



**Housing, Homelessness and Rough  
Sleeping Strategy 2019 – 2024**

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## APPENDIX 1

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### Foreword

Clr. Ashley Yeates

Cabinet Member for Communities and Housing

Access to suitable, good quality and affordable housing is important to our health and wellbeing and essential in providing sustainable communities. Ensuring we have the right type of homes in the right location can have a major impact on our ability to meet the needs of our growing and ageing population and to support the economic prosperity of the district.

Since the publication of our last Housing and Homelessness Strategies, there has been a major change in approaching the ongoing issue of homelessness and rough sleeping. The Homelessness Reduction Act has fundamentally changed the way that local authorities in England deliver their homelessness and housing options services and the government has set a target to eradicate rough sleeping by 2027.

I am therefore very pleased to introduce our new Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2019-2024 which has three priorities to:

- Enable people to live in good quality homes that are suitable for their needs
- Increase housing choice to meet the needs of current and future residents
- Prevent or relieve all forms of homelessness including rough sleeping

Naturally, the council cannot do this alone and the strategy can only be delivered in collaboration with key partners across the private, public and voluntary sectors working alongside our communities. I believe that through this strategy and its supporting action plan, we are able to build upon the strengths of what has already been achieved and meet the challenges of the future.

## Executive Summary

This Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy has been developed in response to the key housing issues currently facing Lichfield district as well as those that are expected to occur over the next few years and decades. It recognises the significant changes we will experience with regard to an ageing and growing population and the demand that this will bring for certain types of housing and housing related support.

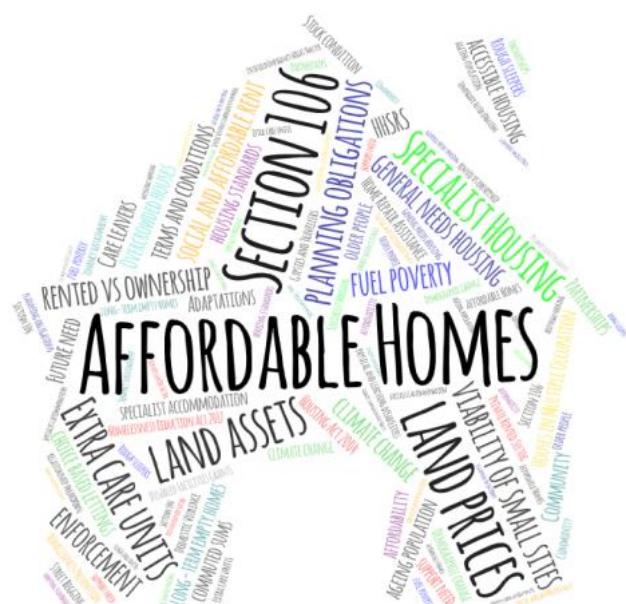
The strategy is in three sections- current housing, future housing and homelessness and rough sleeping. A review of our evidence is included to support our three priorities:

1. To enable people to live in good quality homes that are suitable for their needs
  2. To increase housing choice to meet the needs of current and future residents
  3. To prevent or relieve all forms of homelessness including rough sleeping

Our objectives to meet these are to:

- Promote services enabling people to live independently in their own homes
  - Advise and where possible support vulnerable households living in poor housing conditions
  - Encourage best use of the housing stock
  - Increase the supply of affordable housing
  - Ensure an adequate supply of suitable and accessible accommodation for vulnerable and older people in need
  - Improve the range of suitable housing options for those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness
  - Identify and provide support to those who face barriers to accessing and maintaining suitable accommodation
  - Tackle rough sleeping so that no one needs to sleep rough

How we will achieve these is set out in our action plan in Annex D. The strategy is a working document and we will update our evidence, including the impacts of the Covid 19 pandemic and amend our action plan after one year, and then at regular intervals over the next five years.



### Introduction

Housing is fundamental to the wellbeing of our residents, their families and our communities. Although Lichfield District Council has not owned any council housing since 1997, we still have many key strategic housing responsibilities such as preventing and relieving homelessness, assessing housing need and providing Disabled Facilities Grants.

For the first time, our Housing Strategy and Homelessness Strategy have been combined into one document to create a broader strategy that not only covers homelessness and rough sleeping but the wider housing challenges. This reflects thinking that preventing homelessness and rough sleeping cannot be considered in isolation but within a wider framework, which covers the causes of and solutions to these challenges, such as access to affordable and suitable accommodation, the impact of welfare reform and the provision of and access to support for vulnerable households to successfully maintain their home.

Ensuring an adequate supply of appropriate housing for all needs requires a multi-agency

approach: our stakeholders include residents, registered providers, developers, voluntary and community sector organisations, the county council and private landlords. Our action plan reflects this partnership approach and enables us to monitor and measure how well we address our priorities and objectives over the next five years. It will be reviewed annually to ensure we are achieving our objectives and that we are able to adapt and respond positively to opportunities and promptly to housing market issues or changes in national policy.

This strategy has been developed to take into account the key housing issues locally. It has been informed by our Homelessness Review 2019 which is a comprehensive review of evidence relating to homelessness and rough sleeping in addition to other housing information.

The strategy is structured into three main sections: **Current Housing; Future Housing, and Homelessness and Rough Sleeping** plus an action plan in Annex D that sets out how we will achieve our three priorities:



**Enable people to live in good quality homes that are suitable for their needs**



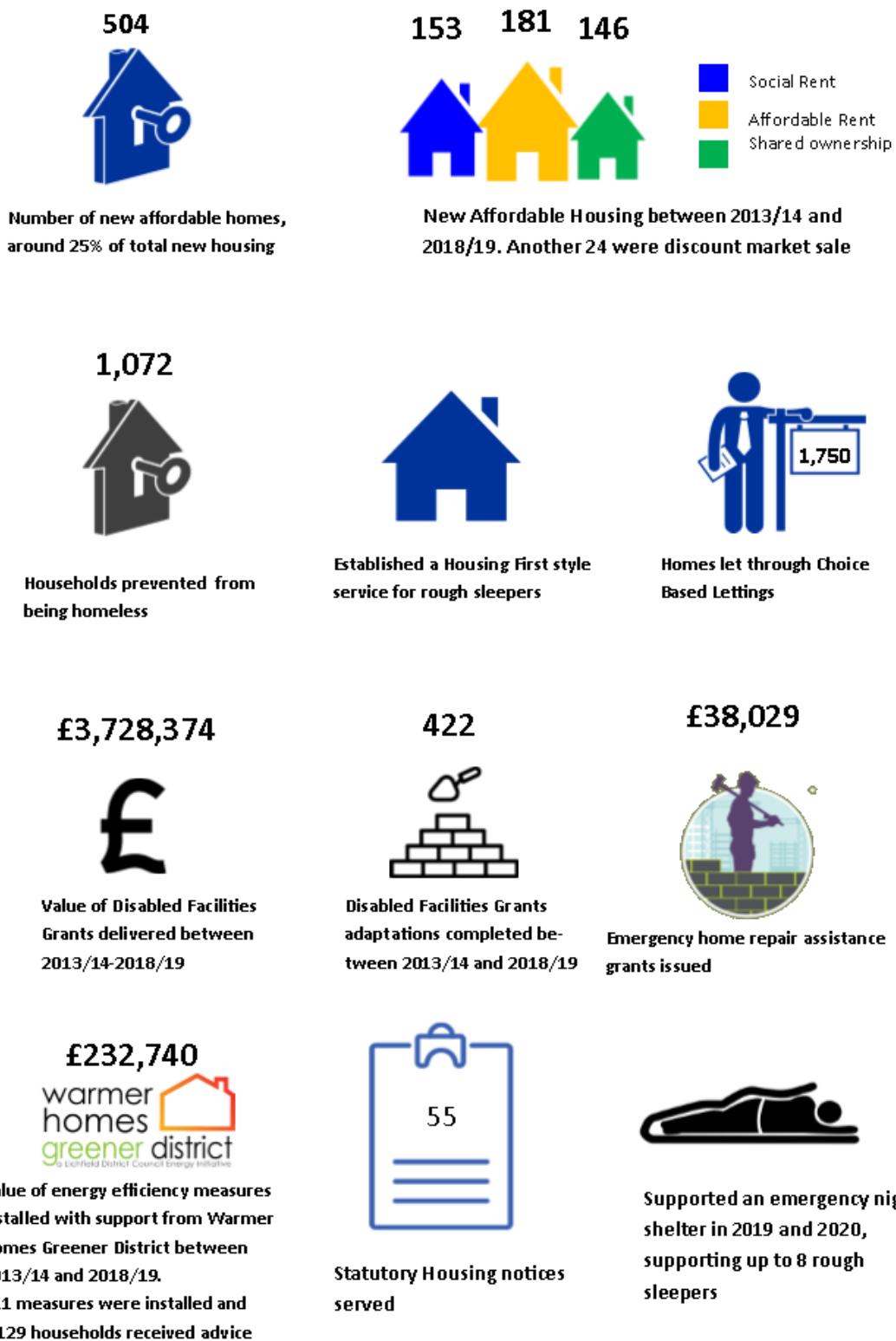
**Increase housing choice to meet the needs of current and future residents**



**Prevent or relieve all forms of homelessness including rough sleeping**

## Achievements since 2013

Since the last housing and homelessness strategies we have delivered some excellent outcomes for the district by working closely with internal and external partners:



### National Context

Our previous housing and homelessness strategies were adopted in 2013 and since that time significant legislative changes have taken place, presenting opportunities and challenges which include:

- Welfare Reform & Work Act (2016) – introduction of universal credit; benefit cap; 1% rent reduction on social housing; freeze on Local Housing Allowance; spare room subsidy
- Housing and Planning Act (2016) – empowered the government to introduce Right to Buy for Housing Association tenants; phasing out of life-time tenancies; Starter Homes.
- Homelessness Reduction Act (2017) – fundamentally changed the way that we deliver our homelessness and housing options services. Discussed in detail in section 3.

### Local Context

Every four years our Strategic Plan sets out the corporate vision and priorities which determine how we deliver our functions and policies during that time. The Strategic Plan 2020 to 2024 has the following vision and priorities:

Corporate Vision      *'We will work collaboratively to enable people, shape place and develop prosperity across Lichfield District. We will be a good council that innovates and puts our customers at the heart of all we do'*

Corporate Priorities



Of most importance to this strategy are the priorities 'shape place', 'enable people' and 'develop prosperity'.

The strategy is a core document which exists alongside a range of interconnected plans, policies and strategies, shown in figure 1. During the previous strategy period the council strengthened its understanding of housing and its relationship with health and wellbeing. This was reflected in our first Health and Wellbeing Strategy, through which we have committed to encouraging more active, healthier lifestyles and supporting vulnerable and older people which can be improved through appropriate housing provision.



Figure 1 Inter-connected documents

## A Profile of Lichfield District

Lichfield District is located in the county of Staffordshire in the West Midlands, 20 miles north of Birmingham and 9 miles from Walsall. It also has good rail links with a direct train to London taking 1 hour, 15 minutes. There are two main urban settlements, the cathedral city of Lichfield and the town of Burntwood, as well as many rural villages and settlements. The district is rich in history and this heritage and culture, along with excellent transport links, has resulted in a high demand for homes, making it now the most expensive place to live in the county.

### Key facts about the district:

- 23% of our residents are aged 65 and over compared to the national and regional average of 18%.
- Population is currently 103,965<sup>1</sup> and projected to increase by 4% between 2015 and 2025, with a significant growth in people over 65 (20%) and over 85 (63%). This rate of increase is likely to be faster than the national average.
- The average house costs £70,000 more than in the West Midlands.
- Household numbers are expected to rise from 44,000 to 48,000 by 2039. Household numbers containing people aged 25-74 years old will decrease whereas those aged 75 or over will rise from 16% to 29%.
- Actual size of our households will decrease from an average 2.43 persons to 2.24 between 2018 and 2038 due to a rise in single person households, such as older people living alone.
- Home ownership is high at 75% but has dropped by 4% since 2001. Private renting has increased from 5% to 12% and social renting remains the same at 13%.
- It is prosperous and ranks within the lowest 25% of local authorities for overall deprivation<sup>2</sup>. However, some areas fall within 20% of the most deprived.
- It is less ethnically diverse than the region and England with White British origin accounting for over 94% of the district. 13 people identified themselves as gypsy or Irish traveller in the 2011 census.
- Overall life expectancy is 81 years for men which is better than the West Midlands at 79 years and England at 80 years. For women in the district it is 83 which is the same for females both regionally and nationally. However, on average, the final 16 years are spent in poor health.
- 48% of people aged 65 or over have a limiting long-term illness which is slightly lower than the national average at 52%
- In 2017/18, 700 people were diagnosed with dementia, rising from 660 the previous year.
- 68% of adults with learning disabilities live in settled accommodation which is lower than Staffordshire (73%), West Midlands (72%) and England (77%).

## Section 1 Current Housing

We cannot rely solely on building new homes to meet the needs of our current and future residents; it is important to ensure that our existing stock, of all tenures, is of a good standard to increase housing choice and encourage mobility. Adapting existing houses to suit the occupant's needs can also help them to remain in their own home, if they wish and to live as independently as possible.

### Owner Occupied Housing

The existing housing stock is generally in good condition, though a stock condition report in 2017<sup>3</sup> found that 15% of dwellings had

category 1 hazards<sup>4</sup>, 6% were hazardous due to excess cold and 9% due to fall hazards. 3% were also in disrepair.

<sup>1</sup> Mid-year population estimate 2017

<sup>2</sup> The Indices of Deprivation are a unique measure of relative deprivation at a small local area level (Lower-layer Super Output Areas) across England. The Indices of Deprivation 2019 (IoD2019) is the most recent release.

<sup>3</sup> BRE Integrated Dwelling Level Housing Stock Modelling and database for Lichfield District Council, July 2017

<sup>4</sup> To comply with Housing law, homes should be free of any serious (category 1) hazards. There are 29 hazards which can

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Though the primary responsibility for maintaining a home rests with the homeowner, we currently have very limited funding for emergency home repair assistance grants for owner-occupiers. Applicants must be vulnerable due to old age or disability and be on income-related benefits to qualify. We will be carrying out an evaluation of these grants as part of a review of our Housing Assistance Policy to determine their effectiveness and examine alternative approaches.

### The Private Rented Sector (PRS)

At 10%, the proportion of our stock that is privately rented is significantly smaller than England at 19%. However, it is the fastest growing sector having increased from 5% of properties in 2001. The stock is generally in good condition and in the 2017 survey had the same percentage with category 1 hazards as the owner occupied stock, though it fared slightly worse for disrepair. A study of housing enforcement notices served by our private sector housing team since 2013 show that the majority were due to excess cold, damp and electrical faults.

We also have 20 licensed<sup>5</sup> Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) and there may be more that we are unaware of that have not been inspected or licensed yet. We also have a number of HMOs that fall slightly below the criteria for a license. HMOs are required to meet basic housing standards as other private rent properties but there are additional rules to address the increased fire risk and facilities for the occupants.

In order to ensure our private rental stock is a good standard, we will continue to engage with landlords to investigate complaints and

also make sure that they are aware of their responsibilities. We have a Landlords' Forum run jointly with Tamworth Borough Council which meets twice a year in conjunction with the National Landlords Association (NLA) to provide advice, education and guidance on housing standards and promote good working practices with our private landlords. The majority of our landlords welcome this partnership working but for the small minority who fail to maintain their properties, we will take enforcement action where necessary to ensure their properties are rented to an acceptable standard and licensed where required.

### Social Housing

We currently have approximately 5,790 properties in the social rented sector, managed by 16 RPs<sup>6</sup>. Although not a stock-owning authority, we still have responsibilities regarding social housing and work with the RPs to make sure that their social stock is a good standard and suitable for our residents' needs, both now and for the future.

We have a Tenancy Strategy<sup>7</sup> which our RPs must abide by when formulating their lettings policies. This includes the use of fixed term tenancies and protection for vulnerable tenants, in addition to rents being at or below local housing allowance rates. It is in our action plan to review our Tenancy Strategy to ensure that it remains fit for purpose.

The RP with the majority of social rented stock (80%) including the ex-council housing stock<sup>8</sup> is Bromford. They have a planned maintenance programme and almost all<sup>9</sup> of their homes now meet the Decent Homes standard<sup>10</sup>.

be assessed for seriousness under The Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) including dampness, disrepair, excess cold and electrical hazards.

<sup>5</sup> An HMO is required to be licensed by the Local Authority if it is occupied by five or more persons living in two or more separate households.

<sup>6</sup> Also called Housing Associations

<sup>7</sup> This required by the Localism Act 2011.

<sup>8</sup> The council stock was sold in 1997.

<sup>9</sup> Tenants can decide if they want the works to be carried out to their home &, as of Feb 2020, there are 12 properties that do not meet the DH standard for this reason.

<sup>10</sup> The Decent Homes standard was updated in 2006 and the criteria for the standard are for a property to meet the current statutory minimum standard for housing, be in a reasonable state of repair, have reasonably modern facilities and services and provide a reasonable degree of thermal comfort.

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Bromford has a regeneration programme<sup>11</sup> to demolish older homes made of non-traditional style construction, such as Swedish Timber and 'Airey' that have a low EPC rating and are very inefficient and expensive to heat. Once the three current schemes are complete, 42 homes will have been demolished and replaced by 93 brand new energy efficient homes.

### Improving on Energy Efficiency

In terms of energy efficiency, the average Simple SAP<sup>12</sup> ratings for all private sector stock is 59, which is better than both England and the West Midlands. Overall owner-occupied homes are not as efficient as the private rented, having a SAP rating of 58 compared to 62. This is likely due to the large number of owner-occupied, rural homes which tend to be older (pre-1944) and less energy efficient. We have a small number of houses with no central heating - 1.6% or 700 homes, which is lower than the national average of 2.7%<sup>13</sup>.

Warmer Homes Greener District (WHGD) was set up in 2008 to support and advise our households on energy and energy bills. A key feature of this service has been its energy efficiency grant, which has enabled many of our vulnerable households to receive assistance with the often prohibitive cost of essential heating repairs and replacements.

WHGD continues to be offered on our behalf by the specialist energy efficiency advice provider, Beat the Cold (BTC). Through BTC we are now involved in a number of pioneering public health focused projects in partnerships including local health and care providers, Staffordshire County Council, utility companies and other key community service providers. The main projects include

Staffordshire Warmer Homes, a scheme to increase access to mains gas services and first time central heating to qualifying households, and the Staying Well Service, improving health outcomes for those living with chronic conditions. This enables us to better address the full impacts of poor housing on the health and wellbeing of vulnerable occupants.

### Empty Homes

Compared to national figures, the number of empty homes in the district is low. At December 2019 there were approximately 800 empty homes, around 1.6% of our total housing stock. Just under half of these had been empty for over 6 months and are therefore considered to be long term empty homes according to the standard definition<sup>14</sup>.

Empty homes are often a cause for concern and can attract anti-social behaviour. Our Empty Homes Policy describes the tools available to us to deal with problematic empty homes as well as how we monitor empty homes, process complaints, assess risks and try to bring empties back into use. The council also uses council tax premium powers as a deterrent to keeping properties empty.

### Adapting Existing Housing

We recognise that many people who are disabled wish to remain in their own homes, rather than move to specialist accommodation. We will therefore continue to assist eligible residents to adapt their properties through the use of Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs). With our predicted ageing population, it is expected that there will be a greater future demand for DFGs to enable residents to live as long and as independently as possible in their own homes.

<sup>11</sup> This includes Lullington road/Main street Clifton Campville, Levett road Packington and Anson Road Alrewas.

<sup>12</sup> The Standard Assessment Procedure (SAP) is the methodology used by the Government to assess and compare the energy and environmental performance of dwellings. Its purpose is to provide accurate and reliable assessments of

dwelling energy performances that are needed to underpin energy and environmental policy initiatives.

<sup>13</sup> 2011 figures from Staffs Observatory

<sup>14</sup> A long term empty home is one which has been empty for more than six months.

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We have used the services of a Home Improvement Agency (HIA) to deliver DFGs for many years and since April 2018 we have been part of the county-wide SILIS<sup>15</sup> Partnership. The current HIA is Millbrook Healthcare Ltd who assist applicants with adaptation works and will guide them through the process from the initial enquiry to completing the works. The majority that are awarded are for the conversion of traditional style bathrooms to level access showers and the installation of stair lifts.

### Housing for Older People

There are c1300 dwellings for older people and 135 with care, 90% of which is either owned outright or through shared ownership schemes, 5.5% is social rent and the remaining 4.5% private rent. It consists of sheltered accommodation, extra care housing and care homes. At present we currently only have one extra care housing scheme in Lichfield that is owned by Bromford. It has 135 one, two and three bedroom apartments available to rent, buy outright, or part rent/buy with shared ownership.

Accord Housing Association are in the process of building a dementia centre of excellence in Fradley. The scheme will provide care and support for residents and their families, with a specialist team who will work alongside people with dementia, 24 hours a day, delivering personalised and quality care and support.

### Housing for People with Disabilities

There is some specialist housing for adults with learning disabilities including a modern supported housing complex for 20 adults in Fazeley that has 12 Supported Living Flats, and an 8 bedded transition home. In Lichfield there is also a 7 bed residential care home, for people with learning disabilities with a view to preparing them for supported living.

A new 'My Place' scheme built by Bromford is soon to open in Burntwood comprising 14 self-contained flats for people with a learning disability, where they can live independently with the care and support they need.

### Current housing – a summary of our challenges

- There is a smaller than average private rental sector with high rent levels
- There are some areas of poor quality private rental housing with category 1 hazards, including hazards due to excess cold and falls
- We are unsure of the exact number of HMOs in the district that require licensing
- As our population ages, more existing housing will become unsuitable
- We expect that there will continue to be an increased demand for DFGs

To address these challenges we have established the following priority- to work with partners to:

### 'Enable people to live in good quality homes that are suitable for their needs'

Our objectives to achieve this are:

- Promote services enabling people to live independently in their own homes
- Advise and where possible support vulnerable households living in poor housing conditions
- Encourage best use of the housing stock

Our actions to deliver these objectives are in the action plan in Annex D.

<sup>15</sup> Supporting Independent Living in Staffordshire Partnership (Staffordshire County Council, Lichfield District Council, Newcastle Under Lyme Borough Council, South Staffordshire

District Council, Stafford Borough Council, Staffs Moorlands Borough Council, Tamworth borough Council)

## Section 2 Future Housing

As with many other local authorities, we face significant housing pressures due to a high demand for housing and a lack of affordable and suitable homes. It is therefore vital, that we are aware of the housing needs of our residents and that new housing built reflects these needs.

### Issues

There is an imbalance of housing types, with a high number of large detached and semi-detached family homes (particularly in rural areas) and a relatively low number of smaller one and two bed homes.

House prices and rents are generally high, affecting mobility and preventing first time buyers getting on the property ladder and older people downsizing. This increases demand for social rented properties and low-cost home ownership options.

We know that we are losing younger working residents and families to nearby areas due to the lack of smaller, affordable properties, which can have a negative impact on the sustainability of communities, particularly in rural areas.

### Affordable housing need

Our last housing strategy identified affordability as a major problem and this is still a significant issue for many of our residents. The 2019 Housing and Economic Development Need Assessment<sup>16</sup> estimated the net annual level of affordable housing need to be 220 affordable housing<sup>17</sup> units from 2016 to 2036. This includes all affordable tenures, such as social and affordable rent and shared ownership.

The need for social rented homes remains high and at January 2020 there were 1350 applicants registered on Homes Direct, our choice based lettings system. 45% of applicants needed one bedroom accommodation followed by 35% with a two-

bedroom need. 15.5% required a three bed property and 4% a four bed. Less than 1% were on the waiting list for a five or six bed home.

The majority of applicants on the register have expressed a preference for a home in Lichfield and Burntwood but this is to be expected as they are the two largest urban settlements.

### Delivery of Affordable Housing

In order to deliver affordable housing, we work in partnership with our approved RPs<sup>18</sup> including supporting their affordable homes grant applications to Homes England. The majority is delivered through planning gain/developer contributions widely called s106. In the last three years 2016-17 to 2018-19<sup>2</sup> of the 398 affordable homes built and occupied, 58% was secured through s106 agreements.

In recent years a few of our RPs have been very successful in building new homes through their own land led schemes rather than s106, with 169 built in the last 3 years. Several RPs are now Homes England strategic partners that gives them even more flexibility and longer term funding certainty for the next ten years which should enable them to do even more of these.

Our current planning policy stipulates that on sites of 15 or more, up to 40% of new dwellings should be affordable with the percentage reviewed every year according to a dynamic model of viability, currently 37%. Our policy also states that around 35% of the

<sup>16</sup> This need from 2016-2036 Lichfield District Council (2019). Housing and Economic Development Need Assessment

<sup>17</sup> Affordable housing includes social rented, affordable rented and intermediate housing, provided to specified eligible households whose needs are not met by the market.

<sup>18</sup> In 2018 we launched an Approved Registered Providers policy  
<https://www.lichfielddc.gov.uk/downloads/file/142/affordable-housing-approved-registered-providers>

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affordable housing should be intermediate tenure (including shared ownership) whilst 65% must be for rent. Where a developer proposes a lower percentage of affordable housing, they are required to provide robust evidence through a viability appraisal to justify this, which will be subject to independent testing and verification by the District Valuer. Affordable housing should be provided on all eligible sites and only in very exceptional circumstances will we accept contributions in lieu to provide affordable housing elsewhere.

As part of our Local Plan review we are reviewing all of our housing policies, which will include the percentage affordable housing that we seek on new housing sites. The percentage will be largely determined by a plan wide viability study that is still in progress. As part of the policy development we will also be reviewing the suite of supplementary planning documents (SPDs), in particular the Developer Contributions SPD and examine how we can balance the competing demands of affordable housing and other contributions such as open space in the future.

There are currently 213 affordable dwellings with planning permission that are due to be constructed in the next five years<sup>19</sup> and many other sites in the planning system. We know that this will not be enough to meet demand, however through our local plan review our aim will be to ensure that we can continue to maximise the delivery of affordable homes in the right locations across the district.

As we are not a stock owning authority, we rely on developers and RPs to build new homes and we will continue to work closely with them to ensure good quality, affordable housing. However, in September 2019 we formed a Housing Company with the aim to respond to local housing need and provide

homes, both to rent and sell, that will help to grow communities, create opportunities and support independent living. It will focus on small to medium size development opportunities which can get overlooked by larger developers. The company will look to initially sell these homes in order to grow capital that allows it to support the development of both smaller and affordable homes in the future.

We are also increasing the supply of affordable housing by using existing commuted sums and some housing reserves to acquire our own properties. We are leasing the initial purchases to Spring Housing for the Housing First initiative to rehouse rough sleepers and homeless people with multiple and complex needs.

### **Meeting the Needs of Specific Groups Older People**

We will experience significant growth in our older population over the next few decades which will have major implications on the type of housing required and associated support. For example, it is estimated that residents over 65 with dementia will increase by 59% by 2035, and higher numbers will be living in accommodation unsuitable for their needs.

In 2019 we commissioned an independent living research project to determine the housing needs of older people in the district<sup>20</sup>. The research found that:-

- The majority of older people prefer to live in their own home for longer rather than move to specialist accommodation. There will therefore be an increased demand for adaptations and DFGs to make current homes more accessible.
- There is currently a lack of housing choice for older people, in all tenures.
- The majority of older persons' accommodation is located in Lichfield city

<sup>19</sup> Lichfield District Council: Authority monitoring report July 2019

<sup>20</sup> An Assessment of the Housing Needs of older People, people with Mental Health Needs & People with Physical Disabilities in Lichfield District, Housing LIN, Jan 2020 (Housing LIN)

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- with areas such as Burntwood under-represented
- The current housing available is expensive and unaffordable for many older people.
  - People were unsure of the options and type of housing available to them.

More detailed information on the research is available in Annex C.

### People with Learning or Physical Disabilities

We know that the number of residents with learning or physical disabilities will decrease slightly over the next few decades<sup>21</sup>. However, the independent living study showed that there will be a rise in people with a learning disability reaching old age as life expectancy improves. We also know that there is a significant number of adults with learning disabilities currently living with older parents who now have their own age-related care needs<sup>22</sup>.

According to Staffordshire County Council, 68% of adults with learning disabilities live in settled accommodation<sup>23</sup> which is lower than the county at 73% and England at 77%<sup>24</sup>. Living independently with support is the ideal housing option for adults with a learning disability as it has a positive effect on their quality of life and can reduce social exclusion.

In addition, the same study identified the need for a proportion of new build properties to be built to Lifetime Homes<sup>25</sup> standards to accommodate both working age and older people with disabilities. Lifetime homes encourage independent living and therefore have a positive effect on quality of life and will reduce the number of residents that require

expensive residential care accommodation in the future. We will therefore work closely with our planning colleagues and developers to encourage the delivery of specialist accommodation, including lifetime homes, to ensure we have a good supply of properties built for changing life circumstances and adaptability.

### Gypsies and Travellers

We have an obligation under the Housing & Planning Act 2016 to consider the needs of people who reside or resort to the district, and provide sites on which caravans can be stationed, or places on inland waterways where houseboats can be moored. In 2018 there were 6 unauthorised encampments believed to be mainly as a result of people passing through the district.

The 2019 Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment (GTAA) identified a need for 7 residential pitches<sup>26</sup>. Our Local Plan supports the delivery of these by 2040 including meeting the identified need for 4 pitches by 2024.

### Self and Custom Build Housing

Under the Housing and Planning Act 2016, we are required to keep a register of all individuals who wish to acquire land to build homes to occupy as their main residence. As of January 2020, we have a very low demand for self-build schemes and it is therefore not necessary to have a specific policy to identify site allocations. However, we support the principle of self and custom build and any proposals will be considered on their merit.

<sup>21</sup> Housing LIN

<sup>22</sup> Housing LIN

<sup>23</sup> 'Settled' accommodation is defined by Public Health England as housing where the person can reasonably expect to stay as long as they want. 'Unsettled' accommodation is either unsatisfactory or where residents do not have security of tenure, for example, in residential care homes.

<sup>24</sup> Housing and Health in Staffordshire, the Strategy Team. Staffordshire Observatory, Staffs County Council, Jan 2019

<sup>25</sup> Homes that meet 16 design criteria that are intended to make homes more accessible and adaptable for lifetime use at minimal cost <http://www.lifetimehomes.org.uk/>

<sup>26</sup> Lichfield District Council, North Warwickshire Borough Council and Tamworth Borough Council Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment (GTAA) November 2019

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### Future housing – a summary of our challenges

- We have a shortage of affordable social rented housing and the turnover does not meet demand
- There is a smaller than average private rental sector with high rent levels. Low income households are therefore priced out of the market with landlords more likely to rent to higher earning households with more stable incomes
- Having the highest house prices in Staffordshire means that home ownership is out of reach for many, which impacts on mobility, preventing first time buyers from getting on the property ladder and older people from downsizing
- We need to improve housing choice for our changing population; this means enabling an increased supply of smaller homes and age-related housing with better accessibility standards
- We need to work with partners to increase the supply of suitable housing choice for people with learning disabilities including where they are currently living with their older parents or carers with their own care needs

To address these challenges we have established the following priority- to work with partners to:

#### **'Increase housing choice to meet the need of current and future residents'**

Our objectives to achieve this are:

- Increase the supply of affordable housing
- Ensure an adequate supply of suitable and accessible accommodation for vulnerable and older people in need

Our actions to deliver these objectives are in the action plan in Annex D.

## Section 3 Homelessness and Rough Sleeping

### Introduction

Section 3 sets out how we plan to tackle homelessness and rough sleeping in our district. The evidence from our Homelessness Review in Annexe B has shown that tackling homelessness is a complex issue and can only be addressed through a thorough understanding of the reasons why people lose their home or become at risk of homelessness. It is also important to understand why some people, in particular vulnerable adults and rough sleepers, repeatedly struggle to sustain their tenancies. The review has shown that one of the most important ways of successfully preventing homelessness is through good partnership working with other agencies and stakeholders to provide sustainable solutions.

Homelessness can be extremely traumatic on individuals and families and have a huge impact on their health and wellbeing. For example, a report by the Local Government Association<sup>27</sup> found that homeless people in England are more likely to have long-term physical health or mental health problems than the general population, and children who experience homelessness are more likely to suffer from stress and anxiety, resulting in depression and behavioural issues. In addition, they are also at greater risk of becoming homeless themselves when they reach adulthood.

We are therefore committed to tackling all forms of homelessness by either preventing households from becoming homeless or assisting those that do to secure suitable and permanent accommodation as soon as possible. In many cases, this will require strong multi-agency partnership working to help those with complex needs who may struggle to find and keep a home.

In addition to tackling homelessness in general, all local authorities are now required to update their homelessness strategies to incorporate how they plan to address rough sleeping in their area. This is in response to the government's own Rough Sleeping Strategy 2018, which states the commitment to halve rough sleeping in England by 2022 and end it by 2027.

### Achievements

Since the adoption of our last Homelessness Strategy in 2013, we have:-

- **Reviewed our use of temporary accommodation** resulting in better self-contained unfurnished accommodation.
- **Improved access to the Discretionary Housing Payment scheme** to make it more accessible to households who are in hardship and facing potential homelessness.
- **Revitalised the Landlord's Forum** by combining it with Tamworth Borough Council's in order to make it more appealing to landlords with property in both areas.
- **Successfully bid for Rough Sleeper Initiative and Rapid Rehousing Pathway funding** to enable our rough sleeper outreach and Housing First scheme.
- **Facilitated the opening of a Winter Night Shelter for the first time in February/March 2019.** This was run by a local charity Churches Together and was made possible through government cold weather funding that we match funded.
- **Reviewed our Homeless Prevention schemes** to simplify the number available and make it easier for vulnerable

<sup>27</sup> Leng,G. (2017). The Impact of Homelessness on Health – A guide for Local Authorities. London. Local Government Association

- households to access grants or loans to secure suitable accommodation.
- **Set up a partnership with Fusion Credit Union (FCU)**, a not-for-profit financial co-operative that administers low-cost loans, for deposits or rent in advance.
  - **Provided funding for Citizens Advice South East Staffordshire (CASES)** through our Community and Voluntary Sector funding to enable them to support people who are in crisis due to homelessness or at risk of homelessness due to debt.
- ### The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017
- By far the most significant event to occur since the adoption of our last Homelessness Strategy is the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act (HRA) which was enacted in April 2018. This has fundamentally changed the way that local authorities in England deliver their homelessness and housing options services. We now have a duty to assist all those affected by homelessness, not just those in 'priority need' or with a local connection. In addition, a person can now be considered at risk of homelessness if they are in danger of losing their home within 56 days rather than 28 under the previous legislation. We also now have a statutory duty to prevent or relieve homelessness and are required to carry out in-depth interviews to compile a personal housing plan (PHP) for each household that presents as homeless or at risk. The PHP contains actions that the applicant and the council must take in order to help them with their homelessness, including contact with supporting agencies, if appropriate. These new duties have increased the number accessing our housing option services and also lengthened the time that officers will assist them in resolving their housing issue. As a result, we have:-
- **Purchased a new IT system**, which has resulted in an improved service to customers. This new database (called Housing Jigsaw) records activity in response to the HRA and collates data required by the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government (MHCLG). It enables online homeless applications through a customer portal that is used to access a PHP, upload documents and update actions.
  - **Appointed an additional Housing Options Officer** to address the need for more in-depth interviews and the creation of PHPs.
  - **Seconded an officer to undertake additional projects** relating to the implementation of the HRA and the requirement to record more detailed homelessness information required by MHCLG.
  - **Appointed a Tenancy Sustainment Officer** to help deliver the new prevention duty. This officer will assist those customers who need additional help to become 'tenancy ready' and help vulnerable tenants who may be at risk of losing their home through debt issues or underlying support needs.
  - **Raised Awareness with our Stakeholders** through meetings with agencies such as mental health services, the Through Care Service (which supports Care Leavers) and Probation to make them aware of the new legislation and their role in helping to prevent homelessness.
  - **Commissioned Spring Housing Association to manage accommodation and provide an outreach service for rough sleepers and other homeless people**. This service, which commenced in September 2019, is in conjunction with Cannock District Council and will provide supported accommodation based on the Housing First model. In addition, with unallocated s106 funds we have committed to the purchase of up to five properties, to be used by Spring as supported accommodation for rough sleepers and homeless people with complex needs.

## A Snapshot of Homelessness and Rough Sleeping

- Between 2013-2018 we received 6308 housing advice enquiries
- There were 5 rough sleepers at the annual rough sleeper estimates in 2018 and 2019

In 2018/19

- 518 households received housing advice of which 230 were owed a prevention or relief duty
- 44 referrals were made to us under the Duty to Refer
- 122 households were owed the prevention duty, 108 households were owed the relief duty
- 13 households were able to remain in their existing home and 40 were found an alternative
- On average 16 households were in temporary accommodation at the end of each quarter
- The average length of stay in temporary accommodation was 15 weeks
- 24 households lost their home due to domestic violence, an increase from 12 in 2017/18
- 14 households secured private rented accommodation to relieve their homelessness
- 33 households secured social rented accommodation to relieve their homelessness
- 151 households were identified as having support needs
- The top three reasons for the loss of last settled home were
  - Family no longer willing or able to accommodate
  - The ending of a private rented tenancy
  - Relationship breakdown

## How we currently tackle Homelessness through Partnership Working

We recognise that to successfully tackle homelessness issues, it is vital to work in partnership with other public agencies and organisations. We have good working relationships with our voluntary and statutory agencies and without them it would not be possible to provide a complete service to our customers. However, a major challenge in the district is that we have no direct access hostel for men or women and no residential treatment centres for drug or alcohol addiction. We will, therefore continue to build good working relationships with local agencies and also develop new partnerships with others that can help us to address the key homelessness issues in the district.

In addition to identifying issues through the Homelessness Review, the council has also carried out consultation to share our emerging priorities and seek additional evidence to assist with the formation of this Strategy. We launched a Homelessness Forum at an event on 11 September 2019 that was attended by 30 people representing 16 organisations working with homeless and vulnerable people. The attendees were invited to comment on our findings of the homelessness review as well as participating in a workshop to discuss case studies based on recent homeless cases. As a result of this consultation, a number of recommendations were made:

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- Investigate the possibility of a private sector leasing scheme
- Promote the use of shared accommodation
- Identify private sector landlords with a social conscience
- Develop eviction panels and protocols with RPs to reduce the number of evictions due to rent arrears
- Facilitate the development of more supported accommodation
- Utilise the availability of DHP to prevent homelessness through payment of rent arrears.
- Reduce debt by encouraging referrals to money advice e.g. CASES
- Ensure RP's policies do not exclude people on financial grounds
- Promote Fusion Credit Union
- Ensure there is access to employment & training opportunities such as those provided by Job Centre Plus.

## Rough Sleeping

We are committed to helping rough sleepers get the right support and access to settled housing and will work to meet the government's target to halve rough sleeping by 2022 and end it by 2027.

We recognise that rough sleepers are one of the most vulnerable groups in society. Some suffer from substance misuse (alcohol or drug dependency) and mental or physical health issues, or a combination. Evidence has also shown that many entrenched rough sleepers are homeless because they have repeatedly been unable to sustain accommodation due to these multiple and complex support needs.

## Rough Sleeping data

Since 2010, we have carried out an annual rough sleeper estimate in accordance with government requirements to get as accurate a representation as possible of the number of people sleeping rough on one particular night.

The last annual rough sleeper estimate in November 2019 reported five rough sleepers. This was the second largest number of rough sleepers in the county behind Newcastle-Under-Lyme and equal to the estimates of East Staffordshire, Stafford and Tamworth. As the estimate is only a snapshot of one particular night, we know from unofficial sightings that there could be more. Though the numbers are relatively low, they have increased, as three were recorded in 2017 and one in 2016. It is also of concern that, of the 151 individuals owed a prevention or relief duty in 2018/19, eight of those had a history of rough sleeping.

### How we currently help Rough Sleepers

#### Homeless & Rough Sleeper Housing Pathway

In June 2019, with Cannock Chase District Council we entered into a partnership with Spring Housing Association to deliver a housing pathway for rough sleepers and homeless individuals with multiple and complex needs. It is hoped this pathway will contribute to a reduction in rough sleeping and repeat homelessness in both districts by the end of 2020 and increase the housing options available to individuals with multiple and complex needs living in precarious housing circumstances. The service incorporates a street outreach facility where officers will monitor areas of known rough sleeping at appropriate times of the day when they are likely to make contact. A rapid assessment of need is undertaken to support rough sleepers away from the street as quickly and sustainably as possible. Where a connection to the district doesn't exist, Spring will support individuals to access accommodation and support options in areas where they do have a local connection.

A significant barrier to ending rough sleeping and homelessness for those with multiple and complex needs is the lack of supported accommodation. To combat this, the pathway will also have up to 5 units of supported

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accommodation on a Housing First model which will include flexible support for as long as is needed.

### Lichfield Emergency Night Shelter (LENS)

In 2019 and 2020, the council and central government has funded an emergency winter night shelter to provide shelter, food and support to our rough sleepers.

- The service was managed by Churches Together, a local faith group and over 50 volunteers and was hosted by different churches over seven nights a week.
- Following the March/ April 2019 shelter, four of the rough sleepers were supported in moving into their own independent or supported accommodation and three were subsequently offered accommodation. Two engaged in recovery services to support them with their substance misuse.

### The Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP)

In times of severe weather<sup>28</sup>, rough sleepers are particularly at risk of harm and in extreme cases, death. The SWEP is therefore intended to get rough sleepers off the streets during periods of extreme weather. Anyone who is sleeping rough is eligible for accommodation whilst the SWEP is in place; they do not need to fit the eligibility criteria for temporary accommodation.

Evidence from the SWEP data from the last three years demonstrates that this is an important service and, though it is not a legal requirement, we see it as a moral duty to help rough sleepers in extreme weather. Over the last three years, this protocol was triggered seven times from 2017 to 2019 for a total of

60 nights. A total of 7 rough sleepers were accommodated at a cost of £667.

### Street Begging

Street begging is often associated with rough sleeping and we have seen an increase in the number of street beggars, particularly in Lichfield city centre. However, not all street beggars are rough sleepers. Intelligence from Staffordshire Police and other partners suggests that some individuals who visit the city are not homeless but 'professional' street beggars. A project is therefore being developed to look at the available options to support those begging in the street, to work alongside the Housing First initiative and to reduce the visible presence of street begging in the city. We are exploring a 'diverted giving scheme' that would seek to dissuade people from giving money directly to street beggars but instead to a scheme that would support people on the street to move away from begging and into a better alternative lifestyle, or would fund a winter night shelter. Options around the implementation of this are currently being considered; any scheme needs to ensure that only those genuinely in need are supported.

### Members of the Armed Forces

In 2018/19, 9 applicants who were owed a housing duty had a history of serving in the armed forces including one person who became homeless as a result of leaving the armed forces. Lichfield District Council supports the Staffordshire Armed Forces Community Covenant which recognises the sacrifices that members of the armed forces and their families make on behalf of their country and ensures that they are not disadvantaged in the provision of public services including housing and homelessness advice.

<sup>28</sup> The SWEP arrangements are activated when the night time temperature is predicted to be zero degrees Celsius for three consecutive nights.

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In order to support our veterans, we ask all homeless applicants if they have a connection to the armed forces and identify any issues which could prevent them from accessing and maintaining accommodation.

We also work in partnership with organisations that provide accommodation and support to ex forces personnel, such as Alabare Supported Housing (ex-service personnel) Royal British Legion, SSAFA, Veterans Gateway and Haig Housing.

Our proposed revised allocations scheme gives additional preference to veterans when accessing social housing and they are also exempt from having to meet the local connection criteria. We have also given the highest priority (emergency band) to the spouse or partner of armed or reserve forces personnel who are required to leave their current armed forces accommodation following the death of a spouse or partner, and their death is as a result of their service.

### Homelessness and rough sleeping – a summary of our challenges

- Households owed a housing duty increased by 81% between 2017/18 and 2018/19 due to our new statutory duties to help all eligible applicants (not just those who are statutory homeless)
- The top three consistent reasons for homelessness applications is families no longer able or willing to accommodate, the ending of a private tenancy and relationship breakdowns
- There is evidence that homelessness is affecting more younger and older households
- In 2018/19, 24 domestic violence cases were recorded, double that in 2017/18
- More households who are assessed as owed a duty have more complex and multiple support needs. In 2018/19, 66% of households owed a duty were assessed as having a support need
- We continue to be a high user of temporary accommodation compared to the other Staffordshire local authorities (second only to Tamworth)
- We have a growing number of rough sleepers with complex needs
- We have no direct access hostels, for either men or women and no residential treatment centres for drug or alcohol addiction

To address these challenges we have established the following priority- to work with partners to:

**'To prevent or relieve all forms of homelessness including rough sleeping'**

This will be achieved through the following objectives:-

- Improve the range of suitable housing options for those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.
- Identify and provide support to those who face barriers to accessing and maintaining suitable accommodation.
- Tackle rough sleeping so that no one needs to sleep rough

Our actions to deliver these are in our action plan in Annexe D

## **List of Annexes**

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| Annexe A | Evidence for our Housing Strategy                                                                                                                               |
| Annexe B | Homelessness Review 2019                                                                                                                                        |
| Annexe C | Summary of Research Project on the Housing Needs of Older People, People with Learning Disabilities and People with Physical Disabilities in Lichfield District |
| Annexe D | Action Plan                                                                                                                                                     |
| Annexe E | Glossary of Homelessness Terms                                                                                                                                  |