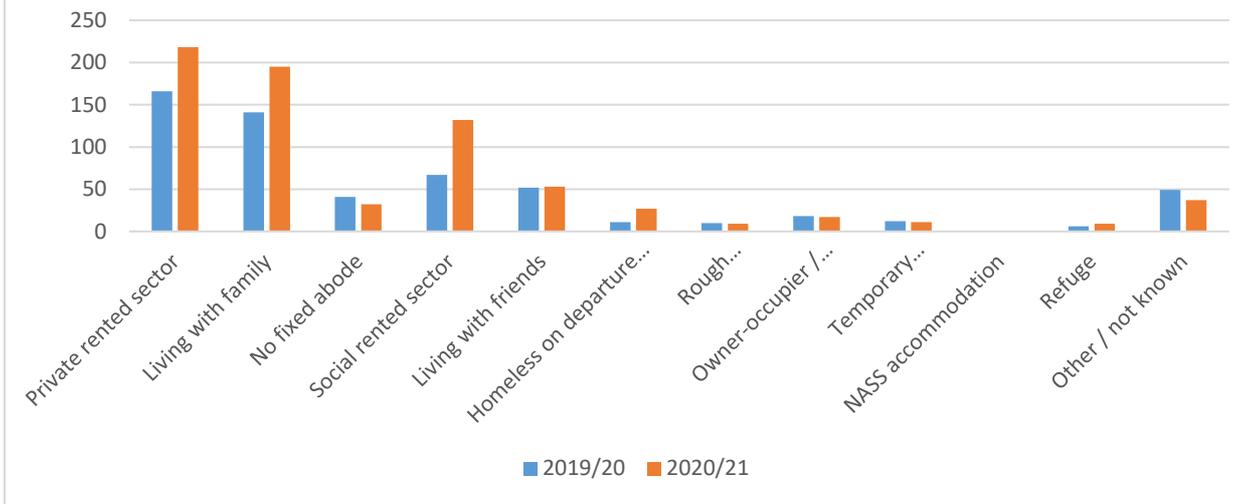


**Table 29: Accommodation at the time of an acceptance of a prevention or a relief duty in 2020/21**



The two years of data shown in the table below show that the increase in those owed a duty in 2020/21 compared to 2019/20 comes largely from households in private and social rented accommodation or living with family.

**Table 30: Accommodation at the time of an acceptance of a prevention or a relief duty in 2019/20 and 2020/21**

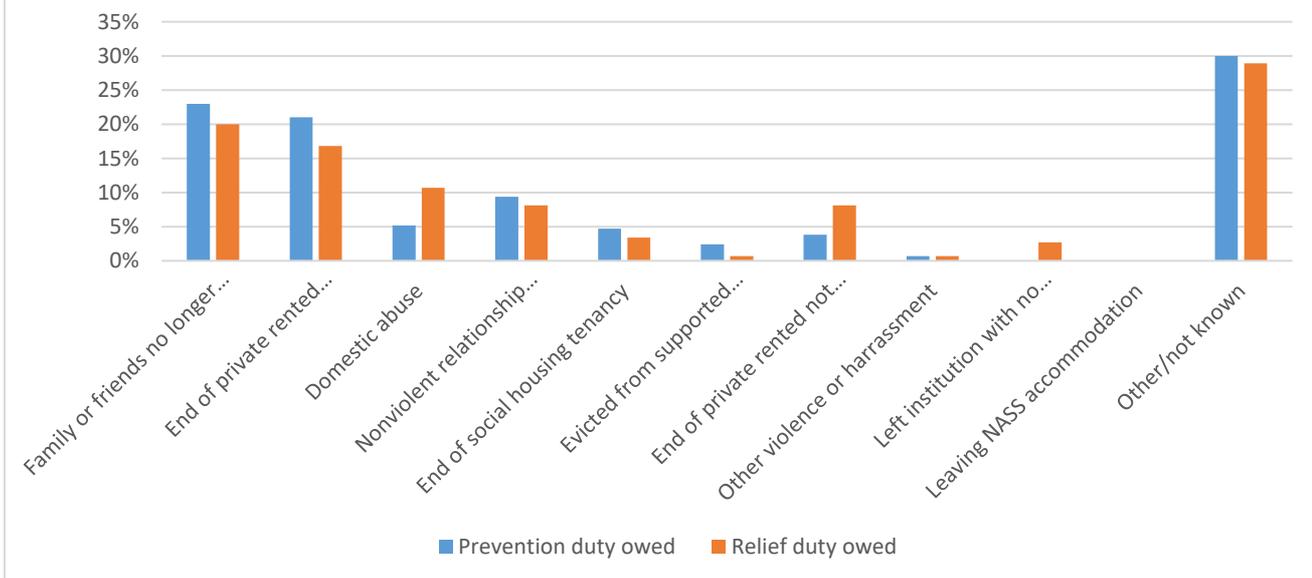


In Table 31 below, the main causes of homelessness are:

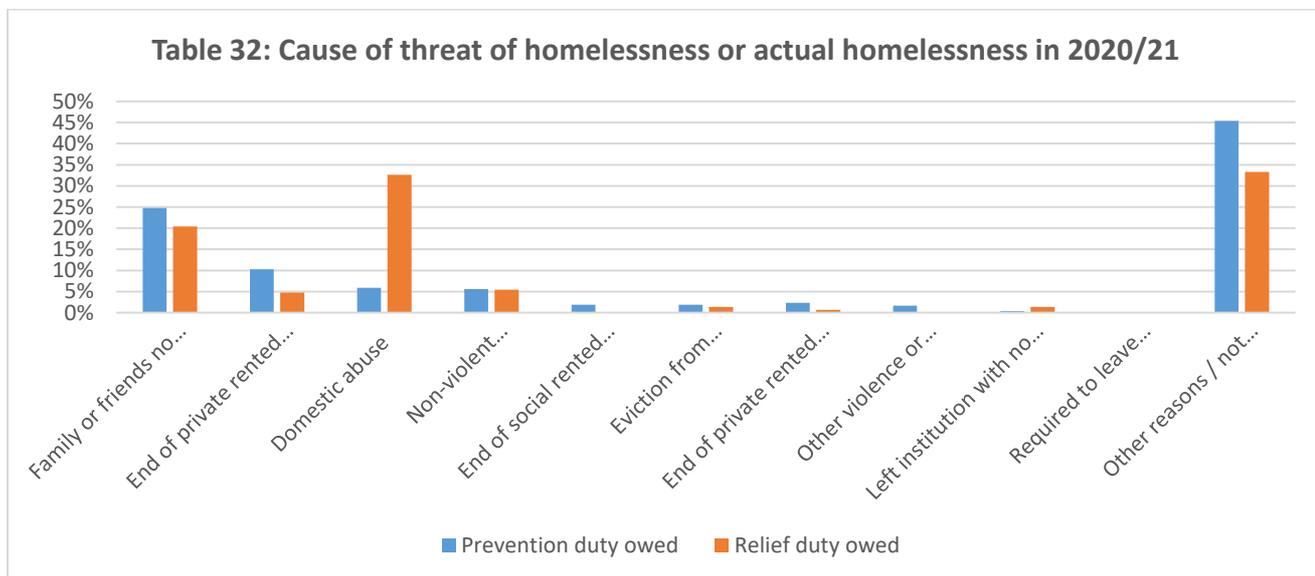
- Friend and family no longer willing or able to accommodation
- Ending of a private rented assured shorthold tenancy
- Domestic abuse
- Non-violent relationship breakdown

However, the 'Other/Not known' category is recorded as the highest cause for both prevention and relief cases. This is a significant proportion of households and it would be helpful to understand more about why this category is used to the extent it is. A greater understanding of causes of homelessness will assist Bracknell Forest Council and partner agencies in finding ways to prevent homelessness earlier with more people.

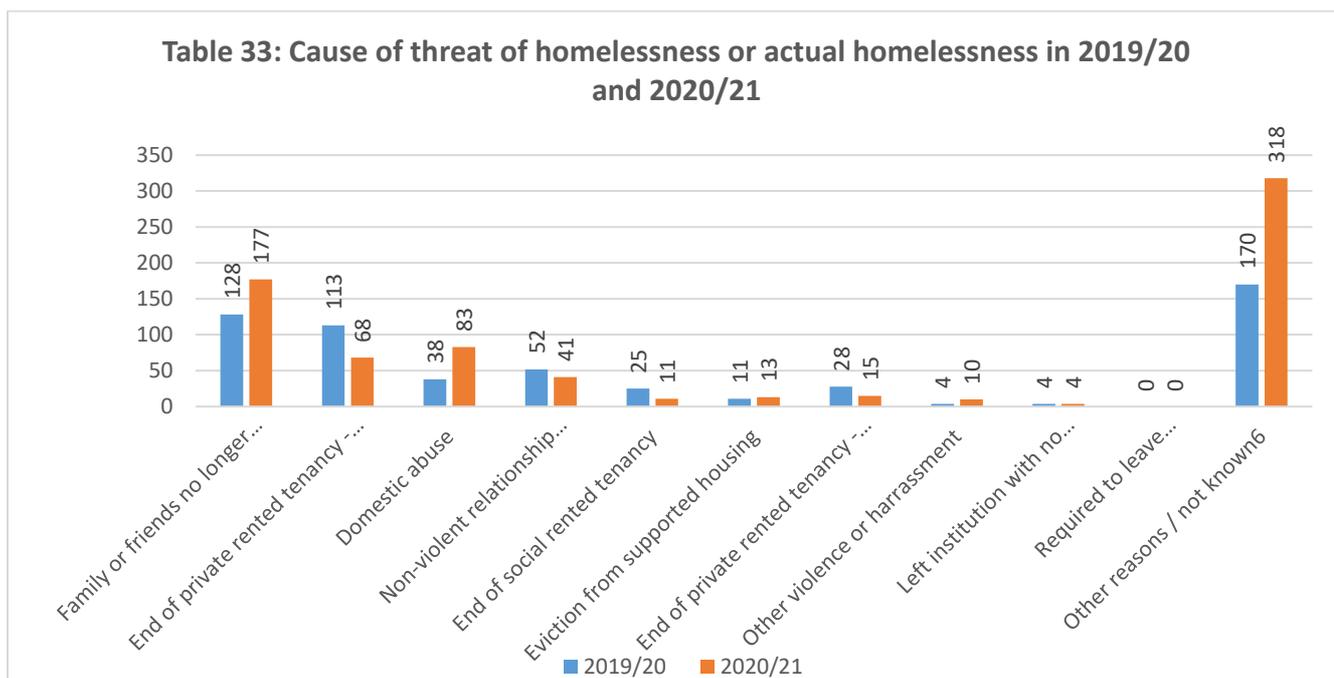
**Table 31: Cause of threat of homelessness or actual homelessness in 2019/20**



The table below, covering the year 2020/21 shows a rise in domestic abuse and a lower proportion of loss of a tenancy in the private rented sector. Both of these changes can, at least in part, be attributed to the Covid-19 pandemic. There has been national reporting of a rise in domestic abuse over the period of lockdown in 2020/21 and, as noted earlier, the temporary restriction on evictions has slowed the rate of loss of tenancies.

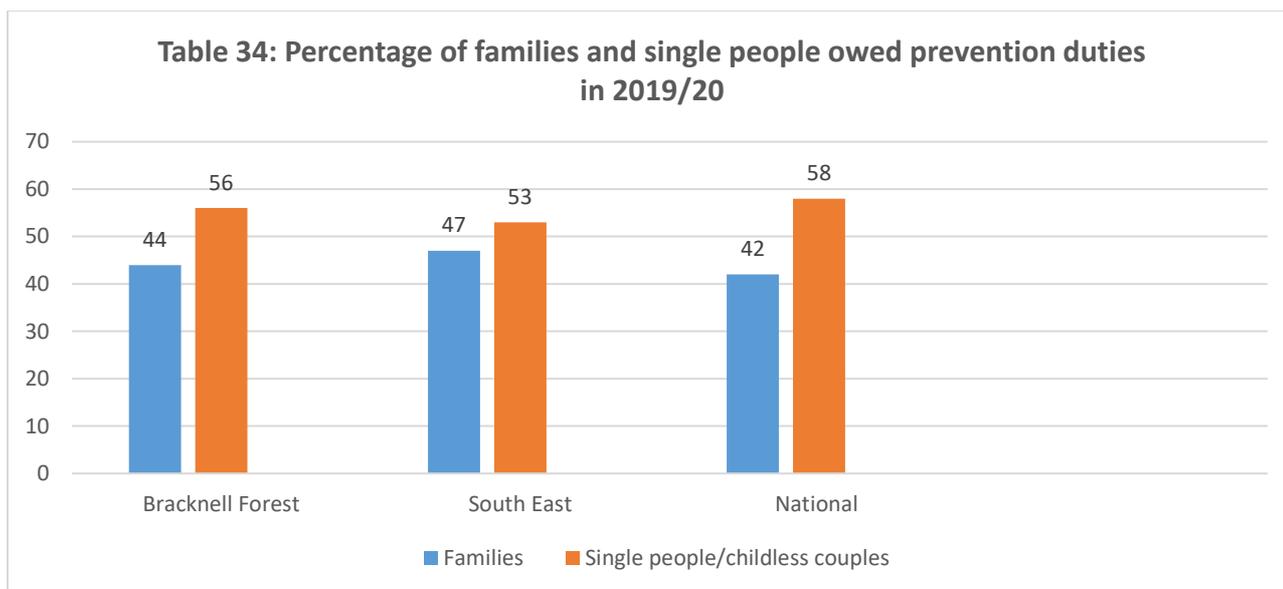


The following table groups the prevention and relief duties owed in each year, to provide a comparison in the causes of homelessness or threat of homelessness over the two years. The most significant change is the increase in the number of people owed a prevention or relief duty due to domestic violence, from 38 in 2019/20 to 83 in 2020/21. This was 19% of known causes of homelessness in Bracknell Forest in 2020/21. As noted above, there was a fall in the number losing a tenancy in the private rented sector (and in social rented housing) and an increase the number who friends or family could no longer accommodate.

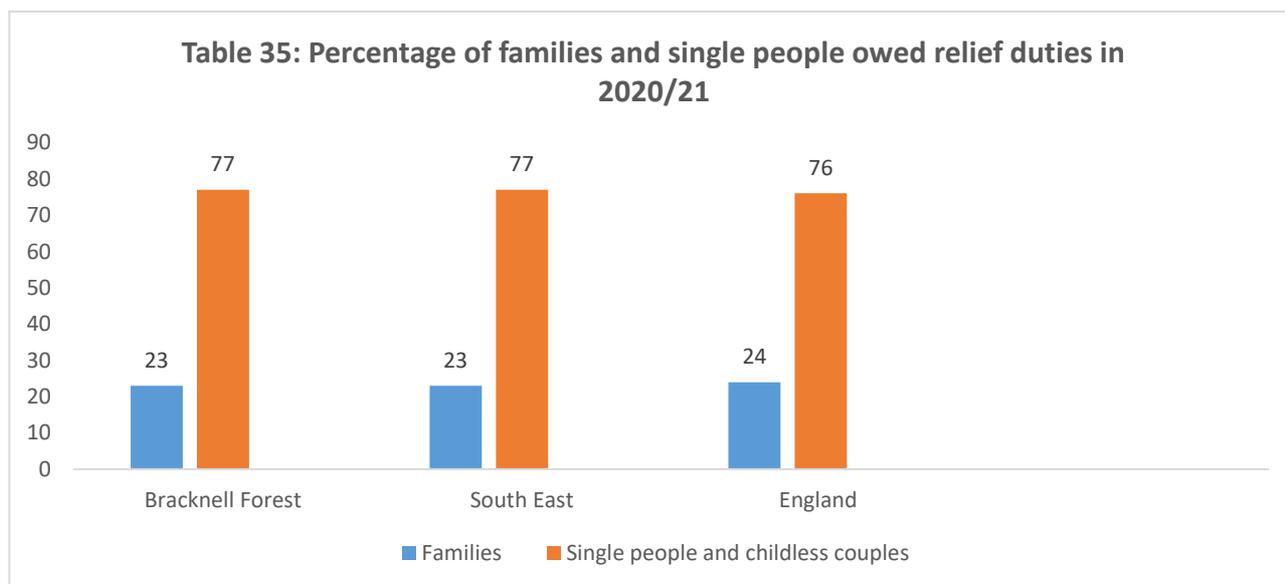


## Which groups of people are at higher risk of becoming homeless or threatened with homelessness in Bracknell Forest?

More single people with no dependent children or childless couples approach the Council seeking assistance than families, as shown in Tables 34 and 35 below. This is a national trend, which is more pronounced since the commencement of the new homelessness legislation in April 2018. A slightly higher proportion of single people approach Bracknell Forest Council for assistance, compared to families, when they are threatened with homelessness than the regional position.



Following the national trend, a much higher proportion of single people approach the Council for assistance when they are already homeless, as set out in Table 35 below.



There has been an increase in the proportion of single people and couples without dependent children seeking assistance in 2020/21 and a corresponding reduction in the number of households with dependent children. This is likely to be as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic and the more volatile housing situations of

some single people. This is an area that requires further monitoring to see if this is a long-term trend or not.

The homelessness legislation places a duty on some public bodies to refer to a housing authority anyone that they believe is or may be at risk of homelessness within 56 days. The referral can only take place with the consent of the client. The referral in itself does not automatically trigger a homelessness application, as the housing authority would need to be satisfied that there was reason to believe the person was homeless or may be at risk of homelessness within 56 days. Whilst this duty is still relatively new, as it commenced 6 months after the Homelessness Reduction Act, in October 2018, it does give an indication of some of the other public agencies working with people who have a housing need.

23, referrals were made to Bracknell Forest Council under the 'Duty to Refer' in 2019/20, with a further 22 referrals made by other organisations including voluntary and charitable agencies outside of the duty. 78 referrals were made under the 'Duty to Refer' in 2020/21, with a further 35 non 'Duty to Refer' referrals. The details of these are set out below:

<b>TABLE 36: Referrals made in the last 2 years under the 'duty to refer'</b>		
<b>Referring body under the 'duty to refer'</b>	<b>Number of referrals in 2019/20</b>	<b>Number of referrals in 2020/21</b>
Prison Service	0	1
Youth Secure Estate	0	
National Probation Service	2	35
Community Rehabilitation Company	0	3
Hospitals	3	7
Mental Health In-patient care	2	1
Jobcentre Plus	0	4
Adult Social Care	9	7
Children's Social Care	7	20
<b>Total</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>78</b>

The Housing Options Service within Bracknell Forest Council has been focussing on improved partnership working with health and criminal justice agencies. This was underway before March 2020 but there has been a significant rise in referrals from the National Probation Service, in particular during the Covid-19 pandemic. This rise may be due in part to the Everyone In initiative to reduce high risks of rough sleeping, including on discharge from custody, and the way in which the Covid -19 pandemic has, in some instances, been a catalyst for closer partnership working.

There has been an increase in referrals from Children's Social Care as well. In part this is due to a rise in 16/17 year olds at risk of homelessness from 2019/20 to 2020/21. This appears to be due to some misunderstanding of the role of the Housing service in meeting the housing needs of looked after children and care leavers under the Homelessness Reduction Act.

We have looked at our statistics in relation to different groups of people, including those groups which are included within the protected characteristics set out in the Public Sector Equality Duty. This is important to understand if any groups are over or under-represented in the homelessness statistics. This will then help to inform any changes to priorities and services to address any imbalances or possibilities of direct or indirect discrimination.

In order to give an overview of the characteristics of those experiencing homelessness, the 2019/20 statistics have been used. This is because the Covid-19 pandemic may have had an impact on the households seeking assistance over the last year (2020/21) due to changes in Government policy which have targeted specific protections to different groups. For example, there was an initial suspension of possession notices during the first wave of the pandemic in 2020, which then changed to a requirement to give at least 6 months' notice of possession until the 31<sup>st</sup> May 2021, with very few exceptions. The number of homelessness cases has reduced as a result of this, and this may result in less households headed up by women coming forward. Conversely, there were more men being assisted through the 'Everyone In' programme in 2020 as this was aimed at those rough sleeping. Single men are over-represented in all rough sleeping statistics nationally.

In the table below the age group of 18 – 34 year olds appear to be significantly over represented in homelessness figures, with the 35 – 45 year old age group also over represented, but not to the same extent. Young people aged 18 – 24 are almost 3 times more likely to become homeless than those aged 45 – 54 in Bracknell Forest. This over-representation of young people is also found nationally, although to a slightly lesser degree.

Young people who leave the parental home or care and form new households are less experienced and earn less money than their counterparts who are older. As noted earlier, the cost of housing has risen over the last 10 years, making access for those on low incomes in Bracknell Forest more challenging.

<b>TABLE 37: AGE OF HOMELESS APPLICANTS IN 2019/20 COMPARED TO THE OVERALL POPULATION</b>		
<b>Age</b>	<b>% of Homeless applicants (and number) by age</b>	<b>ONS estimate of the population by age in Bracknell Forest in 2019/20</b>
16-17	0.3% (2)	2.4%
18-24	20.6% (118)	7.3%
24- 34	30.7% (176)	12.9%
35-44	25% (143)	14.7%
45-54	13.3% (76)	14.8%
55-64	7.2% (41)	12.2%
65-74	2.1% (12)	8.3%
75+	0.0% (5)	6.3%

In the table below, women are over-represented in the homelessness statistics, indicating that as a group women are at higher risk of homelessness in Bracknell Forest.

<b>TABLE 38: GENDER OF HOMELESS APPLICANTS OWED A DUTY IN 2019/20 COMPARED TO THE OVERALL POPULATION</b>		
	<b>% of Homeless applicants (and number)</b>	<b>ONS estimate of the population by gender in Bracknell Forest in 2019/20</b>
Female	57.7% (325)	50.4% (60,841)
Male	43.3% (248)	49.6% (61,708)

The table below shows the gender breakdown locally by the type of duty owed. There is a clear gender delineation based on gender, with more women owed duties due to threat of homelessness and more men owed relief duties. This relates to family composition: of the 265 women owed a prevention duty, 111 were single parents. Of the 90 men owed a relief duty, 80 were single with no dependent children.

<b>TABLE 39: GENDER OF HOMELESS APPLICANTS BY TYPE OF DUTY OWED IN 2019/20</b>		
	<b>Prevention duty owed</b>	<b>Relief duty owed</b>
Female	265	60
Male	158	90

The 2016 estimate of ethnicity within local authority areas, undertaken by the Office of National Statistics should be treated with some caution but it has been used as it is likely to give a more up to date picture than the 2011 Census. Based on this, the table below indicates that those who are White or Asian are under-represented in the homelessness statistics. However, people who are Black are at a significantly higher risk of homelessness than any other group. This is likely to be driven by income disparities between different ethnicities but may warrant some further analysis.

<b>TABLE 40: ETHNICITY OF HOMELESS APPLICANTS IN 2019/20 COMPARED TO THE OVERALL POPULATION</b>		
<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>% of Homeless applicants (and number)</b>	<b>ONS estimate of the population by ethnicity 2016</b>
White	83.1% (476)	89.8%
Black/African/Caribbean/Black British	5.2% (30)	2.5%
Asian/Asian British	1.7% (10)	4.2%
Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups	2.3% (13)	2.5%
Other ethnic groups	3% (17)	0.8%
Don't know	4.7% (27)	n/a

It is problematic to make comparisons directly between estimates from the Office of National Statistics (ONS) on nationality and the data reported through H-CLIC on nationality, as the former does not require

any test of eligibility. Different criteria are used by MHCLG and the ONS as well, which mean some groupings of residents do not correspond.

As the UK has now left the European Union, migration patterns are changing and the way in which EU citizens are recorded is changing. Their eligibility for public funding is no longer subject to the rules prior to the point when the UK formally left the EU. Those with no determination on settled status may not be eligible for services unless they meet qualifying criteria for EEA nationals, for example, worker status, temporary unable to work, involuntary unemployed. People arriving in the UK from EEA countries with no settled or pre-settled status are now subject to immigration control.

<b>Table 41: Nationality of homeless applicants in 2019/20</b>	
<b>Nationality</b>	<b>% of Homeless applicants by UK, and non-UK in 2019/20</b>
British or Irish national	89.5%
EEA Worker	4.4%
Other EU and EEA nationals with right to reside/otherwise eligible	2.8%
Non-EU and EEA country nationals with leave to remain/refugee status	3.2%

There are several different ways of presenting information about health and disability. Caution should be used if making direct comparisons with the 2011 Census data to see if people with a disability or ill health are over or under-represented in the homelessness statistics. We have used both the self-reported claims of physical ill health and disability and information on benefit related claims (for ESA, incapacity benefit and Disability benefit) in the table below. This shows that levels of ill-health and disability are higher among homeless applicants compared to the population as a whole, which warrants more focus in the future.

<b>TABLE 42: ILL HEALTH AND DISABILITY OF HOMELESS APPLICANTS IN 2019/20 COMPARED TO THE OVERALL POPULATION</b>		
	<b>% of Homeless applicants (and number)</b>	<b>2011 census: % of population</b>
Self-reported physical ill health & disability	12.9% (74 people owed a homelessness duty through support needs assessment)	3.2%
	<b>% of Homeless applicants (and number)</b>	<b>NOMIS Labour Market Profile March 2021: the % of population in Bracknell Forest</b>
Claiming benefit on the basis on long term illness or disability	14% (80 people)	3.9%

The table below shows data on sexual orientation of applicants. It is not possible to determine if lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender people are over-represented in the homelessness figures as there is a high proportion of 'prefer not to say' and a significantly high number where sexual orientation was not

recorded at all. In 2018 the Office of National Statistics estimated that 2.2% of the population in the South East of England were gay, lesbian or bisexual.

**Table 43: Applicants and their self-reported sexual orientation.**

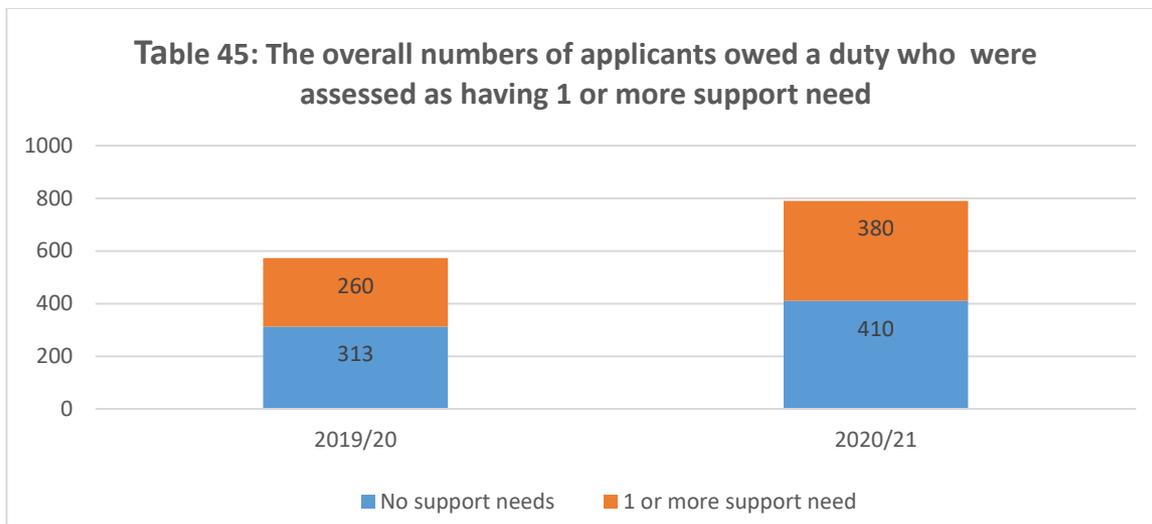
	2020/21		2019/20	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Heterosexual	524	70.1%	778	68.7%
Gay Lesbian and Bisexual	6	0.8%	15	1.3%
Prefer not to say	203	27.2%	318	28.1%
Other	14	1.9%	21	1.9%
<b>Sub-Total</b>	<b>747</b>		<b>1132</b>	
<i>Not Recorded</i>	<i>678</i>	<i>47% of all records</i>	<i>896</i>	<i>44% of all records</i>

Finally, it is clear that economic activity is a protective factor in terms of reducing the risk of homelessness in Bracknell Forest. People who are not in paid work are at a higher risk of becoming homeless. But it should be noted that a higher proportion of people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness in Bracknell Forest are working or in training (42%) compared to the South East (29%). This is likely to be in part at least, a reflection of the high cost housing market in Bracknell Forest.

<b>TABLE 44: OVERALL ECONOMIC STATUS OF HOMELESS APPLICANTS IN 2019/20 COMPARED TO THE OVERALL POPULATION</b>				
	<b>NOMIS Labour Market Profile 2020: % of population in Bracknell Forest</b>	<b>% of Homeless applicants (and number) in Bracknell Forest</b>	<b>% of Homeless applicants in the South East region</b>	<b>% of Homeless applicants in England</b>
Economically active (part time, full time, self-employed or in training/apprenticeship)	83.7%	42.2% (242)	28.9%	25.8%
Economically inactive (due to sickness or disability, unemployed seeking work, carer for children or others in family, retired, students)	16.3%	51.7% (293)	66.6%	68.4%
'Not known' and 'Other'	n/a	6.6% (38)	4.4%	5.8%

**What do we know about the support needs of people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness in Bracknell Forest?**

The assessment process under the homelessness legislation requires Councils to find out about any particular issues that an applicant might need support with in order to have and to sustain suitable accommodation. We compared 2019/20 with 2020/21, as the support needs may have been different due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic

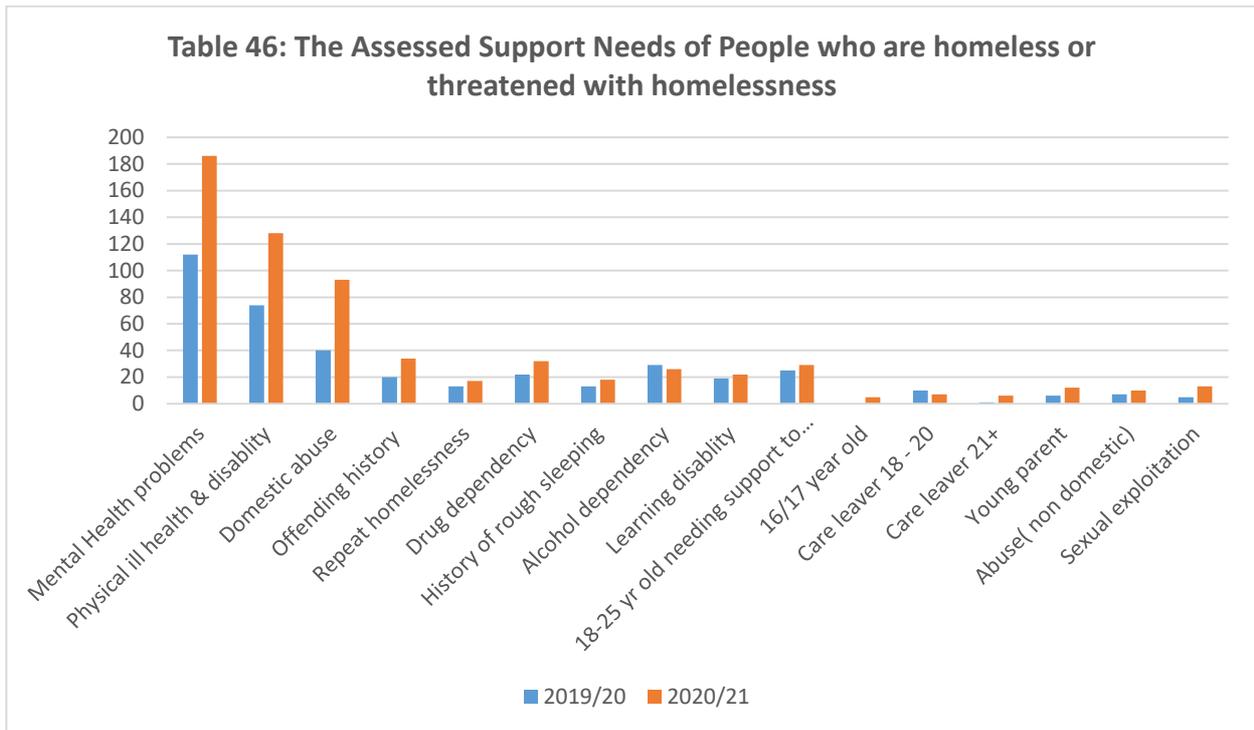


The chart below sets out assessed support needs of applicants owed either a prevention or a relief duty, where 5 or more applicants had the same support need. Assessments can record up to 3 support needs per household, so the number of support needs recorded in any authority do not equate to the number of applicants.

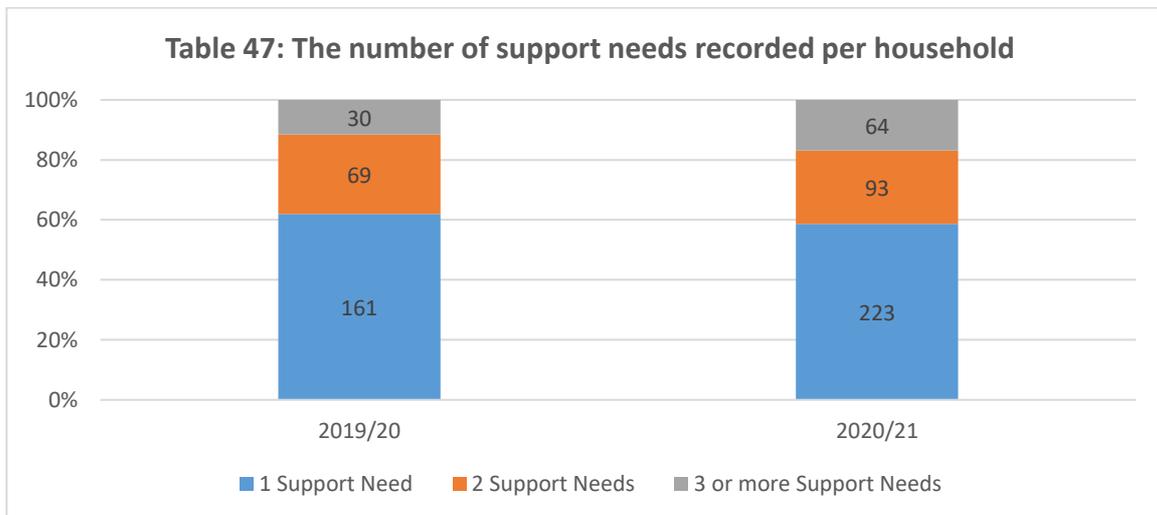
In Bracknell Forest there was a significant increase overall in applications between 2019/20 and 2020/21 (see Table 16 above) and there has been a corresponding rise in the numbers of people with support needs. This is set out in table 46 below and is particularly the case for the 3 highest support needs: mental health; physical ill health and disability; domestic abuse. In these areas, support needs have nearly doubled, which will have implications for the capacity of the housing options service to address these needs. Some applicants have more than 1 support need and up to 3 support needs per applicant can be recorded.

It is helpful to note that the 4 separate sets of young people related support needs, if grouped together, would make this the 4<sup>th</sup> highest overall support need group.

Care leavers are over-represented in homelessness statistics nationally, regionally and locally, when compared to their peers who are not care leavers. In 2019/20, 10 former relevant care leavers aged 18 – 20 were owed prevention or relief duties, which is around 17% of all care leavers in Bracknell Forest aged 18 – 21. In the same year, a total of 3,370 care leavers nationally of the same age were owed homelessness duties. The way in which the statistics are now provided by the Department for Education on care leavers mean it is not possible to determine the total numbers aged 18 – 20 in that year in order to undertake a comprehensive comparison.



Of the households who were assessed as having support needs in Table 45 above, this can be further broken down into how many support needs were identified in Table 47 below.



### What more do we know about people who are rough sleeping and their support needs?

Some people who sleep on the streets or outside do so for relatively short periods of time, days or weeks, whilst for other people, sleeping rough can last for several months or more. Like many other areas of England, in Bracknell Forest there are some people who have spent significant periods of time living in hostels, sofa surfing and rough sleeping.

In 2019 a new Rough Sleeper’s Team, funded by MHCLG’s Rough Sleeping Initiative’ programme, was created to work with people who are rough sleeping in Bracknell Forest. The data and other qualitative evidence inform the increasingly detailed picture about people who are rough sleeping in Bracknell Forest.

Based on 3 years of the 'Annual Rough Sleeping Snapshot' which Bracknell Forest, which is a basic estimate or count of people on a single night, the following has been reported to MHCLG:

**Table 48: The characteristics of those counted as rough sleeping on the annual 'snapshot' night**

Annual Rough Sleeping Snapshot	2018	2019	2020
Overall number	19	22	4
Gender	16 men 3 women	15 men 7 women	4 men 0 women
Nationality	Not known	All UK national	3 UK nationals 1 EU citizen
Age	18 were aged over 25 1 'not known'	All aged over 25	All aged over 25

The annual snapshot does not pick up the 'flow' of people sleeping rough in Bracknell Forest. The current profile of rough sleepers shows that there is little movement into the borough from other areas with the overwhelming majority having a local connection. Case recording indicates that around 16% of people are women. White men aged between 25 and 55 predominate.

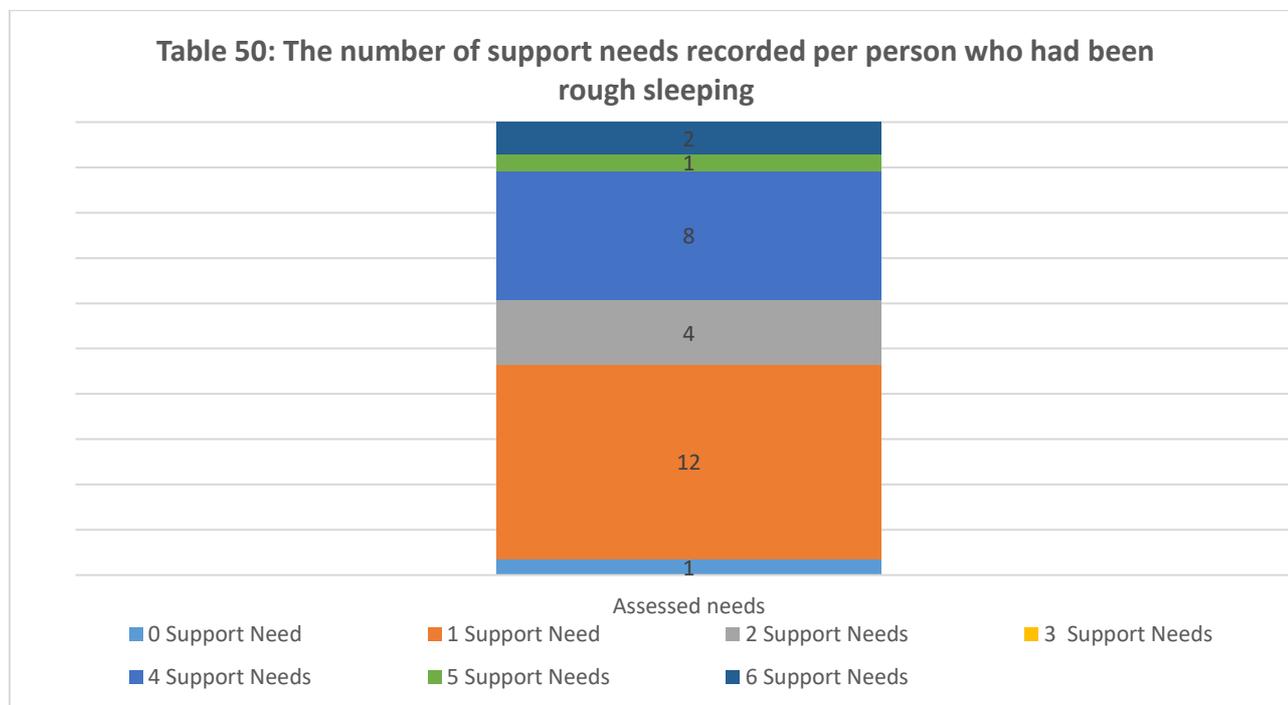
At the point of preparing this review (May 2021), the Rough Sleeping Team are seeing a new flow of people on to the streets, of which 3 or 4 per week are verified as rough sleeping. Some of these people had previously been sofa surfing and as lockdown has eased, they have needed to move on.

People rough sleeping often have a number of support needs. This is not reflected in detail in some of the data collected through H-CLIC, as this cannot be extrapolated to particular groups. So a more accurate indication of support needs is set out in Tables 49 and 50 below, which have been identified through the Rough Sleeping Team assessments.

<b>Table 49: Summary of gender and support needs of 35 people who had been rough sleeping in Bracknell Forest between September 2019 and March 2021:</b>		
<b>Details of 35 people who have been rough sleeping</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage of the total</b>
Female	6	17%
Male	29	83%
Drug misuse/addiction	24	68%
Alcohol addiction	8	23%
Mental health issues	13	37%
History of offending behaviour	13	37%
Victim of domestic abuse	4	11%
Perpetrator of domestic abuse	2	5.7%
Physical health issues	3	8.5%
Exploitation	9	25%

Aged under 25	2	5.7%
Learning difficulty	2	5.7%
At risk from others	9	25%

The table below shows the number of support needs per person from the cohort of 35 people above.



The range and number of support needs reflects national research findings on the needs of rough sleepers, which has been cited by the Government in the 2018 Rough Sleeping Strategy<sup>1</sup>. Severe and multiple disadvantage is defined as a combination of 2 or more of: homelessness, substance misuse, mental health problems and involvement in criminal justice system. Poverty is also an underlying feature but is not taken into account in the methodology used to assess the extent of severe and multiple disadvantage.

Alongside the annual November snapshot and the Rough Sleeping Team support needs assessments, there is data on the accommodation actions and outcomes for people assisted between September 2019 to November 2020 and up to May 2021 which go some way to explain the significant reduction in rough sleeping between 2019 and 2020.

<b>Table 51: Accommodation provided to people who had been rough sleeping from September 2019 – November 2020</b>	November 2020	May 2021
<b>November 2020: Numbers accommodated under the Housing-led Rough Sleepers' Initiative (RSI)</b>	14	14

<sup>1</sup> The 2015 'Hard Edges' Report, mapped severe and multiple disadvantage in England. Written by Professor Suzanne Fitzpatrick and Professor Glen Bramley, it can be viewed here:

<https://lankellychase.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/Hard-Edges-Mapping-SMD-2015.pdf>

Numbers still accommodated under the RSI	5	2
Numbers assisted who have now moved into settled accommodation	7	11
<b>Numbers of people picked up through the 'Everyone In' programme</b>	35	41
Numbers still in Temporary Accommodation (B&B or nightly let)	21	19
Number assisted who have now moved into settled accommodation	5	8
Numbers in supported housing out of the Borough	2	1

In September 2019 the Rough Sleeping Team had worked with 14 people to help them off the street and into Temporary Accommodation. At that point a further 30 people were estimated to be longer term or 'entrenched' rough sleepers, who were using the night-shelter and/or were picked up through the triggering of SWEP (Severe Weather Emergency Protocol) and placed into emergency accommodation over the winter months.

As the UK entered lockdown in March 2020, the night-shelter closed, and people were offered accommodation under the 'Everyone In' programme<sup>2</sup>. Whilst the pandemic has had a negative impact in many areas of society and the economy, for some people sleeping rough it was a catalyst to being offered assistance to come off the street and stay off the streets in the longer term.

Over the last 2 years and in particular in response to the 'Everyone In' MHCLG directive, rough sleeping services in Bracknell Forest have increased and up to the end of March 2021, over 84 people have been supported off the streets, and more people have been prevented from going onto the streets from prison and hospital.

The most up to date information indicates between that from November 2020 to March 2021 there has been an 65% increase in people who are rough sleeping and a consequent rise in demand for appropriate accommodation and specialist services compared to this period last year.

Around 10 referrals regarding people rough sleeping have been received every month in Bracknell Forest in the first half of 2021 and of these, between 3 and 4 people are verified as sleeping rough each month. If this trend continues it is expected that there will be an additional 36 – 48 cases of people sleeping rough per year.

Each number represents an individual who has had a unique journey into homelessness and rough sleeping. For some people, they have experienced a single period of rough sleeping and been assisted into accommodation relatively quickly. For other people, their experience may be longstanding, with episodes of homelessness, including rough sleeping, from a relatively young age.

In Bracknell Forest the local needs of people rough sleeping and assisted through 'Everyone In' began to be met through a multi-agency response, including Public Health, a local GP practice, the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG), the Probation Service and a local charity, Pilgrim Hearts, as well as the Rough Sleeping Team and the Housing Options Service.

---

<sup>2</sup> A Government-led programme in response to the Covid-19 pandemic and lockdown from March 2020 onward, which required local authorities to get people off the streets through an offer short stay accommodation to all rough sleepers.

## Use of Temporary Accommodation for those who have, or may have, a priority need for accommodation.

The table below looks at the last 4 years, including the year preceding the commencement of the new homelessness legislation, to see if there was any noticeable change in numbers and households accessing Temporary Accommodation. The numbers in Temporary Accommodation have been relatively steady until 2020/21. The increase in the last year related to single people with no children and is likely to be related to the Covid-19 pandemic. In March 2020, 80% of those in Temporary Accommodation had dependent children, by March 2021 this had fallen to 63%.

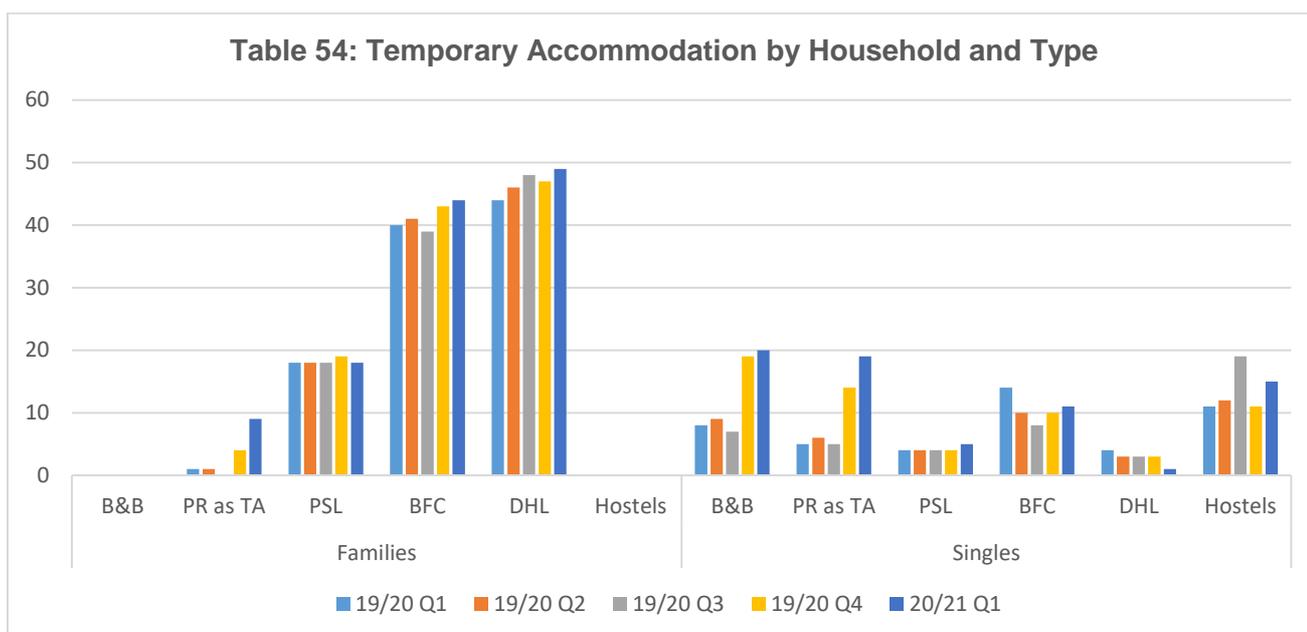
**Table 52: Temporary Accommodation by household type and accommodation type**

Year ending	Total	Of which, S193 Main duty owed	Families	Total number of children	Single people	LA/DHL	Hostel	Private Sector Leased	Bed & Breakfast	Other TA types	Number placed out of area
March 2018	133	119	116	201	17	47	19	29	5	33	-
March 2019	145	102	114	207	31	63	3	20	6	38	7
March 2020	136	100	109	206	27	77	4	17	3	35	2
March 2021	174	111	113	213	61	103	11	23	19	18	-

The use of different types of TA varies, which may be due to the particular issues with the TA itself, or the complexity of a person's needs, or particular issues within a family, which means placing them into the available suitable TA is not possible.

This is illustrated in table 54. Families are predominantly accommodated in Council, Downshire Homes or private sector leased accommodation. Single people are more likely to be in private rented, hostel and bed and breakfast accommodation. Use of bed and breakfast accommodation has recently increased as a result, after three years in which use of bed and breakfast had reduced and was routinely at nil. The Council does not use bed and breakfast accommodation for families, as it is unsuitable and unlawful if used for over 6 weeks.

**Table 54: Temporary Accommodation by Household and Type**



A small number of people may be placed into Temporary Accommodation under a power not a duty because whilst vulnerable, they do not have a priority need for accommodation on the basis of being more vulnerable than the ‘ordinary person’ would be if rendered homeless.

The length of stay in Temporary Accommodation increased significantly in 2020/21. This is likely to be related to the Covid-19 pandemic and difficulties in moving on into new tenancies some homeless households, in part due to a slow down in lettings generally in the private and social housing sectors but also in part due to the challenges of moving on some people who have been rough sleeping who have high levels of support needs.

**Table 54: Average time in temporary accommodation**

Year	Estimated days in Temporary Accommodation*
2019/20	337
2020/21	419

\* Based on snapshots on 31 March 2020 and 31 March 2021 of households that had been in temporary accommodation that year

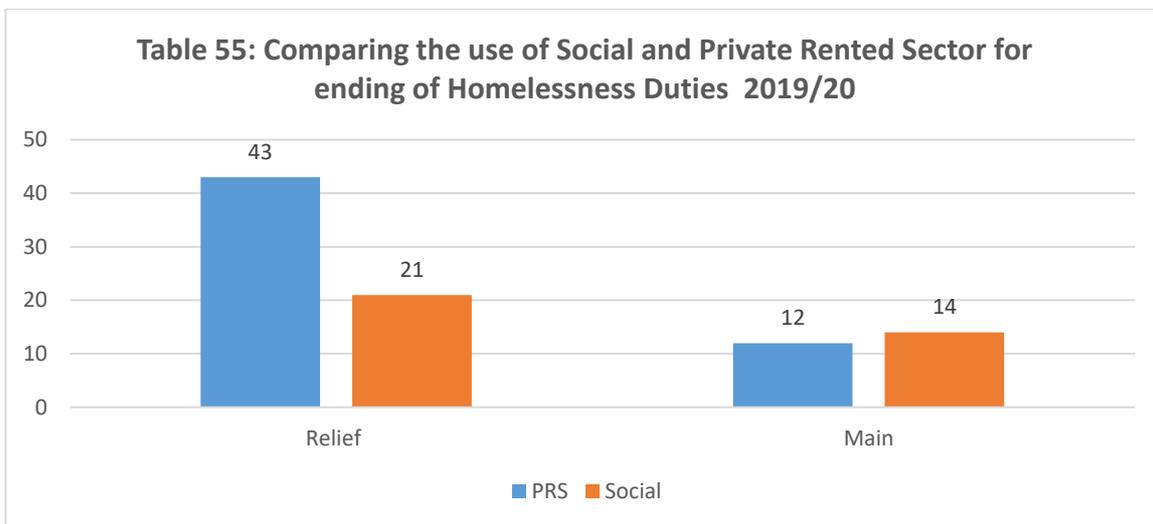
**Use of the private rented and social housing sectors to end homelessness duties:**

The prevention and the relief duties can both be ended through the offer of a 6 month Assured Shorthold Tenancy (AST) in the private rented sector, or a social tenancy offer. In Bracknell Forest, like every area, the likelihood of a social housing offer is limited, based on the level of priority awarded through the banding on the housing register.

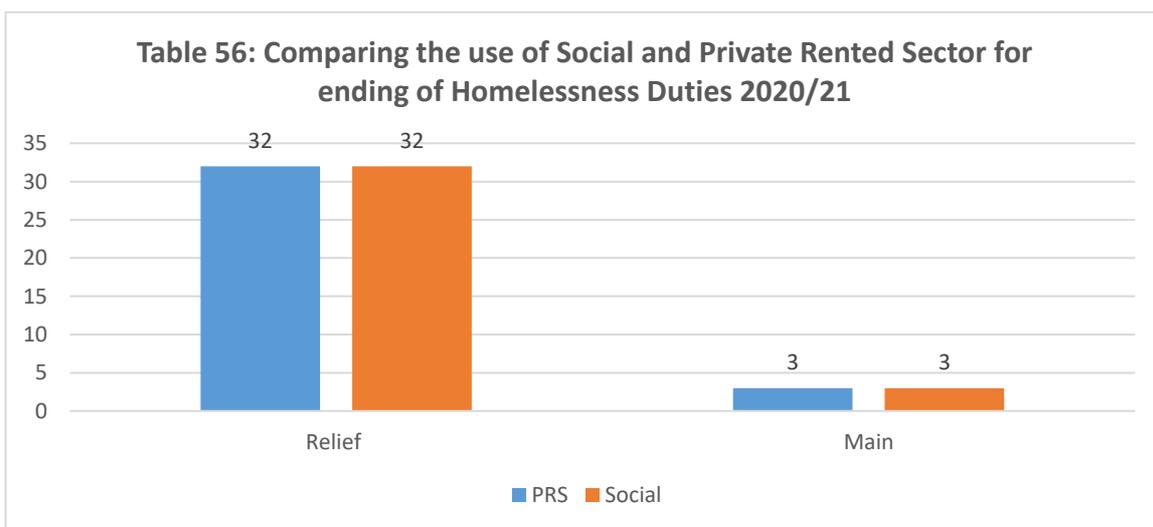
It is not possible to determine how many households secured new social or private rented accommodation at the prevention duty stage because the statistics include households assisted to retain their accommodation as well as those assisted with a new tenancy, so these numbers are taken out of the tables below to avoid any misrepresentation.

The relief duty lasts for 56 days and for those households then owed the main housing duty, the offer must be either social housing or a tenancy in the private rented sector for 12 months. It is reported to be more

challenging to find landlords willing to let for 12 months to end a main duty compared to the shorter tenancies required to end a relief duty. There has been a general expectation that the Homelessness Reduction Act would enable Councils to end relief duties more readily with the 6 month AST option, and over time reduce numbers owed the main duty. This is not the case in Bracknell Forest. Although there has been a reduction in main duty acceptances, the number of households owed the main housing duty who are in Temporary Accommodation awaiting an offer of housing has not changed significantly since 2017/18 This suggests a possible lack of throughput in temporary accommodation for those households owed a main duty.



There was reported to be slowdown in access to both sectors in 2020/21 at the point where there was a significant increase in demand and higher use of Temporary Accommodation for single people. The slowdown is in part attributable to the impact of Covid-19. Housing associations minimised or stopped lettings for large periods of 2020/21, coinciding with national lockdowns. Private landlords had fewer vacant properties for letting as people tended not to move and the suspension of possession orders has been in place until 31<sup>st</sup> May 2021.



As set out earlier in Table 56, at the end of March 2021, there were 174 households in Temporary Accommodation of which 111 households were owed the ‘main duty’. It would appear that if the trend outlined in Table 56 continues regarding the low numbers of households owed a main duty, where the duty

is being ended in either private rented or social housing, this is likely to cause significant costs over time to the local authority.

One of the main issues in ending the main duty in Bracknell is the difficulty securing accommodation for families needing homes with three or more bedrooms, resulting in prolonged stays in temporary accommodation. Private rented and social housing are difficult to access due to affordability issues and a lack of supply. This might partly be addressed through increasing engagement with landlords and the use of incentives and rent support. Supporting households to maximise their incomes and find employment can help overcome the affordability gap in the private rented sector.

Another possible factor is that securing private rented accommodation may be easier where a relief duty is ended with 6 month AST, rather than a main duty which requires that the landlord provides a 12 month AST. Other factors include the relatively small private rented sector in Bracknell Forest compared to elsewhere, and the lack of affordability for many households, especially those dependent on benefits.

Bracknell Forest Council has no policy enabling an ending of duty in suitable accommodation outside the boundaries of the local authority. A change in policy may make some difference to the numbers of households in TA, length of stay and how many are owed the main housing duty.

In light of the importance of private rented sector offers in preventing homelessness, relieving homelessness, ending the main housing duty, and supporting people to move on from temporary accommodation, this is an area which warrants more strategic and operational focus.

## **What legislative or policy changes might impact on levels of homelessness for particular groups in Bracknell Forest?**

### **At a National level**

This review has been undertaken in May 2021, over 1 year since the outbreak of the Covid -19 pandemic. The medium and longer term impacts of the pandemic on the economy, public services and our society generally is not yet known. Some legislative policy intentions pre-date the pandemic or are taking place regardless of the pandemic whilst other policy changes are a direct result of the pandemic.

There has been some general support from the Government to local authorities as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. During 2020/21 additional funding was announced for English authorities to support vulnerable people and was distributed to local authorities by the Government. This was not ring fenced. The total paid to Bracknell Forest was based on ONS population estimates and the ranking of the authority in terms of deprivation. It amounted to £7,791,292.

The un-ringfenced amount paid to Bracknell Forest for 2021/22 has reduced to £2,654,365. In addition, all Councils have had financial support through grants to offset losses of income of Council Tax and Business Rates due to the impact of Covid- on the economy and on individuals' ability to pay.

The 3 national lockdowns and the contraction in the economy have been accompanied by support from the Government to protect jobs. Furloughing of employees and support for business owners has taken place through variations of the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS) introduced in April 2020 and still

continuing at the point of writing this review. Initially it met 80% of a furloughed employee's salary up to £2,500 per month, with the Government funding 75% of this cost. The scheme was extended until the end of March 2021, and then, in December 2020, the Chancellor announced a further extension until the end of April 2021. The scheme has had a number of adjustments to target specific employees with health vulnerabilities and has been particularly critical for businesses in the hospitality.

The Scheme has been extended again to September 2021. By the end of January 2021 it is estimated that 11.3 million people have been furloughed at some point. Younger people and women were more likely to have been furloughed than older people and men. By March 2021 the cost to the public purse was £53 billion. The furlough scheme has been a key factor in preventing the risk of homelessness<sup>3</sup>.

In order to directly assist those at risk of homelessness the Government measures include:

**Restrictions on eviction** from rented accommodation alongside protections for home-owners and landlords with Buy to Let mortgages. These measures were introduced in late March 2020. In terms of the protections for renters, the terms of the protections have changed over the last year but with broadly the same purpose. Since September 2020 landlords have not been able to start possession proceedings unless they have given their tenants 6 months' notice, with some exceptions (for example for anti-social behaviour, arrears totally over 6 months' rent, some cases of domestic abuse). Bailiff action was also suspended with some exceptions.

The evictions moratorium has been viewed by all local authorities as a significant factor in preventing or minimising homelessness over the period of the pandemic. This is evident in the homelessness statistics nationally and in Bracknell Forest, where the proportion of people facing homelessness due to the ending of private or social tenancy went from 21.6% in 2019/20 to 6.7% in 2020/21. This policy has changed, as after 31<sup>st</sup> May 2021 a 4 month notice period will be required for Section 21 notices and bailiff action will begin again. Subject to Public Health advice, notice periods will return to pre-Covid 19 times scales in October 2021. Councils are generally concerned that there will be significant rise in issuing of Section 21 and Section 8 notices from the 1<sup>st</sup> June 2021. The economic downturn, reports of landlords selling properties and delays on evictions from 2020/21 are all likely to contribute to a rise in evictions, but these will proceed relatively slowly through the courts due to backlogs in proceedings.

In addition to the above, in the spring and early summer of 2020, the Government (MHCLG and Ministry of Justice) indicated that some work was underway to extend the Ministry of Justice Pre-action Protocol on possession proceedings to include private renters and to strengthen its remit. It is intended this would increase engagement between private landlords and tenants to resolve disputes and landlords will need to understand the levels of vulnerability of a tenant and their financial position they are in and reasonable repayment terms. This was hoped to alleviate pressures on people renting both social and private accommodation. No further progress on this has been announced since 2020.

---

<sup>3</sup> There is no formal evidence base for this. There is some feedback from local authorities on the first CJRS through a survey for the Crisis Monitor 2021 report: <https://www.crisis.org.uk/ending-homelessness/homelessness-knowledge-hub/homelessness-monitor/england/the-homelessness-monitor-england-2021/>

A range of temporary measures to Universal Credit system were introduced over the Covid-19 pandemic including a **temporary uplift in Universal Credit payments** by £20.00 per week. This will continue until the 6<sup>th</sup> October 2021. Alongside this was the temporary suspension of most benefit deductions for debt, terms and almost all sanctioning. These short-term measures have now ended.

**The uprating of Housing Benefit levels** was announced as part of the Covid-19 response from DWP in March 2020, with the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates rising in April 2020 to cover the lowest 30% of market rents in each area following a freeze of any rise since 2016. The discrepancy between the LHA levels and rising market rents has been cited as a major driver of homelessness since 2010, but significantly so since 2016. There has been no corresponding offsetting of the Benefit Cap in relation to the LHA uplift so for some households in receipt of welfare support who live in higher cost housing areas, this may not result in a significant increase if they reach the Benefit Cap threshold, which is £20,000 outside London. There has been a 're-freeze' of the LHA levels from April 2021 onward. The uprated levels of LHA are shown in Table 15 earlier in this review.

The Chancellor announced in the January 2020 budget that the **Shared Accommodation Rate exemption groups will be expanded** to include:

- Young people under 25s who have spent 3 months or more in resettlement accommodation/hostel accommodation will be immediately exempt from the SAR on leaving resettlements. Note that currently this only applies to young people leaving resettlement accommodation once they reach the age of 25.
- Single people who are under 35 and need accommodation due to being a victim of domestic abuse or modern-day slavery
- Care leavers up to the age of 25. Note that currently this only applies to care leavers up to the age of 22.

These changes were originally due to commence in 2023 but have been brought forward to 1<sup>st</sup> June 2021.

The Government had already committed to **ending rough sleeping** by end of this Parliament, which is in 2024 with various programmes of funding from Government being made available to local authorities since 2018.

£3.2 million funding was announced for local authorities in England to find accommodation and support for people who were sleeping rough or approached as homeless with no available accommodation during the Covid-19 pandemic, regardless of if they had a 'priority need' for accommodation or not.

The **'Everyone In' programme's** success to bring in people sleeping rough during the Covid-19 pandemic has resulted in a greater focus and additional resources being made available to keep people off the streets through the provision of both interim and more settled accommodation.

'Next Steps Accommodation Programme' (NSAP) funding has been allocated to local authorities in England, including Bracknell Forest, for both revenue and capital. More detail on the allocation to Bracknell Forest is

set out in Section 2 of this review.

Funding for 6,000 new supported housing units for rough sleepers, amounting to £433 million, was announced in March 2020 and of this £161 million was brought forward to form the NSAP in an announcement that this would be used for 3,300 units to keep people off the streets following assistance from the 'Everyone In' programme. A further £105 million was announced as part of the NSAP in June 2020 for interim accommodation.

The **Domestic Abuse Bill** received Royal Assent in April 2021 and introduces some significant changes in homelessness, through the amending of Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996 to provide that victims of domestic abuse would have a priority need for accommodation. The definition of domestic abuse, as set out in the Domestic Abuse Act has been incorporated into the homelessness legislation. Changes have been drafted to update the Homelessness Code of Guidance. It is expected the new legislation will commence in the summer of 2021. In addition, local authorities will need ensure they can offer safe temporary accommodation to those fleeing domestic abuse and set out an annual strategy for doing so based on local needs.

Many victims of domestic abuse will already have a 'priority need' for accommodation without having to demonstrate vulnerability, because they have dependent children. The changes will mean single people and couples without children will have a priority need if they are homeless as a result of domestic abuse.

A new burdens assessment has led to additional funding being provided to local authorities, with £203,767 being allocated to Bracknell Forest Council.

## **Housing reform changes**

**The Affordable Homes Programme for 2021 – 2026** aims to supporting the building of 130,000 new homes outside London. The Programme will be worth £12.2 billion with annual spending rising by a quarter from £1.95 billion in 2020/21 to an average of £2.44 billion. There has been a change in prioritisation, reducing the proportion of building for the rental market towards a 50 – 50 split with affordable home ownership.

Local authorities have been granted greater flexibilities to build affordable housing through the investment of monies from Right to Buy sales. **House building using Right to Buy receipts**, combined with the abolition of the borrowing cap in 2018 mean that some local authorities which still own their own stock are in a stronger position to plan new developments of housing to meet community needs. Bracknell Forest transferred its stock to Silva Homes and therefore does not benefit from Right to Buy receipts currently.

In May 2021, the Government announced the implementation of **First Homes** from 28 June 2021, which includes the requirement that 25% of the affordable housing secured through planning obligations is provided as First Homes (homes with a discount of at least 30% on the market value). In many areas, the likely impact will be a reduction in the level of social and affordable rented homes delivered. Transitional arrangements mean that providing the Council submits its draft Local Plan for examination before 28 December 2021, it will not have to include the First Homes policy in the Local Plan and will be exempt from immediate requirements to implement First Homes.

## Other housing policy changes

Private rented tenants have some more protections brought in over the last 5 years:

**The Tenant Fees Act 2019** bans private landlords and letting agents from charging a 'relevant person' (a tenant, licensee, guarantor or person acting on their behalf) any fee unless it is a 'permitted payment'. Where a local housing authority is acting on behalf of someone in helping them to secure accommodation under homelessness duties, they are exempt from the restrictions. A 'permitted payment' includes rent, a tenancy deposit (up to maximum of five or six weeks' rent), a holding deposit (up to maximum of one week's rent), a fee in the event of a 'relevant default', damages for breach of agreement, in connection with tenant's request for a change in their tenancy agreement or in respect of council tax, utilities, communication services and TV licence.

**The Deregulation Act 2015** introduced protection for private rented tenants against retaliatory evictions. Retaliatory eviction is where a tenant makes a legitimate complaint to their landlord about the condition of their property and instead of making the repair the landlord serves them with an eviction notice. All new Assured Shorthold Tenancies starting on or after 1 October 2015 are covered by the provisions in the Act.

In April 2019 the **Government signalled it was considering abolishing 'no fault' evictions** to give greater security to tenants, to be set out in a new Renter's Reform Bill. There has been no progress on this. The current Housing Minister restated the Government intention in March 2021. The 2021 Queens Speech outlined again the intention to bring in additional protections for renters. Section 21 notices are reported to be the second highest cause of homelessness in Bracknell Forest, which mirrors the national position.

### At a regional level:

At a sub-regional level, local authorities and criminal justice agencies in the Thames Valley area, including Bracknell Forest, have developed joint working arrangements, based on Ministry of Justice and MHCLG jointly published guidance for those in custody with no accommodation on release. The joint working arrangements aim to minimise risks of homelessness and other poor outcomes relating to health and well-being, which play a key part in reducing risks of recidivism. A bid has been prepared by partners for funding from the Thames Valley Police and Crime Commissioner to strengthen the services available at the point of prison discharge. The intention is to offer leadership, key contacts, and a support offer to those leaving prison.

### Local policy and planning relating to homelessness and rough sleeping

Bracknell Forest Council started to develop a comprehensive Local Plan in 2015. This is due to be submitted for examination in autumn 2021. The Plan is focussed on development, it is evidence based and has been through community and other stakeholder consultation processes. Within the Local Plan are a range of areas which will directly and indirectly impact on the Council's work with local residents to prevent homelessness, for example: economic development; housing; local infrastructure; community uses and transport.

**Bracknell Forest Council Plan 2019 – 2023** sets out 6 strategic themes:

- Value for Money
- Economic Resilience
- Education and Skills
- Caring for You and Your Family
- Protecting and Enhancing our Environment
- Communities

Four of the objectives of the Communities theme relate directly or indirectly to homelessness:

1. deliver housing services that focus on preventing homelessness
2. develop a new Homelessness Strategy and implement a local action plan to reduce rough sleeping
3. identify the need for and facilitate the provision of affordable homes for rent and shared ownership and rent to meet that need
4. review our Housing Allocations Policy to make best use of affordable housing provision to meet local needs

In terms of the progress towards these:

1. The improvement journey since 2019 on the prevention of homelessness has led to positive performance in terms of rates of prevention success – one of the Government’s aims when the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 was introduced. In Bracknell Forest this has been achieved through a change management programme, focussed on:
  - improved partnership working
  - clearer referral pathways
  - training for staff in other services
  - sharing of information and good practice
  - earlier intervention
  - encouraging people to come forward earlier for assistance
  - allocating new cases within 48 hours
  - income maximization to help people keep their accommodation
  - being explicitly customer focused
  - learning from feedback including any complaints
  - enhancing the performance management practices within the Housing Options Service.
2. A new Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy is being developed, with this review being a key part of that work.
3. The Bracknell Forest Housing Needs Assessment report, commissioned and written in 2020 has informed the new Local Plan in terms of homes for social and affordable rent and shared ownership.
4. Bracknell Forest Council’s allocation policy is currently under review

## **2: The current activity and resources available to prevent and relieve homelessness in Bracknell Forest**

This part of the review outlines the range of resources available to the local authority. This includes funding, partnership working, services and accommodation available to prevent and relieve homelessness.

## Financial resources

Bracknell Forest Council has had an uplift over the last 5 years in financial resources to support work on both preventing homelessness and also relieving homelessness, including targeted funding which is specifically aimed at assisting people who are rough sleeping. The funding programme has changed over the 5 years and the table below tries to set out these and explain the basis for the grants.

The funding is set out in 2 headings: General Homelessness Prevention and Relief and below that a heading specifically for Rough Sleeping work, but there is some cross over between these, as people rough sleeping who are eligible can access services under the Homelessness Reduction Act and would be able to get some assistance on that basis as well as through the more targeted rough sleeping funding services.

**Table 57: General Homelessness Prevention and Relief funding**

Grant	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
MHCLG - Flexible Homelessness Support Grant: ring fenced and replaced the old DWP Temporary Accommodation Management Fee (TAMF)	£303,384	£349,073	£375,230	£375,230	N/A
MHCLG - New burdens funding: funding over 3 years to support the implementation of the new homelessness legislation	£31,992	£29,305	£30,977	N/A	N/A
MHCLG - Homelessness Reduction Grant: A one year grant	N/A	N/A	N/A	£82,801	
MHCLG - Homelessness Prevention Grant: A ring-fenced grant, bringing together 2 previously separate funding streams (the Flexible Homelessness Support Grant and the Homelessness Reduction Grant, previously new burdens funding). The purpose of the grant is to enforce the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 and contribute to ending rough sleeping by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increasing activity to prevent single homelessness</li> <li>Reduce family temporary accommodation numbers through maximising family homelessness prevention,</li> <li>Eliminate the use of unsuitable bed and breakfast accommodation for families for longer than the statutory six-week limit.</li> </ul>	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	£538,306

MHCLG- Homelessness Prevention Grant – a long standing grant payment, not ring-fenced, within the Revenue Support Grant (RSG) from MHCLG. From 2021/22 all visible lines for specific allocation, including the homelessness funding for prevention have been taken out of the RSG	£41,194	£32,718	£49,277	£50,142	N/A
DWP - Discretionary Housing Payments: available to local authorities to assist people on a one off or short-term basis if they are in receipt of housing costs/housing benefit and where there is a shortfall in their rent. Guidance set out how this may be used. DHP can be used for prevention of homelessness	£244,422	£224,367	£184,357	£245,792	£135,991
MHCLG - Private Rented Sector Access Fund	N/A	N/A	£42,700	N/A	N/A
<b>Funding specifically to address rough sleeping</b>					
<b>Grant</b>	<b>2017/18</b>	<b>2018/19</b>	<b>2019/20</b>	<b>2020/21</b>	<b>2021/22</b>
MHCLG - Rough Sleeping Initiative (RSI4)	N/A	N/A	£120,000	£356,141	£578,669  Breakdown: £361,669 - RS staffing £60K - Covid funding £87K - Emergency accommodation (incl CWF) £25K - Rehabilitation/Therapy fund £45K PRS incentives (formerly NSAP)
MHCLG - Rapid Rehousing Pathway funding for: Specialist Housing Officer Senior Tenancy Sustainment Officer Rough Sleeper Navigator Senior Rough Sleeper Navigator Personalised budgets for rough sleepers	N/A	N/A	£181,834	N/A	N/A
MHCLG - Cold Weather funding: Annual payments to support rough sleepers off the streets during severe cold weather. Funding only drawn down as needed.	N/A	£30,000	£50,000	£40,000	Amalgamated into RSI4 this year, but there may be a further opportunity to bid later in the year, but no decisions made yet
Protect +	N/A	N/A	N/A	£7,500	No new bid
MHCLG - Next Steps Accommodation Programme to	N/A	N/A	N/A	£25,000 £17,000	Amalgamated into RSI4 this year

source accommodation for people assisted off the streets during Covid-19 pandemic					
---	--	--	--	--	--

The current structure of Housing and Welfare Service is likely to change, subject to consultation and approval, in order to separate out into 2 discrete service areas the housing services functions and the welfare functions and better match staff skills and capacity with service pressures and customer needs. Currently some roles, including the Housing Options officer roles contain welfare functions as well.

It is proposed that the Housing Service would contain:

- The Housing Options Service: statutory homelessness prevention and relief work and general housing advice
- The Single Homeless Team: preventing and relieving rough sleeping
- The Housing Management and Compliance Team: temporary accommodation and move on options/procurement
- The Housing Resources Team: applications to the Housing Register and allocation of social housing
- The Disability and Home Improvements Team: legal compliance, aids and adaptations

The Welfare Services would contain:

- The Welfare Support and Assessment Team: decision making and processing applications for Housing Benefit, Council Tax, discretionary housing payments and Welfare Assistance. The team would also include a debt/ money advice function

## **Services and joint working to prevent or relieve homelessness in Bracknell Forest**

The causes of homelessness are complex, and the remedies are often multi-faceted. Working in partnership is recognised nationally as being essential in order to prevent and relieve homelessness. This was reflected in feedback from stakeholder consultation in Bracknell Forest.

There are some multi-agency meetings, two in particular relating to partnership working on rough sleeping, which are outlined later in this section. These are building blocks for some of the partnership working between agencies in Bracknell Forest. There has been an aspiration to have a Homelessness Forum in Bracknell Forest and this was set out in the 2015 Homelessness Strategy. There has not been a regular meeting of the Bracknell Forest Homelessness Forum and this remains an area for development.

### **Early intervention and prevention services:**

As noted in the Section above, Bracknell Forest Council has re-focussed its Housing Options Service and partnership working to better support households who may be at risk of homelessness in the future.

The services below offer advice and support to different groups of people in different circumstances. The ambition of the Housing Options Service is to support people to remain where they live, as long as the accommodation is reasonable to occupy. Considerations of safety, affordability, overcrowding and the state of repair of a property are all aspects to be assessed. Where a move to different accommodation is needed, because the person/household cannot remain where they are, the aim is to plan ahead and avoid any risk of homelessness.

Some of the services below will offer people advice and assistance where homelessness may be a threat in the future, but they are not at risk of homelessness within 56 days, as set out in the Homelessness Reduction Act.

**Bracknell Forest Council’s Housing Options Service** offers advice and assistance under S179 of the Housing Act 1996 to people who are not threatened with homelessness within 56 days but are seeking advice due to concerns about homelessness in the future. The number of households where this is the case is not required to be reported to the Government through H-CLIC. This general housing advice is provided within a wider advice service. The following is a snapshot of general advice from Quarter 4 of 2020/21:

**Table 58: General Advice Enquiries January - March 2021**

Benefits and Tax Credits	1,698
Benefits – Universal Credit	1,267
Consumer Goods and Services	231
Debt	976
Discrimination and hate crimes	106
Education	23
Employment	726
Financial Services and capability	243
Health and Community Care	191
Housing	941
Immigration and asylum	175
Legal	327
Other	124
Relationships and family	509
Tax	22
Travel and Transport	51
Utilities and communications	26
Total advice enquiries	7,694

There are two advice agencies which provide free housing advice to the public in Bracknell Forest:

- Shelter has an office in Slough and provides specialist housing and homelessness advice.
- Bracknell Forest Citizens Advice is part funded by the Council to provide advice to customers on housing issues.

### **Community based money advice and related support services**

Poverty is one of the main drivers of homelessness. Having a comprehensive network of community support agencies, including the Council, which work to prevent the more severe impacts of poverty<sup>4</sup> is a protective factor for poor households in Bracknell Forest.

<sup>4</sup> Destitution is a broad term covering extreme levels of poverty in the UK, to a level where a person or family cannot feed themselves, stay warm, dry and clean. See <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/destitution-uk-2020>

Whilst the area is in the top quartile in terms of overall affluence, the impact of high rents and the benefit cap on some lower income households in Bracknell Forest can mean that rent needs to be topped up from incomes, resulting in financial hardship and difficulties. Services include the following:

- The Council provides advice and can offer some assistance on maximising income and financial planning. The services range from the general advice function, as indicated in Table 53 above, to direct financial help in the form of rent bonds, deposits and discretionary welfare grants.
- The Local Crisis Grant is currently under review. It is restricted to short term support to those in immediate need. The Home Emergency Grant Scheme is for those who have lost their home due to an emergency or for people leaving institutions to assist them to set up a home.
- Bracknell Forest Citizens Advice provides specialist advice services on welfare benefits and landlord and tenant issues and debt management.
- The Kerith Community Centre runs a number of services as part of their programme, Christians against Poverty, including providing advice, financial planning, a food bank and advice on debt management.
- A number of housing associations operating in Bracknell Forest provide tenancy sustainment officers who work with tenants under threat of eviction. Silva Homes inform the Council where eviction is proposed to see if the Council can step in to help avoid homelessness.

**The Housing Options Service** offers assistance to people threatened with homelessness within 56 days under Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996. In Bracknell Forest this can include:

- Negotiation with landlords or with parents/family/friends to prevent eviction
- Income maximization
- Low level debt guidance
- Resolving landlord and tenant disputes
- Advice to landlords and tenants on renting in the private sector and use of tenancy deposit schemes
- Work with the Public Protection Partnership on cases of illegal eviction and disrepair cases
- Advice on legal possession proceedings
- Mediation with families
- Partnership work with Community Safety and Thames Valley Police in cases of domestic abuse and anti-social behavior
- Use of Discretionary Housing Payments for access to housing (rent in advance or rent deposits) or in specific circumstances, pay off some arrears so the person can remain in their accommodation
- Flexible use of the Housing Options 'Prevention Fund' for some rent deposits and other work to prevent homelessness
- Referral to advice agencies such as Citizen's Advice and Shelter
- Help with registering for social housing

### **Services for people who are sleeping rough**

As noted in Table 20, there has been a sharp rise in recorded rough sleeping since 2018 in Bracknell Forest. In response to this, Bracknell Forest Council has developed new services, funded through the

Government’s Rough Sleeping Initiative programme and other smaller Rough Sleeping programme funding since 2018 (see Table 54 above for the funding outline).

The service provision for people rough sleeping is underpinned by strong partnership working. This is reported to have strengthened over the last year due to the ways in which statutory and voluntary agencies have worked together through the ‘Everyone In’ programme and challenges relating to the Covid-19 pandemic. There are two partnership meetings which inform and support service delivery to people who are sleeping rough and recovering from homelessness:

- The Rough Sleeping Strategic Partnership Board meets quarterly and is attended by senior officers.
- Rough Sleeping Core Group Meetings take place fortnightly and developed in order to co-ordinate services during first national lockdown in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Attendees are operational staff.

Agencies represented at either or both of the meetings above are:

Thames Valley Police	Public Health
Community Safety	A local GP practice
Pilgrim Hearts	Drug and Alcohol Services
Bracknell Forest Council	Community Mental Health Services
Renova	Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)
Kerith Church	Adult Social Care Safeguarding
Citizen’s Advice Bureau	Parks and Open Spaces Service
Berkshire Primary Care Group	Probation
The Recovery College	

Since Bracknell Forest Council was awarded additional Rough Sleeping Initiative (RSI) funding in 2018, a team of 6 people has been set up to reach and support people sleeping rough into short stay accommodation and then offer up to 6 months of tenancy support when people move into settled accommodation. Learning from the team response to the Covid-19, the roles of the team are becoming more fluid, as people have developed the skills to perform a variety of roles, including street outreach, navigators and support with tenancy skills and re-settlement.

All the Rough Sleeping Team staff have had training in the Homelessness Reduction Act and will be taking homelessness applications directly, undertake statutory assessments and develop Personal Housing Plans for people sleeping rough, rather than referring people to the Housing Options Services. Whilst more generic working will continue within the team, one person will take a lead responsibility on the statutory homelessness work. There has been a gap in systematically registering people rough sleeping for social housing which will be addressed through this new function within the team.

A mobile GP service is available for rough sleepers in a local voluntary agency, Pilgrim Hearts. In addition to primary care services, there is a need for some more specialist support and treatment services for individuals who have co-occurring mental health problems alcohol and drug misuse. Whilst funding has been secured for this, there has been a problem with recruitment into the role, due in part to a shortage of expertise in dual diagnosis nationally in this field. At the moment there is provision for 1 day per week

within the Drug and Alcohol Team (DAAT), which is not deemed to be sufficient, as the highest support needs of people rough sleeping is mental health and substance misuse.

Pilgrim Hearts is a valued partner which provides a range of services through its drop-in centre sessions and through Winter Night Shelter, including referrals to more specialist services, food, support, help applying for benefits and employment, the base for the mobile GP service and more recently being a venue for Covid-19 vaccinations.

Due to open in the Autumn of 2021 is Stepping Stones, Bracknell Forest's Recovery College, a voluntary agency which will work in partnership with the Council to give people experiencing problems with their mental health and anything else affecting their quality of life, the opportunity to attend courses and training programmes that help them to better understand their condition, take control of their recovery and ultimately, to lead a happier, more fulfilling life.

The gaps in services for people who are recovering from sleeping rough or still on the streets were identified as:

- mental health services which are flexible and designed to reach and support this client group
- the second stage options are very limited, with minimal in-borough supported housing options for people recovering from rough sleeping
- the move on offer is limited in terms of a range of housing options for different people with different needs
- social housing is affordable but is a move on option which is rarely available in Bracknell Forest for those who have a history of rough sleeping
- move on is limited due to the issue of affordability - high rents, the benefit cap and other welfare related constraints, including the shared accommodation rate, applicable to single under 35 year olds, remain blockages to move on options

The accommodation options for those recovering from rough sleeping are covered later in this section.

### **Services for people who may be at risk of homelessness due to domestic abuse**

A range of services for those experiencing and fleeing domestic abuse are coordinated through the part-time Domestic Abuse Co-Ordinator, based in the Bracknell Forest council Community Safety Team. The Bracknell Forest Domestic Abuse Executive Group, accountable to the Community Safety Partnership, provides strategic oversight of the multi-agency responses to domestic abuse across Bracknell Forest and aims to:

- Improve outcomes for victims of domestic abuse, including their children
- Identify and addressing gaps in support, including those within safe accommodation.
- Bring together managers from key agencies with responsibility of domestic abuse.
- Meet the function of the required Local Partnership Board (LPB) as set out in Part 4, Section 58 of the Domestic Abuse Act.
- Be responsible for supporting Bracknell Forest Council in meeting its duty under Part 4 of the Domestic Abuse Act.

- Work together to support, advise and work in partnership with Bracknell Forest Council to ensure victim of domestic abuse have access to adequate and appropriate support within safe accommodation services.

Moving forward and in line with the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, a needs assessment is currently being undertaken to assess the need for accommodation-based domestic abuse support in the Bracknell Forest area for all victims and their children, including those who come from out of area. Bracknell Forest Council will develop and publish a strategy for the provision of such support, having regard to the needs assessment.

Currently women and children who are homeless as a result of domestic abuse can be accommodated through Berkshire Women's Aid (BWA), which is part funded by the Council to provide refuge for women fleeing domestic violence as well as support services for both men and women. BWA provides housing advice including helping people into private rented sector, financial planning, opening bank accounts, sanctuary schemes and provides 11 places in temporary accommodation in non-self-contained refuge.

### **Identification of and support to people who may be at risk of homelessness when leaving hospital**

Currently the 'duty to refer' referrals to the Housing Options Service by hospitals is low, with around 3 or 4 referrals made per year. It is likely that there are vulnerable single people leaving hospital with no accommodation to return to, and it is recognised that the referral pathways need improving in order to identify people earlier and to assist them with housing options before they leave hospital.

### **Services for people with mental health problems**

Mental health was reported as the most prevalent support need in Bracknell Forest amongst people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness. This was also raised as a gap in services to homeless people through consultation with stakeholders.

It was raised in consultation and feedback from internal and external stakeholders that partnership working and referral pathways could be improved both in the community, with Bracknell Forest Community Mental Health Team and within in-patient care settings. Currently there is no Mental Health Hospital Discharge Protocol in place.

There are lower level services, provided via GP practices including access to Talking Therapies which are more readily accessed.

### **Services for people with substance misuse problems**

New Hope provide a range of drug and alcohol treatment services in the community including specific groups for people who are in the criminal justice system, counselling, harm reduction such as blood borne virus testing and vaccination, Opiate Substitute Therapy, a 10 week structured program, psychosocial interventions such as cognitive behaviour therapy and alternative therapies. The service can also make referrals for clients into Tier 4 in-patient treatment services. There is reported to be positive and proactive joint working between New Hope and the Rough Sleeping Team in particular.

## **Services to people who may be at risk of homelessness when leaving custody**

There is evidence of improved joint working with the Probation Services, anecdotally and through the significant increase in the number of referrals under the 'duty to refer'. As shown in Table 35 this has increased from 2 in 2019/20 to 35 in the following year. In part this is attributed to the way in which partners have had to work more closely over the last year as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, resulting in stronger working relationships and an improved understanding of roles and services.

The Rough Sleeping Team in Bracknell Forest has particularly focussed on improving joint working, due to the correlation between adult homelessness on release from custody leading to rough sleeping. Repeat homelessness and recidivism are also strongly linked, which is a focus as well for the Rough Sleeping Team with the Probation Service.

One officer within the Rough Sleeping Team has professional expertise in criminal justice system and has helped to build networks.

As noted above, Bracknell Forest is involved in the Thames Valley approach to prison release.

## **Services for young people**

There is reported to be positive, pro-active partnership working between Children's Services and the Housing Options Services.

A joint protocol is in place regarding homeless 16/17 years and an information leaflet for young people informing them of their options and rights.

Whilst working relationships with the Leaving Care Service are positive, care leavers aged 18 – 20 remain significantly over- represented in the homelessness statistics, being at a much higher risk of homelessness than their peers. This is a national issue and one which continues to attract focus from Government.

There is no joint protocol currently which sets out the way in which Housing Services and Children's Services will work together to prepare and assist young people as they leave care, but this is planned for 2021, following the 2019 review of leaving care services.

There are some supported housing services for young people which are set out later in this section.

## **Adult Social Care**

The Housing Service and Adult Social Care work together to provide services to vulnerable adults. For example, where accommodation is no longer suitable due to a health need, Disabled Facilities Grant can be used for aids and adaptations, or where there are safeguarding or mental health issues, joint work may be undertaken to find appropriate move on options

### **Services for people who may be at risk of homelessness as refugees or following a decision from the Home Office on their asylum claim**

There are a low number of people with new refugee status living in Bracknell Forest currently and this is not therefore a significant driver of homelessness. The local authority does have some refugee families through the Government's Syrian Vulnerable Person's Resettlement Scheme and they are supported through Early Help. The Housing Service works with Children's Services where families have no recourse to public funds and assist with finding accommodation which is funded through Children's Services Section 17 support.

### **Ex-Military personnel**

Bracknell Forest Council has signed the Military Personnel Covenant, which sets out a commitment to treating ex-military personnel and their families fairly.

## **Accommodation options to prevent and relieve homelessness in Bracknell Forest**

### **Temporary Accommodation options:**

There are different types of Temporary Accommodation (TA) which the Council procures:

- 2 hostels, each with 10 units of accommodation. These are owned by the Council. One hostel is suitable for single people only as it has shared facilities.
- Self-contained Private Sector Leased accommodation
- Self-contained social housing
- Other types of TA, including self-contained nightly let accommodation and Downshire Homes Ltd, which is a housing company set up to acquire more properties to meet the growing demand for TA
- Bed and Breakfast

There has been a concerted focus to end the use of bed and breakfast for families for 6 weeks or more, and as a result overall bed and breakfast use has been reduced over the last 3 years. No families have been placed by Bracknell Forest Council into bed and breakfast type provision for over 12 months.

2020/21 was an exceptional year, in terms of use of TA during the Covid-19 pandemic. As was shown in Section 1, in Table 51, there has been a sharp rise in the number of single people in TA, from 27 in March 2020 to 68 in March 2021, whilst the number of families in TA has remained static at 116.

In order to manage the TA portfolio and assist households with move on options, there is a Housing Management Team comprising of 6 staff: 1 Team Manager, 3 Housing Management officers and 2 Housing Procurement Officers.

The Housing Procurement Officers identify suitable move-on options from TA and move on from other forms of accommodation, such as bed and breakfast, for people who have been rough sleeping but do not have a priority need for accommodation.

### **Supported housing**

## **Women and children fleeing domestic abuse**

Berkshire Women's Aid provide women's refuges across Reading, Bracknell Forest and Wokingham with 39 spaces for single women and those with children. Within this, 11 spaces are funded through Bracknell Forest Council.

### **16 – 25 year olds**

LookAhead Housing Association provides 75 units of accommodation across 4 different supported housing schemes in Bracknell Forest. A mixture of young people live in the supported housing schemes at any time. They are a combination of young people referred by the Housing Options Service because they are homeless or threatened with homelessness and looked after 16/17 year olds and care leavers. In February 2021 there were 56 young people at risk of homelessness and 23 young people who were 'open' to Children's Services.

The services provide some 'progression' from 24 hour staffed accommodation to more independent living environments with floating support.

This service is funded through a combination of:

- a 5 year block contract with Bracknell Forest for support costs, which is due to expire in August 2022. The contract value over the 5 years for support work is approximately £2.5 million
- rent, either paid directly by the young person, but more usually through housing benefit or by Children's Services for 16/17 year olds who are either still looked after or are a 'relevant' care leaver aged 16/17
- service charges paid by the young person from their own income

A review of the services is underway to ensure any future commissioned service matches the needs of young people.

Life House is funded by Bracknell Forest Council to provide accommodation and a floating support service provided to 16 to 25 year old homeless pregnant women and homeless mothers with a child under 5 years of age. The cost of this per annum is approximately £20,000.

### **Single people aged 25 and over**

Renova provides accommodation for 8 single homeless vulnerable men aged 25+ from a variety of backgrounds including: offending, mental health, domestic violence, and alcohol & drug abuse, to help them achieve independent living and employment.

## **Social Housing**

The way in which social housing is allocated across the Registered Providers is set out in the Allocations Policy. There is no common housing register and nomination agreements are in place with each housing association.

In terms of homelessness and the allocation of social housing, the current policy reflects the changes in the homelessness legislation, brought in by the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, which amended Part VII of

the Housing Act 1996. Numbers awaiting housing offers who are owed the main duty have not fallen, and remain relatively high, indicating that the option of accessing social housing is a challenge for many homeless households.

A particular issue is the shortage of properties available for larger families. Waiting times for 4 or 5 bed properties are extremely long due to the lack of such properties becoming available to let. This is exacerbated by the bedroom allowance within the current allocations policy which creates additional demand for larger properties.

Barriers to social housing in many areas of England, including affordability assessments undertaken by housing associations, exclusion on the basis of a history of anti-social behaviour or arrears can prevent lettings to homeless households in TA. This may warrant some detailed project work in the future in Bracknell Forest.

### **Private rented housing**

The Council must be satisfied a property is suitable before making an offer to a household which is homeless or threatened with homelessness. This is set out in Chapter 17 of MHCLG's Homelessness Code of Guidance.

Enforcement of housing standards sits in the Public Protection Partnership, which is a cross-borough service with Wokingham Borough Council and West Berkshire Borough Council. Wokingham Council are leaving this service next year.

Affordability is part of the suitability assessment as well as the standards of repair and health and safety. As set out in Section 1 of this review, the private rented sector has been unaffordable for many households on low incomes with anecdotal feedback that the uplift in the Local Housing Allowance rates in April 2020 has not had an impact on the ability of those reliant on welfare benefits to access private rented housing. The benefit cap and some wider welfare reforms are cited as a key barrier locally.

The Housing Options Service can support people to access the Private Rented Sector through access to the Prevention Fund or Discretionary Housing Payments for rent advance or rent deposits.

Although the 2 Housing Procurement Officers within the Housing Management Team work with individual private landlords, at present there is no Landlord Forum, bringing together the Council and landlords to communicate more formally. A Landlord Forum would enable landlords to share their experiences of letting accommodation in Bracknell Forest and the surrounding areas, both with each other and with the Council. It can also be a means of raising awareness of the Bracknell Forest 'offer' to private landlords, including the detail of leasing properties to the local authority, proactive offering advice/help regarding changes of legislation, procedures and policies, as well as a vehicle for communicating regarding suitability and responding to landlord concerns.

The Rough Sleeping Team have secured some MHCLG 'Next Steps' funding which aims to incentivise landlords to take people who have been sleeping rough. By covering rent in advance, deposits and by the use of insurance bonds guaranteeing rent and losses due to damage, the Team seek to be able to move people currently in Bed and Breakfast and nightly let accommodation, alongside an offer of tenancy

sustainment support to this cohort. If this model is proved to work well, versions of this could be adapted for other client groups who are in housing need and homeless.