

Homelessness

Quarter 2 position statement

October 2021

Homelessness Reduction Act 2017

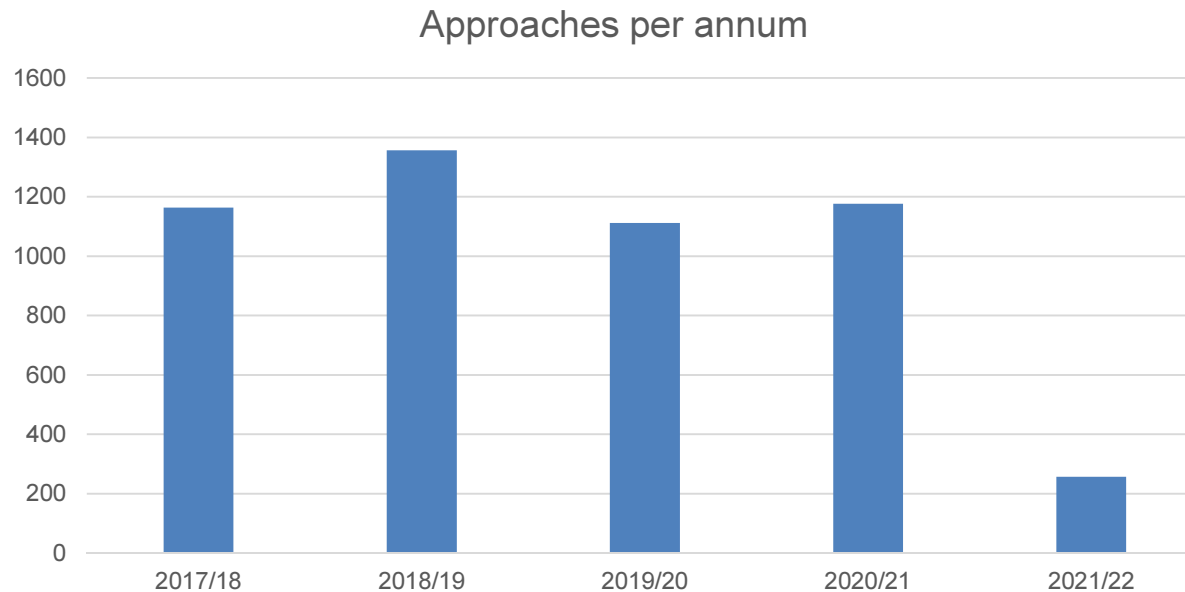


- Most significant change in homelessness legislation
- New approach to tackling homelessness
 - To expand the provision of advice and information about homelessness with prevention and relief of homelessness as a primary focus
 - Extending the period of “threatened homelessness” for households from twenty eight to fifty six days and allow earlier intervention
 - New duties to both prevent and relieve homelessness for all eligible people [irrespective of their priority need or any issues of intentional homelessness]
 - Tailored assessment and Personalised Housing Plan [PHP], setting out actions that local authorities and clients need to take to secure alternative accommodation
 - Encouraging public bodies and agencies to work together to prevent and relieve homelessness through a new legal “duty to refer”

Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 - implementation



- Implementation April 2018
 - Report presented to the Housing & Health Advisory Committee in September 2018
 - Highlighted key implications and challenges
 - Most significant impact on approaches



Reasons for a rise in homelessness - post April 2018



- The continued impact of the HRA, placing the additional new duties on the local authority including *duty to refer*
- Welfare reform and Local Housing Allowance (LHA) caps
- Lack of affordable housing supply
 - High competition for private rented housing
 - Increased rental costs
 - Increase housing market prices
 - Reduction in new build delivery
- New Buy-to-Let tax rules impacted the private rented market
- Domestic Abuse Act 2021

Reasons for a rise in homelessness - Covid-19



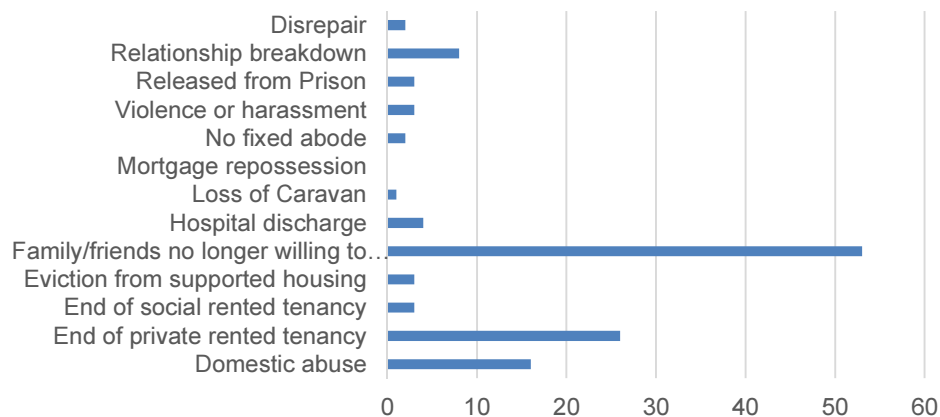
- Covid-19 hit the service hard and had a substantial impact on residents in the District leading to increased levels of homelessness.
- At short notice, following the announcement of a national emergency on 23 March 2020, the Government required rough sleepers or those threatened by rough sleeping to be housed under the “Everyone In” policy.
- Single homelessness - in part attributable to not being able to ‘sofa surf’ between family and friends
- Eviction ban and extension to notice period
- Family and friends now longer will to accommodation
- Funding restrictions/ending

Homelessness statistics



- HERO support - 2020/21- 594 customers including KCC Covid-19 referrals (£90,755 worth of arrears cleared) 2021/22 - 411 customers to end of quarter 2.
- Increase applications to our housing waiting list - 352 April 2019 - 881 September 2021(250% increase in 30 months)
- Temporary accommodation - consistent supply (46 average)
- Under ‘Everyone In’ which ran between March 2020 - June 2021, the Council was approached for assistance by 73 individuals resulting in 65 being offered emergency accommodation. 13 have remained with a full duty accepted.

Emergency & temporary accommodation placement reasons (August 2021)



Homeless Prevention Team - new challenges

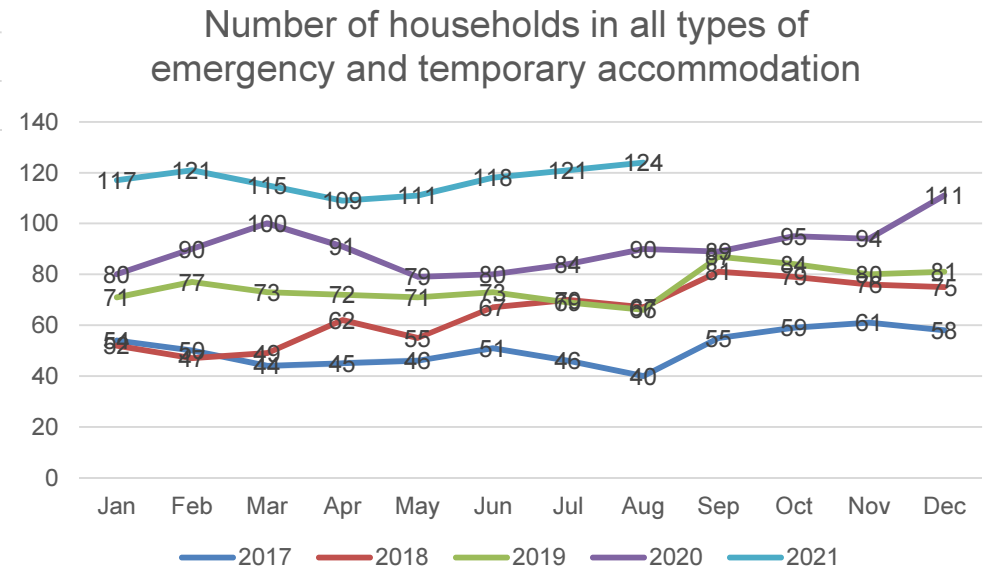
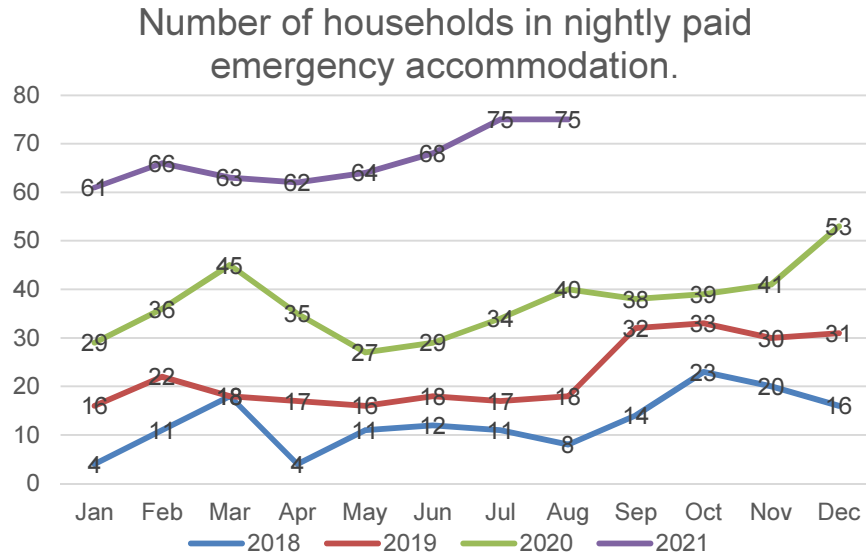


- Eviction ban lifting and “standard” notice period returned
- End of furlough - 30 September 2021
- End of Universal Credit uplift
- Increasing cost of utilities
- Rough Sleeper Action plan (Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities - DLHC)
- Reduction in the use of emergency accommodation (nightly paid)
- Increased approaches due to the new Domestic Abuse Act
- Increased approaches of customers with complex/multiple issues
- Lack of ongoing Government funding to support additional pressures and costs of homelessness (accommodation/staffing)

Impact of Homelessness Reduction Act - Emergency & Temporary Accommodation



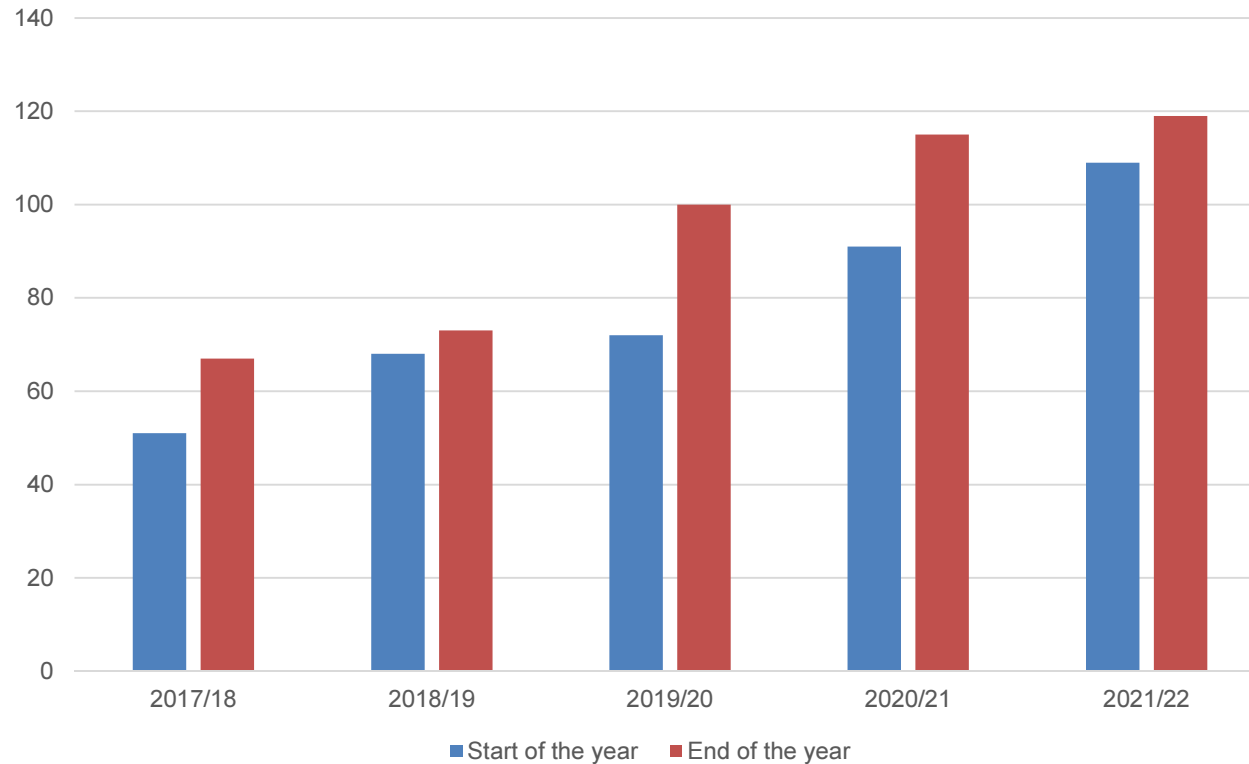
- Increase in emergency accommodation (nightly paid)



Emergency & Temporary Accommodation



Temporary Accommodation Figures at the start and end of each financial year (2017-2022)



- Placement assessment
- Charging schedule for nightly paid placements



Actions & achievements



- Restructure - live from January 2021
- Senior appointments - Homelessness Prevention Manager (November 2020), Head of Housing (March 2021) and Housing Strategy Manager (September 2021)
- Creation of a holistic homelessness prevention and support service - HERO, Housing Advice & Accommodation Services Team
- Holistic approach to homelessness to respond to the HRA - prevent, intervene and recover
- Homeless Prevention Team workshops hosted
- Temporary Accommodation Action Plan implemented
- Triage service launched - early intervention & assessment
- All temporary accommodation/emergency accommodation placements assessed against the HRA and sign off by senior managers
- Staff training programme in place

Actions & achievements



- HRA Assessment Framework introduced
- Bid/grant applications to support the delivery of the service
- Yoti - verified electronic signature app to support new customer declaration, consent & authorisation form launched
- Review process in place for reclaiming of housing benefit
- Launch of our Voluntary Relocation Scheme & Family Incentive
- Quercus Housing Business Plan updated to allow prudential borrowing via the Council
- 37 Vine Court Road - joint supported housing accommodation with West Kent Housing Association (WKHA), Kent County Council commissioning (KCC) & Look Ahead (commissioned homelessness support services)
- Virtual engagement event with local letting agents and landlords
- Re-branded private rented sector offer - Help to Let
- New Help2Rent rent guarantee insurance policy
- Increased funding contribution from WKHA for our HERO service
- Launched Digital Inclusion project in partnership with Compaid

Pipeline projects



- Delivery of 37 Vine Court Road
- Delivery of the District's first Housing-Led project at Orchard Close
- Implementation of our nightly rental and occupation charging schedule
- Handover of 11-13 High Street, Swanley (Quercus Housing)
- Progress purchase of Abbey Court, West Kingsdown (QH)
- Launch of our new private sector offer - Help to Let
- Expansion of our HERO team - HERO+ officers
- Procurement of private sector accommodation including emergency accommodation
- Revision of the Council's Homelessness Strategy and Allocations Policy
- Develop Empty Homes Action Plan
- Explore the feasibility of a Council-led Social Lettings Agency.
- Review of Council land assets - potential affordable housing delivery

Pipeline projects



- Work with local churches to provide winter accommodation (when SWEP is triggered) as an alternative to temporary accommodation
- Review website to encourage self-help to resolve housing issues, noting that elsewhere where this has been undertaken a 25% drop in footfall and calls to respective call centres has been seen
- Develop suite of customer 'factsheets' to provide support and guidance
- Smarter use of data to support early intervention
- Work with Customer Solutions to understand the top 5 customer requests for housing and how we can address these to reduce customer demand
- Review the viability for the Council to provide its own emergency accommodation
- Develop Business Plan for the purchase of TA at The Rosary (QH)

Financial income



- Homeless Prevention Grant 2021/22 **£434,897**
- Rough Sleeper Initiative 4 - **£293,742** (31.03.22)
- Rough Sleeper Accommodation Programme - **£233,175**
including £57,675 capital funding for WKHA
- Accommodation for ex-Offenders - **£67,000** (31.03.22)
- Helping Hands - **£65,000**
- Kent Housing Group joint COMF bid- **£175,000** (31.03.22)
- Housing benefit income - LHA rate at 90% of 2011 levels
(approximately 38% of gross cost of nightly paid)
- Charging schedule (nightly paid) **£36,000** per annum

Risks



- Resources
 - Financial - grant allocation under the Homeless Prevention Grant for 2022/23
 - Nightly paid rates for emergency accommodation (approximately 38% recoverable via housing benefit)
 - Staff - staff levels will reduce significantly - 6.6 FTE (1 x FTE triage officer, 2 x FTE housing advice officers, 1 x 0.6 FTE domestic abuse co-ordinator, 1 x FTE HERO (Covid) are contracted to 31.03.22. 1 x FTE HERO+ officer until 31.08.22 and 3 x FTE Rough Sleeper support officers 30.06.22)
 - The homeless prevention team have worked tirelessly over the last 18 months on significantly reduced staff for long periods of time (long term sickness of 2.6 FTE) and recruitment issues.
- Continuing demand for nightly paid accommodation in Kent resulting in procurement issues
- Housing benefit income rates
- Affordability of the private rented sector
- Affect of the removal of the UC uplift and furlough
- Available housing via the housing register - low void turnaround or lack of lettings chains