




# BABERGH & MID SUFFOLK DISTRICT COUNCIL HOMELESSNESS REVIEW: 2023



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# BABERGH AND MID SUFFOLK DISTRICT COUNCIL HOMELESSNESS REVIEW 2023

## INTRODUCTION

Section 1(1) of the Homelessness Act 2002 gives housing authorities the power to carry out a homelessness review for their district and formulate and publish a homelessness strategy based on the results of the review. The purpose of the review is to:

- Establish the Extent of Homelessness
- Assess its likely extent in the future
- Identify what is currently being done and by who
- Identify what level of resources are available to prevent and tackle homelessness
- Inform future homelessness services and to develop and deliver services in partnership with the aim of preventing and managing homelessness

## RATIONALE AND METHODOLOGY

- This Homelessness Review will form the basis to produce a new Strategy
- This Homelessness Review will demonstrate the major issues and identify gaps in provision
- A New Homelessness Strategy will build upon these and set out plans to tackle homelessness over the next five years

## SURVEY OF PARTNERS AND STAKEHOLDERS

- A survey was sent to Partners and Stakeholders to capture their reflections on the current strategy and to ensure that their views feed into the development of the next strategy.
- The Survey consisted of 11 questions (plus 1 question about the organisation they are representing). The survey was sent, in April 2023 to 30 Stakeholders and Partners.
- The Survey had 9 respondents, which equates to a response rate of 30%.
- Responses were received from Citizens Advice, Suffolk County Council, National Probation Service, Norfolk and Suffolk Foundation Trust, Turning Point, Financial Inclusion and Advice Service, Solo Housing and The Stone Foundation.
- The results of the survey are used and highlighted throughout this Homelessness Review to add insight and perception.

## LEGISLATION

This is the legal framework, which we must follow to meet our statutory obligations to those who are homeless or at risk of becoming so:

➤ **Housing Act 1996 (Part 7)**

The Housing Act 1996 came into effect 20 January 1997. Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996 is the overarching piece of legislation that relates to homelessness. The Act has been amended by the Homelessness Act 2002, the Localism Act 2011 and more recently by the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.

➤ **Homelessness Act 2002 and the Homelessness (Priority Need for Accommodation) (England) Order 2002**

The Homelessness Act 2002 introduced the following amendments to Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996:

- Changes to appeals against the suitability of accommodation
- Exclusion from eligibility for assistance of anyone refused housing benefit on eligibility (immigration) grounds
- Provisions relating to Allocations
- Right of Appeal against the refusal by the Local Authority to provide accommodation pending an appeal to the County Court on the homelessness decision
- Cooperation between a local housing authority and a social services authority
- Late appeals to the County Court

It introduced powers for a Local Authority to end the main housing duty, owed to applicants where a homeless duty had been accepted, by arrangement of a suitable offer of accommodation through the private rented sector.

➤ **Welfare Reform Act 2012**

The Welfare Reform Act 2012 came into effect 1 April 2013. Amongst the provisions of the Act are the introduction of Universal Credit and Personal Independence Payments, the benefit cap, under-occupation reduction in entitlement and changes to the 'Social Fund' now known as Local Welfare Assistance.

➤ **Homelessness Reduction Act 2017**

The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 amended the period from which a person can be at risk of homelessness from 28 days to 56 days. This meant that housing authorities must work with people to prevent homelessness at an earlier stage. This is known as the extended prevention duty. The Act aimed to reduce homelessness by improving the quality of the advice available and refocusing local authorities on prevention work and increasing support for single people.



➤ Care Act 2014

The Care Act 2014 is the law that sets out how adult social care in England should be provided. It requires local authorities to make sure that people who live in their areas: receive services that prevent their care needs from becoming more serious or delay the impact of their needs. The Care Act prescribes those local authorities must promote wellbeing when carrying out their care and / or support functions when working with clients. One of the areas, which the Act details is the suitability of living accommodation. The Care Act set a strong expectation that agencies would work together to protect children, young adults and people with care and support needs.

➤ Domestic Abuse Act 2021

The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 provided a new statutory definition of Domestic Abuse (to replace the term 'Domestic Violence'). The definition is broader than only physical violence; it also includes sexual abuse, violent or threatening behaviour, psychological or emotional abuse, coercive or controlling behaviour and economic or financial abuse. Domestic abuse can consist of a single incident or a course of conduct over time. It can include behaviour directed at another individual, for example someone's child.

The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 changed the homelessness legislation to give automatic priority need to survivors of domestic abuse. The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 imposes a duty on upper tier local authorities to provide support in safe accommodation.

➤ The Mental Health Act 1983

The Mental Health Act (1983) is the main piece of legislation that covers the assessment, treatment, and rights of people with a mental health disorder. Where a person 'ceases to be detained' under the Mental Health Act 1983, they are eligible for aftercare services, including housing.

## NATIONAL CONTEXT

The following sets out the national situation and policy landscape which shapes and affects housing within Babergh and Mid Suffolk.

### ➤ Covid-19 Pandemic and Recovery

On 11<sup>th</sup> March 2020, a Coronavirus pandemic, referred to as Covid-19, was declared by the World Health Organisation. On 26 March 2020, the UK Government announced a wave of measures to try and reduce the spread of the virus and asked local authorities in England to “help make sure we get everyone in”, including those who would not normally be entitled to assistance under homelessness legislation and included an eviction ban for those households in rent arrears during the summer of 2020.

In response, Babergh and Mid Suffolk Councils sought to ensure that people sleeping rough and in accommodation where it was difficult to self-isolate (such as shelters and assessment centres) were safely accommodated to protect them, and the wider public, from the risks of Covid-19. This was an enormous challenge for two rural districts like ours however our team of Rough Sleeper Outreach Workers and a Team Navigator accommodated several individuals who had been entrenched rough sleepers, people who have regularly slept rough over the past two years, and those who were well known to homelessness services but had previously refused accommodation. Our housing solutions team played a vital role in supporting residents and championing innovative practices, despite the additional pressures they faced due to COVID-19 including block-booking hotel rooms, securing other self-contained accommodation, and working with partner agencies to ensure that those accommodated had the food, medical care and support they required.

During the Covid 19 recovery period and following the lifting of the ban in October 2021 we have seen an increase in households presenting as homeless and our temporary accommodation provision has been at full capacity with the use of bed and breakfast provision increasing.

During the first national lockdown, the Housing Solutions Team:

- handled over **3000 calls**
- located emergency accommodation for **140 households**
- accommodated over **95 households** in temporary accommodation
- completed **16 Minor Adaptations Grants applications** for those needing urgent adaptations to make their home safe and prevent hospital admission or enable hospital discharge
- sourced **150 food parcels** for families or individuals in need

- received **53 rough sleeper referrals** and through the development of a Safe Systems of Work, continued to carry out rough sleeper outreach work throughout the lockdown
- provided meals to the homeless in accommodation who were unable to prepare food, to reduce the need for them to go out and find food
- continued to successfully prevent and relieve homelessness, despite the pandemic. Managing to **end homelessness in 124 cases**, including housing 34 into the private rented sector
- rehoused **60 households** via Direct Let through the Housing Register
- helped **20 households** into the private rented sector
- prevented **over 60 cases** of individuals or families becoming (or ending) homelessness
- set up **three temporary accommodation sites** – transforming one property, The Lees, to house 8 individuals, in just five working days.
- sourced furniture and white goods for clients needing to furnish their new homes – while the shops were shut.
- Led on a county wide initiative which included sourcing over **800** potential hotel rooms to support hospital discharge, key workers needing to self-isolate and housing homeless persons.

#### ➤ Deprivation

The Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) is produced by the Government to rank nearly 33,000 neighbourhoods across England in terms of their relative deprivation. Deprivation is measured based on 39 separate indicators, organised across seven domains:

- Income
- Employment
- Health & Disability
- Education, skills and training
- Crime
- Barriers to Housing & Services
- Living Environment

The IMD ranks all neighbourhoods in England based on scores calculated for each of these domains, from the most deprived (rank 1) to the least deprived (rank 32,844). In addition, an 'overall' deprivation ranking is also calculated based on a single score from all the domains.

Overall, Suffolk is not among England's most deprived local authorities. In the 2019 IMD, Suffolk was ranked 99th out of 151 upper-tier local authorities (where 1 is most deprived and 151 is least deprived). This means that, overall, Suffolk is among the 40% least deprived upper-tier local authorities in England: 60% of English upper-tier local authorities are more deprived than Suffolk. Suffolk's most deprived neighbourhoods are concentrated in Ipswich. Ipswich has a much higher concentration of deprived neighbourhoods (33%) than found in England generally. This is to be expected insofar as, across England, deprivation is concentrated in cities and large towns. All districts within Suffolk have experienced more decline than improvement since the 2007 IMD. Babergh and Mid Suffolk (and West Suffolk), who had the least deprivation in the 2007 IMD— have seen the steepest net declines.

Both Babergh and Mid Suffolk are classified as predominantly rural areas. Although deprivation levels are low compared with national levels, across Suffolk 28% of those identified as income deprived live in rural areas. Living in a very rural area is widely considered to cost households on average about 20% more than a similar household living in an urban area.

Existing pockets of deprivation within the districts will be exacerbated by the current Cost of Living Crisis.

#### ➤ Cost of Living Crisis

A cost-of-living crisis refers to a scenario in which the cost of everyday essentials like energy and food is rising much faster than average household incomes. A wide variety of factors, including the war in Ukraine, market volatility, costs associated with supply chains and inflation rates, have converged and resulted in a cost-of-living crisis in the UK. The rising costs of fuel, food and other essentials are combining with existing disadvantage and vulnerability within our communities to put many households at greater risk of both immediate hardship and reduced opportunity and wellbeing. This will impact on some people and communities more than others and many households face stark financial challenges with increasing food and energy bills.

In May 2022 Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils launched a five-point action plan to support residents through the cost-of-living crisis, focusing on:

1. Co-ordinating Government Support to ensure it reaches those people who need it.
2. Exercising discretion when providing welfare support and advice to support those people who could potentially fall on hard times.
3. Maximising partnership working and established systems to provide targeted support in localities where there is a particular trend and need, implementing a targeted family-first approach.

4. Maintaining Good Health – whether that be referrals for mental health support, discounts at our gyms and swimming pools, engaging in community-led “wellbeing” initiatives, volunteering, and socialising via local initiatives.
5. Access to food and nutrition – whether that be participating in healthy eating exercises/initiatives, organising a community garden to grow produce, setting up of a Community Larder or providing extra support to local food banks to meet any unmet need

The Cost-of-Living Crisis Action Plan brings together a suite of measures that focus on maximising income, accessing advice, food insecurity and poverty, fuel poverty and Health and Wellbeing. The Action Plan is reviewed regularly as there are many unknowns and potential challenges ahead that cannot be fully predicted, such as global challenges, market volatility, rising inflation and the everyday changing landscape regarding people’s household budgets. In the past year Housing Services have assisted with:

	1 April 2022 – 31 March 2023
<b>Food Bank Parcels awarded:</b>	286
<b>Fuel Vouchers awarded:</b>	31
<b>Furniture/ White Goods acquired:</b>	68
<b>Funds secured from Charities:</b>	£12,064.12
<b>Discretionary Housing Payments Awarded:</b>	30

Babergh and Mid Suffolk Districts Council’s response to the Cost-of-Living Crisis can be found here: [BMSDC Cost of Living Support](#)

➤ **Ending Rough Sleeping for Good**

‘Ending rough sleeping for good’ is a cross-government strategy setting out how the government and its partners plan to work together to deliver on the government’s manifesto commitment to end rough sleeping in this Parliament. It also lays the foundations for long-term system change to end rough sleeping sustainably and for good. It was published in September 2022 and can be found here: [Ending Rough Sleeping for Good](#)

The ‘end goal’ of the Strategy is for ‘rough sleeping to be prevented wherever possible but when it does occur it should be rare, brief and non-recurring.’ The Strategy focuses on better prevention, swift and effective intervention, extra help to aid recovery and a more transparent and joined up system

The strategy admits that to meet the goal of ending rough sleeping for good, a step change would be needed, and sets out the following measures to achieve the step change:

- Defining what ending rough sleeping means and a new data-led framework to measure it
- A new 'Prevention First' approach
- A new £200m Single Homelessness Accommodation Programme

➤ Homes For Ukraine Scheme

On 14<sup>th</sup> March 2022 following the invasion of Ukraine, the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, launched Phase one of the Homes for Ukrainians Scheme.

*"The Homes for Ukraine scheme will allow individuals, charities, community groups and businesses in the UK to bring Ukrainians to safety – including those with no family ties to the UK." - Michael Gove*

Phase One of the scheme allowed sponsors in the UK to nominate a named Ukrainian or a named Ukrainian family to stay with them in their home or in a separate property.

- Councils had a statutory duty to ensure that all prospective sponsors were subject to accommodation and safeguarding checks. These checks were conducted after the council had been alerted that a visa application had been made. The Private Sector Housing Team made at least one in-person visit either before or shortly after a guest moved into a property, to confirm that the accommodation was suitable and that the guests were well and that there was no serious safeguarding, or welfare concerns.
- There were some cases where the sponsor/guest relationship broke down quickly and the guest was at risk of homelessness. In these cases, our Councils' statutory homelessness duties applied, while we worked with the Suffolk Refugee Service to rematch guests to new hosts or assisted them to find accommodation in the private rented sector.
- In Babergh (as of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023), 14 Ukrainian households presented as homeless or as threatened with homelessness. Of those 14 households, 10 were owed an initial prevention or relief duty under the legislation. 9 of these households were sourced alternative accommodation, 8 within the private-sector, and 1 moved to live with family outside of the district.
- In Mid Suffolk (as of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023), 16 Ukrainian households presented as homeless or as threatened with homelessness. Of those 16 households, 9 were owed an initial prevention or relief duty under the legislation. 4 of these households were sourced alternative accommodation, 3 within the private-sector and 1 offered a Council tenancy in a sheltered scheme. An additional 3 households were sourced alternative accommodation with a new host.

➤ Afghan and Refugee Asylum Seekers

The UK formally opened the Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (ACRS) on 6<sup>th</sup> January 2022: [Afghan citizens resettlement scheme - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/afghan-citizens-resettlement-scheme)

The scheme prioritises:

- those who have assisted the UK efforts in Afghanistan and stood up for values such as democracy, women’s rights, freedom of speech, and rule of law
- vulnerable people, including women and girls at risk, and members of minority groups at risk (including ethnic and religious minorities and LGBT+)

The Government aims to resettle more than 5,000 people in the first year and up to 20,000 over the coming years.

This is in addition to the [Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy \(ARAP\) scheme](#), which has already settled thousands of Afghans who have worked with the UK government, and their families. The ARAP scheme is a separate scheme to the ACRS and offers Afghan nationals who have worked for or alongside the UK government, and meet the ARAP criteria, relocation to the UK.

➤ Local Context

In Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils we are working in partnership with our Strategic Migration Partnership to deliver a package of support and advice. We have attended several local surgeries within our districts to provide advice on housing options and support with making applications on the housing register.

We currently have one Asylum Seeker accommodation within our districts.

Our Private Sector Housing team have inspected almost 200 properties in support of Homes for Ukraine.

The table below shows number of Homes for Ukraine households in our districts.

Homes for Ukraine	Suffolk	Babergh	Mid Suffolk
<b>Properties where guests have arrived</b>	428	82	106
<b>Guests have arrived</b>	1006	154	193
<b>Properties offered</b>	590	86	121
<b>Guests have applied for visas</b>	1402	207	258

We have also been successful in our bid for the Local Authority Housing Fund and secured funding to deliver 10 properties in Babergh, 9 for Homes for Ukraine and 1 for the Afghan resettlement scheme. In Mid Suffolk it is to deliver 12 properties, 11 for Homes for Ukraine and 1 for the Afghan resettlement to support with additional housing demand.

We have been working collaboratively in the other districts, sharing good practice and ensuring that the approach is consistent, when offering housing assistance.

➤ [Social Housing White Paper](#)

The Social Housing White Paper was published by the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government on 17 November 2020. It sets out seven commitments that social housing residents should be able to expect from their landlord. It collates a range of different initiatives and legislative changes from across the housing landscape, building on proposals set out in the Social Housing Green Paper and the Review of Social Housing Regulation: Call for Evidence. The overarching themes are building and resident safety, and resident voice. It also aims to deliver the improvements in transparency and accountability promised in the 2018 green paper.

In 2022 The Social Housing Regulation Bill was laid in parliament to deliver the reforms outlined in the Social Housing White Paper and address the concerns raised following the tragic fire at Grenfell Tower in 2017. The Bill will bring forward a stronger and more proactive regulatory regime to drive up standards in the sector and hold landlords to account for the service they provide to their tenants.



## LOCAL CONTEXT

The following sets out the local situation and policy landscape that shapes and affects housing within Babergh and Mid Suffolk.

➤ [Babergh Mid Suffolk District Council Corporate Plan 2019-2023](#)

The Corporate Plan is designed to address the challenges and seize the opportunities facing the districts, and partner organisations, for the foreseeable future. Housing (along with Environment, Economy, Wellbeing, Customers and Community) is a Strategic Priority of the Corporate Plan.

The Vision of the Corporate Plan is to build "Great communities with bright and healthy futures that everyone is proud to call home".

The Mission of the Corporate Plan is to "Provide strong, proud and inspirational leadership; striving for excellence, and together building great communities for everyone to live, work, visit and invest in".

The Corporate Plan is due to be refreshed in the coming year.

➤ [BMSDC Joint Homes and Housing Strategy](#)

In March 2019, both Councils adopted the Homes and Housing Strategy 2019 -2024. In October 2022, the Homes and Housing Strategy was refreshed to ensure it remains up to date. The Homes and Housing Strategy Delivery Plan has been refocused and it now contains actions on the new priorities that have emerged since the original strategy and delivery plan was written in 2019.

The Joint Homes and Housing Strategy has nine strategic aims:

- The housing market functions effectively, providing homes which are as affordable as possible; to meet the needs of residents and support the local economy.
- There is a wide and varied choice of good quality, sustainable homes of different sizes, types, and tenures, to meet the needs of a wide range of different households.
- Homelessness is prevented and our services provide positive and planned interventions.
- Babergh and Mid Suffolk is an effective social landlord known for delivering quality services.
- Homes are in high quality, sustainable environments, served by jobs and community facilities, appropriate green spaces, effective transport links and other necessary infrastructure.
- Best use is made of private sector land and private accommodation across the districts.
- People live in vibrant and well-connected communities; and homes and communities continue to meet the changing needs of residents.
- Everyone has a suitable home, and residents can live as healthily, safely, and independently as possible within sustainable communities.
- Both councils have strong relationships with residents, developers and other partners that enable us to deliver housing, infrastructure, and services effectively, and to innovate where appropriate.

The Joint Homes and Housing Strategy commits the councils to:

- Working with anyone that wants to develop and deliver the right homes, in the right place at the right time to provide much needed new homes
- Making more effective use of existing homes
- Developing innovative solutions to the housing needs of our residents and communities.
- Creating a new relationship with residents which is based around their need and experience, rather than the processes of individual agencies.
- Adopting a 'one public sector' approach, working together in a more linked up way with our public sector partners to deliver better, more effective, and efficient services.
- Being open and transparent, providing frequent information as to how we are performing against the plans. This will ensure residents have the information at their fingertips to engage with us and ensure we deliver on our priorities.

The Joint Homes and Housing Strategy Delivery Plan is monitored on a quarterly basis, with a quarterly update and overview provided to the Housing Programme Board. The Housing Programme oversees all the projects that are in progress within the Housing Service. Strategic Property also report their projects into the Housing board. The board meets monthly to look at any projects that are 'At Risk' or 'Off-track' and to help steer projects back or support projects with ideas and guidance as well as deciding on priorities for the upcoming month. The board also looks at risk management at a Programme level and tracks benefits from projects that have been completed to monitor whether they have delivered the benefits they were set out to.. The Housing Programme also works with the other corporate boards to better plan projects and resources, for example forward planning where IT resource is required.

The Strategy and Delivery Plan are also reviewed on an annual basis by the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The Joint Homes and Housing Strategy can be found here: [Joint Homes and Housing Strategy 2022](#)

➤ [Gateway to Home Choice Allocation Policy](#)

Gateway to Homechoice is a choice-based lettings system, where social housing properties are advertised in the Local Authority areas of Babergh, Braintree, Colchester, East Suffolk, Ipswich, Maldon, and Mid Suffolk. The scheme allows one point of access for customers to apply to a Local Authority housing register and be considered for available properties in any of the areas.

The scheme aims to provide a consistent approach to accessing housing across the diverse area of operation and where possible, to ensure that applicants have choice over where they live.

The Key Objectives of the Choice Based Lettings (CBL) Scheme are:

- To maintain a system that customers can understand, and which is open, fair, user-friendly and offers a high level of operational consistency across the Gateway area of operation
- To facilitate genuine opportunities for mobility across the Gateway area of operation
- To meet the legal requirements for the allocation of housing as set out in the Housing Act 1996 Part VI as amended by the Homeless Act (2002), the Localism Act 2011 and the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 (HRA 2017).

The Gateway to Home Choice Allocation Policy can be found here: [Allocations Policy - July 2022 - HomeChoice \(gatewaytohomechoice.org.uk\)](https://gatewaytohomechoice.org.uk/allocations-policy-july-2022)

#### ➤ Strategic Housing Market Assessment

Ipswich Borough Council, Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils and Suffolk Coastal District Council and Waveney District Council (Now East Suffolk Council) jointly commissioned Peter Brett Associates to undertake a Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) in September 2016. The objective of the SHMA was to test and confirm the housing market geography and to produce conclusions on objectively assessed housing need.

The Ipswich and Waveney Area Strategic Housing Market Assessment was published in May 2017 and can be found here: [Strategic Housing Market Assessment \(SHMA\) » Babergh Mid Suffolk](#)

Volume 1 of the SHMA is in three parts. Part A provides the introduction and policy context and goes on to analyse the market geography of the study area. The analysis found that the area contains two housing market areas (HMAs), the Ipswich HMA and the Waveney HMA. Part B of the report provides the objectively assessed housing need calculation for the Ipswich HMA and part C for the Waveney HMA. Volume 2 deals with housing mix and tenure and affordable housing need

The Ipswich and Waveney Area Strategic Housing Market Assessment 2017 (with a partial update in 2019) indicated a need for at least 110 affordable homes per year in Babergh and the requirement for new affordable homes per year across Mid Suffolk is at least 127.

#### ➤ Gypsy, Traveller, Travelling Show People and Boat Dwellers Accommodation Needs Assessment May 2017

In 2017, Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils - working in conjunction with Ipswich Borough Council, and Suffolk Coastal and Waveney District Councils (now East Suffolk Council) - commissioned RRR Consultancy to deliver an "Accommodation Needs Assessment" for Gypsies, Travellers, Travelling Show people and Boat Dwellers in relevant parts of Suffolk.

This updated the previously published Gypsy, Traveller & Travelling Show people Accommodation Assessment (Oct 2013), and before that, the Suffolk Cross-Boundary GTAA (2007), both of which had been commissioned by the same five local authorities.

The 2017 Accommodation Needs Assessment showed:

Local Authority Need: Gypsy and Traveller Pitches: Twenty Year Summary: 2016-2036							
	Base Numbers 2016	Additional Need 2016-2021	Additional Need 2021-2026	Additional Need 2026-2031	Additional Need 2031-2036	Additional Need 2016-2036	Numbers as at 2036
Babergh	1	0	0	0	1	1	2
Mid Suffolk	62 (41)	-5(16)	4	5	5	9 (30)	74

The figures in brackets in the table above are based on a possible scenario of 21 pitches not being available. A site in Mid Suffolk is believed to have been sold. It includes 16 vacant and 5 occupied pitches at the time of the survey. It is possible that the site might not be available to Gypsies and Travellers and therefore may be removed from the supply and added to need. The other vacant pitches are likely to be occupied within the next five years, so continue to be included in the supply.

There is an ongoing project supported by all the Local Authorities in Suffolk, to identify three sites throughout Suffolk to accommodate Gypsies and Travellers on a Short-term basis. The sites being sought are referred to as Short Term Transit Sites (STTS) and are designed to be used as temporary accommodation for 2-3 weeks, with a maximum stay of 3 months.

An action within the Joint Homes and Housing Strategy Delivery Plan commits the Councils to working with partners across Suffolk to deliver suitable pitches for Gypsies and Travellers to meet identified needs.

Gypsy, Traveller, Travelling Show People and Boat Dwellers Accommodation Needs Assessment May 2017 can be found here: [Gypsy, Traveller, Travelling Show People & Boat Dwellers ANA May 2017](#)

## DISTRICT PROFILES

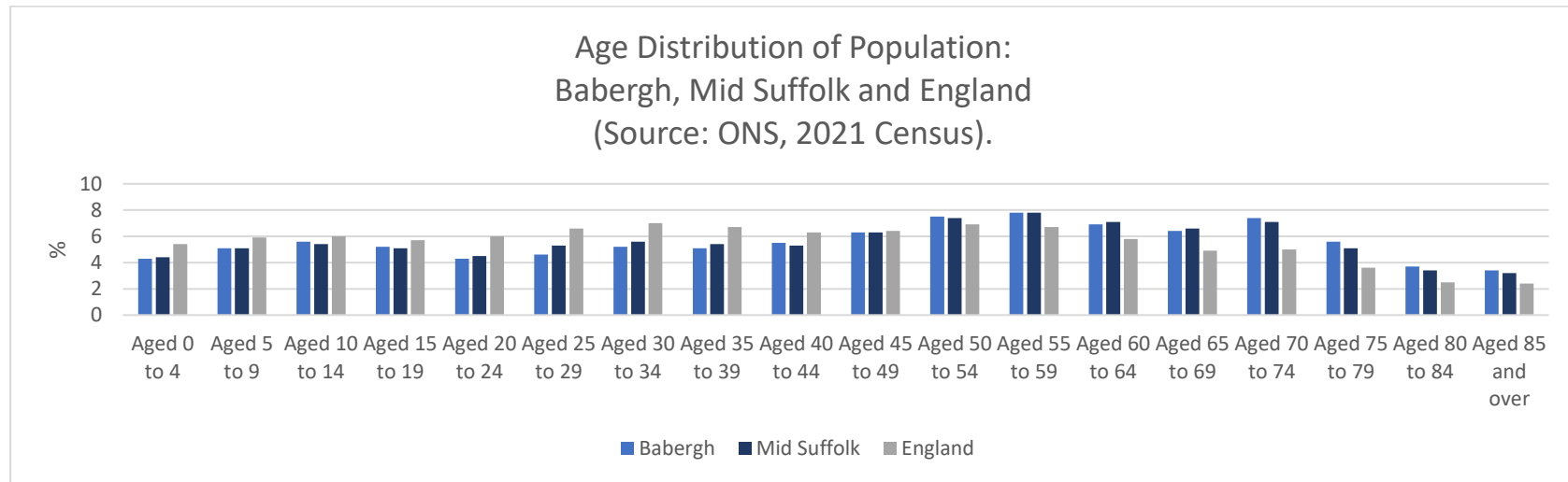
### ➤ Population

Babergh District Council and Mid Suffolk District Council are predominantly rural districts covering the centre of Suffolk, running from the boundary with Essex in the south to the border with Norfolk in the north.

The 2021 Census showed the population of Babergh to be 92,300 and the population of Mid Suffolk to be 102,700. The Office for National Statistics, in its 2018-based Subnational Population Projections, forecasts that Babergh's population will increase by over 10% by 2043 to 101,923 and forecasts Mid Suffolk's population to increase by almost 13% to 115,846 by 2043.

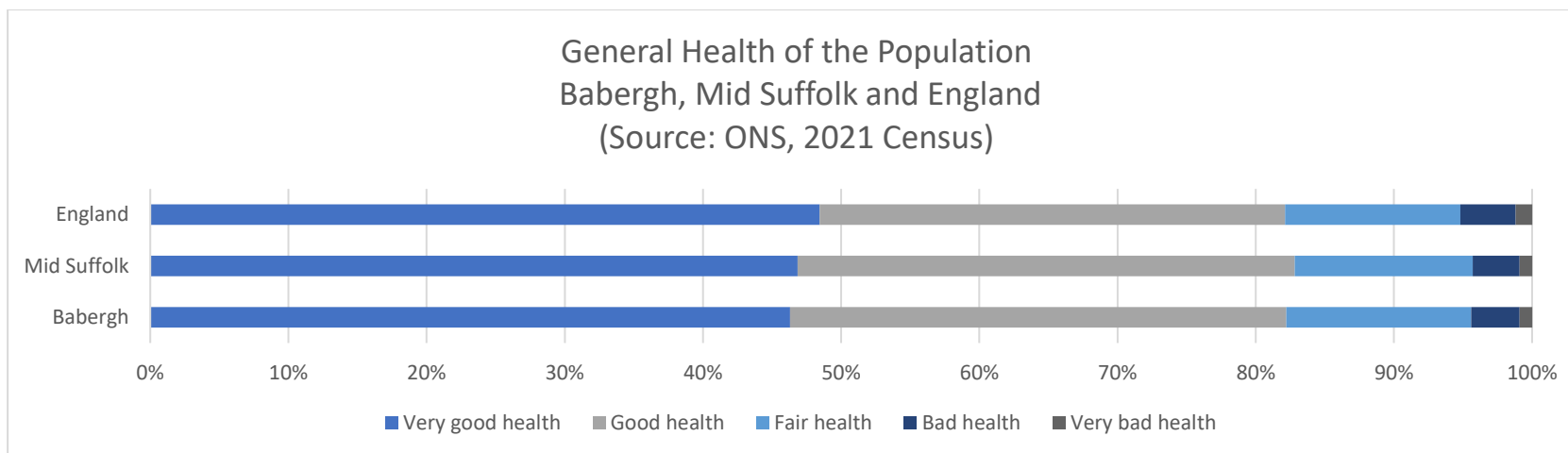
### ➤ Age Distribution

Both Districts have an ageing population and fewer younger people.



### ➤ Health

According to data from the 2021 Census; the general health of the populations in Babergh and Mid Suffolk is very similar to the national picture.



➤ **Current Housing Provision**

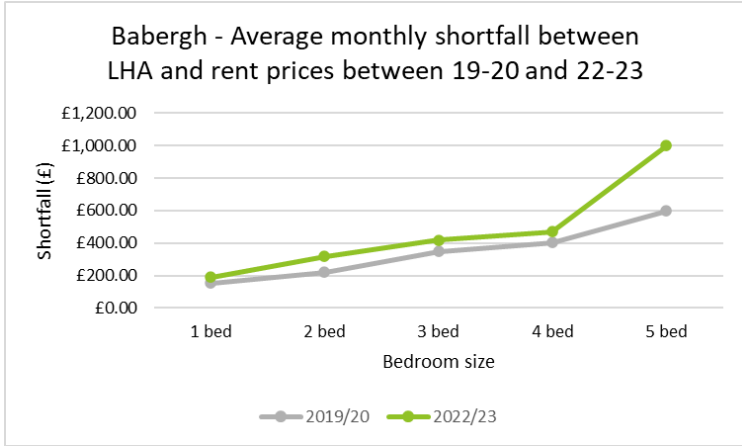
Both Babergh and Mid Suffolk have a significantly higher percentage of properties owned-outright (with no mortgage) than Suffolk and England. Both districts have a lower percentage of properties in the Private Rented Sector than both Suffolk and England.

Ownership & Tenancy by Type							
		Babergh		Mid Suffolk		Suffolk %	England %
<b>Owned:</b>	Owns Outright	17,460	43.4%	19,151	43.2%	38.6%	32.5%
	Owns with mortgage or loan	11,098	27.6%	13,607	30.7%	26.7%	28.8%
<b>Shared Ownership:</b>	Shared Ownership	289	0.7%	446	1%	0.7%	1%
<b>Social Rented:</b>	Rents from Council or LA	3,370	8.4%	3,141	7.1%	6.9%	8.3%
	Other Social Rented	1,963	4.9%	1,870	4.2%	8%	8.8%
<b>Private Rented:</b>	Private Landlord or Letting Agency	4,910	12.2%	4,874	11%	16.3%	18.2%
	Other Private Rented	1,049	2.6%	1,205	2.7%	2.5%	2.2%
<b>Lives Rent Free:</b>	Lives Rent Free	61	0.2%	50	0.1%	0.1%	0.1%
	<b>TOTAL:</b>						

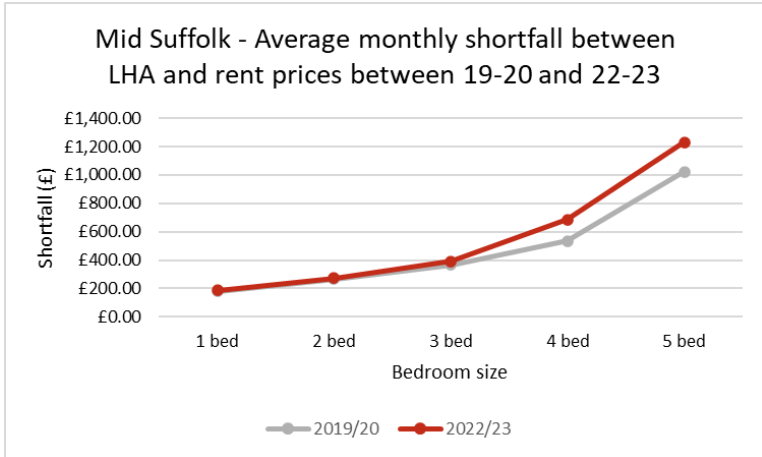
**Data Source: Office for National Statistics, via SODA. 2021**

➤ Average Rents and Local Housing Allowance

Babergh and Mid Suffolk market rents have increased year on year with the gap between Local Housing Allowance (LHA) and market rents often with over £300 per month difference.



In Babergh, the average monthly shortfall between LHA and market rent prices between 19-20 and 22-23 have risen for all bedroom sizes, particularly for larger sized properties. The graph shows the widening gap in Babergh between the Bury St Edmunds LHA rate, and the market rent prices over a three-year period.



In Mid Suffolk, the average monthly shortfall between LHA and market rent prices between 19-20 and 22-23 has risen for larger sized properties. The graph shows the widening gap in Mid Suffolk between the Ipswich LHA rate, and the market rent prices over a three-year period.

## HOMELESSNESS, ROUGH SLEEPING AND TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION DATA

### ➤ Homelessness Assessments and Outcomes

Applications, Duties and Outcomes (2019 – 23)	Babergh	Mid Suffolk	Combined
Applications taken	2396	2176	4572
Owed an initial prevention or relief duty	1321	1162	2483
Successfully prevented from becoming homeless	579	542	1121
Successful relieved from homelessness	164	190	354
Main Duty accepted at main duty stage	226	178	404
Found to be in non-priority at main duty stage	57	35	92
Found to be intentionally homeless at main duty stage	20	12	32
Main Duty discharged	206	160	366
Ineligible	2	8	10

### ➤ Tenure of applications

The top five tenures of applications taken, across both Districts, for period 1<sup>st</sup> April 2019 – 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023 were:

Accommodation at time of application	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	% Increase (19- 23)
Living with family	147	231	163	247	68%
Private rented sector: self-contained	148	118	178	206	39%
Council tenant	216	64	83	95	-56%
Living with friends	77	94	50	77	No change
Registered Provider tenant	55	21	27	38	-31%

In 2022/23 there was a 56% decrease in the number of applications from Council tenants, compared to 2019-20 figures. This may be attributed to the eviction ban in place during COVID-19, as well as a focus on early intervention of those in arrears, supported by the Tenancy Support Team. For the same comparison period as above, 2022-23 saw a 54% decrease in presentations from those living in supported accommodation.



In 2022-23, there was a 42% increase in presentations from those living within the entire private sector (Houses of Multiple Occupation, self-contained accommodation, and lodgings), compared to 2019-20 figures. In particular, the number of those who were living in self-contained accommodation at the time of their application was 39% more than in 2019-20. This may be attributed to the lifting of the eviction ban which took place during COVID, with more landlords serving notice. This figure may also be impacted by the cost-of-living crisis, where landlords have been selling their properties due to rising interest rates and expenses.

There was also a 100% increase in the number of applications from Owner-Occupiers in 2022/23 compared to 2019-20 figures.

➤ **Reasons for homelessness**

The top five reasons for homelessness, across both Districts, for period 1<sup>st</sup> April 2019 – 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023 were:

- 1) End of private rented tenancy - assured shorthold tenancy
- 2) Family no longer willing or able to accommodate
- 3) Relationship with partner ended (non-violent breakdown)
- 4) End of social rented tenancy
- 5) Other

Main reason for loss of settled home	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	% Increase (19- 23)
<b>End of private rented tenancy - assured shorthold tenancy</b>	132	93	160	221	67%
<b>Family no longer willing or able to accommodate</b>	95	153	106	135	42%
<b>Relationship with partner ended (non-violent breakdown)</b>	92	118	63	76	-17%
<b>End of social rented tenancy</b>	120	27	88	101	-16%
<b>Other</b>	88	103	37	0	-100%

In 2022-23, there was a 45% decrease in those presenting to the Council as homeless due to eviction from supported accommodation, compared to 2019-20 figures. This decrease can be attributed to increased collaborative working.

Following on from the reduction of those approaching as homeless from Council tenancies, 2022-23 saw the number of those homeless due to the end of a social housing tenancy fall by 16%, compared to 2019-20 figures.

Presentations in those fleeing domestic abuse rose by 142% over a three-year period (53 presentations in 2019/20 to 128 presentations in 2022/23).

- The rise in homelessness presentations due to domestic abuse can be attributed to the change in homelessness legislation following the introduction of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 when Local Authorities became able to give those households who are homeless due to domestic abuse priority need for homelessness assistance and accommodation.
- From the Domestic Abuse New Burdens Funding 2021 which followed the new 2021 Act Babergh and Mid Suffolk Councils allocated money towards a new Domestic Abuse Link Worker Post, repurposed, and manage four refuge properties from within our own housing stock and use of a fund to support the financial costs of those suffering domestic abuse.
- The new Domestic Abuse Link Worker role has proved to be invaluable in providing support to individuals and households who have a potential housing need in addition to experiencing domestic abuse and compliments the Housing Solutions Team who are often presented with households who need assistance around housing circumstances due to families fleeing properties and areas due to domestic abuse.
- Our domestic abuse service is a bespoke support service which is tailored to suit the immediate needs of the client in the first instance with a personalised plan moving forward to achieve safe accommodation.
- In the 12 months that our Domestic Abuse Link Worker has been in post they have worked with over 200 individuals supporting them to safe places, referring them to other agencies and publicising the support we can offer.
- Our Domestic Abuse Link Worker has coordinated an organisational response to the Suffolk Domestic Abuse Champions Network who are now entering their fourth year with more than 1200 people across the county trained as champions, Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils have had 37 members of staff trained as champions.

There was a 72% increase in those becoming homeless due to the end of a tenancy within the entire private sector. The number of those asked to leave from Assured Shorthold Tenancies (AST), Houses of Multiple Occupation, and Lodgings all rose, however those asked to leave an AST increased the most, reaching a 67% increase compared to 2019-20 figures.

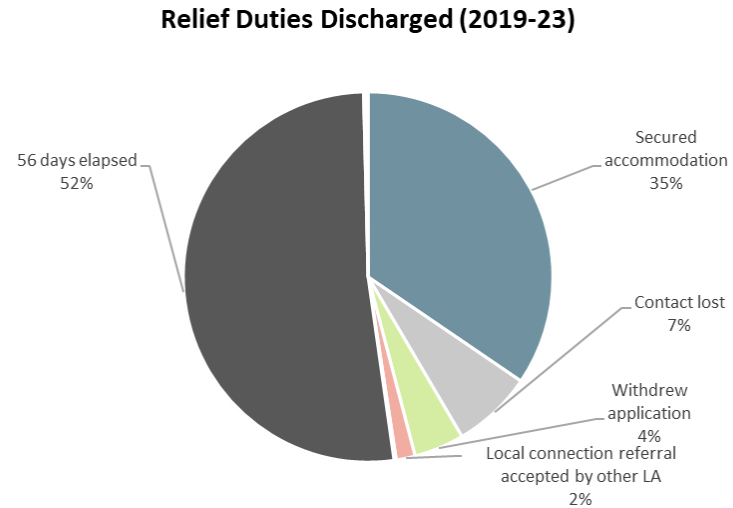
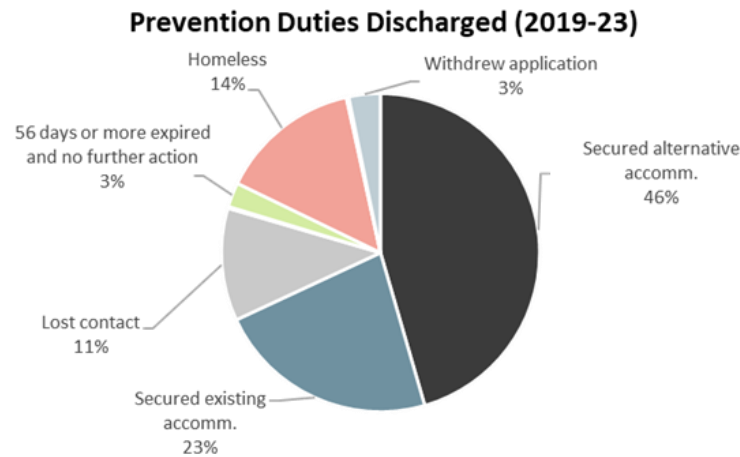
The number of homeless presentations due to a private landlord wishing to sell or relet the property has increased over the last three years. In 2019-20, this figure was 35 applications. In 2022-23, this figure was 60 applications. This is an increase of 71%. There has not been a significant increase in the number of private tenants where rent arrears were the main cause of homelessness.

➤ Of those owed an initial prevention or relief duty:

	Babergh 1 <sup>st</sup> April 2019 – 31 <sup>st</sup> March 2023	Mid Suffolk 1 <sup>st</sup> April 2019 – 31 <sup>st</sup> March 2023
Age of Main Applicant: Average	37 years old	40 years old
Most Common age group:	25-34 years old	25 – 34 years old
Ethnicity of main Applicant:	86.75% were White British	91.40% were White British
Nationality of main Applicant:	95.99% were UK Nationals	96.39% were UK Nationals
Gender of Main Applicant:	56.62% were Female 43.22% were Male 0.15% were Transgender	57.14% were Female 42.60% were Male 0.26% were Transgender

➤ Reasons for prevention and relief duty ending

- Of those owed a prevention or relief duty, 55% of those duties were discharged via a positive outcome i.e. into accommodation available for at least 6 months
- 9.75 of those owed a duty lost contact with the Council
- 3.66% withdrew their applications



➤ Type of accommodation secured for households at end of Prevention Duty

The top five tenures for preventing homelessness, across both Districts, for period 1<sup>st</sup> April 2019 – 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023 were:

- 1) Council tenancy – 39.80%
- 2) Private rented sector: self-contained – 21.55%
- 3) Registered Provider tenancy – 21.37%
- 4) Staying with family – 5.79%
- 5) Social rented supported housing or hostel – 5.25%

Mostly, the percentage of duties discharged per tenure in 2022-23 remains like the levels in 2019-20 figures. There has been an increase in the number of prevention duties discharged via Registered Provider tenancies, this has increased by 125% during the three-year period.

➤ Type of accommodation secured for households at end of Relief Duty

The top five tenures for relieving homelessness, across both Districts, for period 1<sup>st</sup> April 2019 – 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023 were:

- 1) Council tenancy - 42%
- 2) Private rented sector: self-contained - 20.06%
- 3) Registered Provider tenancy - 16.95%

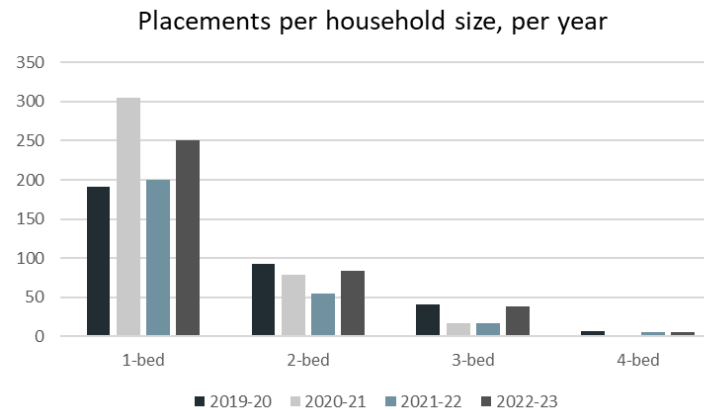
- 4) Social rented supported housing or hostel - 15.25%
- 5) Private rented sector: HMO - 7.91%

Over the three-year period, the number of relief duties discharged into self-contained accommodation within the private sector rose by 53.6%. This could be attributed to the establishment and expansion of Central Suffolk Lettings. Similarly, there was a large increase in the number of duties discharged via Registered Provider tenancies, with this increasing from 5 per year, to 26 per year in 2022-23.

➤ Household size and demand for Temporary Accommodation and Bed & Breakfast Accommodation

In the last three years, the demand for B&B and temporary accommodation has increased. In 2022-23, the total combined number of placements across both Districts, including moves between B&B and TA, increased by 14%.

- The total combined number of placements peaked in 2020-21 (totalling 401 placements p/year), due to the ‘Everyone In’ scheme during COVID.
- The number of placements who have a 3-bed need increased last financial year, this is double the figure it was both in 2020-21 and 2021-22. This is most likely due to the increase in the number of presentations from the private sector following the lifting of the eviction ban, and the impact of financial hardship on larger families.
- The number of single households placed into B&B and temporary accommodation has also increased in the most recent years – this figure is now up 31% compared to 2019 levels.



➤ Comparison with regional and national data

Data is submitted to DLUHC each quarter, as part of the Homelessness Case Level Collection return, which measures local authorities' actions under statutory homelessness legislation. BMSDC data can be compared regionally and nationally using the data published by DLUHC, which is publicly available here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-homelessness>

➤ Case Studies and Lived Experience

Journeys through homelessness and rough sleeping and individual, personal testimonials can be found in Appendix - **Number**

## EVALUATION OF CURRENT HOMELESSNESS REDUCTION AND ROUGH SLEEPING STRATEGY (2019-2024)

### EVALUATION OF VISION

The Vision of the current strategy posed the question – where will we be in 2024? The Vision then proceeds to state 5 bold ambitions to be achieved within the lifetime of the strategy. These ambitions (plus narrative and statistics to quantify if they have been achieved or not) are:

➤ VISION AMBITION 1: To have ended rough sleeping in our districts

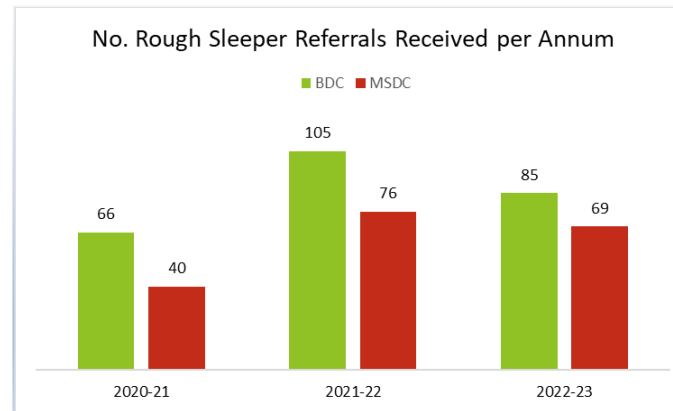
Babergh and Mid Suffolk Councils take a No Second Night Out approach to tackling rough sleeping and have built upon previous strategies to tackle rough sleeping alongside the Rough Sleeper Initiative 2022-25.

There are relatively low numbers of rough sleepers across our districts and the Rough Sleeper Team will verify and act upon information received as soon as possible, working with partner organisations, and using resources to provide:

- An immediate place of safety for rough sleepers to stay
- An assessment of their needs
- Access to other services such as healthcare and support

Babergh and Mid Suffolk, along with all Local Authorities in England, take a ‘single night snapshot’ of people sleeping rough in the Autumn of every year. We use a count-based estimate of visible rough sleeping. Our snapshot is collated by rough sleeper outreach workers and volunteers within the organisation and is independently verified by Homeless Link. Annual Rough Sleeper count figures show:

	Babergh	Mid Suffolk
Autumn 2019	2	2
Autumn 2020	6	1
Autumn 2021	4	1
Autumn 2022	5	2



In 2020-21 the figures were lower than the annual average due to the ‘Everyone In’ government initiative during the COVID 19 pandemic when local authorities accommodated rough sleepers regardless of ‘priority need’ under homelessness legislation.

In 2021-22 The ‘Everyone In’ initiative ended, and the eviction ban was lifted resulting in more people presenting as homeless and more individuals turning to rough sleeping.

The service received more referrals from members of the public via StreetLink resulting in several referrals for one person possibly due to a higher awareness following the Council social media campaigns on how to report a rough sleeper.

The public were more aware of rough sleeping following a period of reduced rough sleeping.

The Socio-economic impact of COVID has changed how rough sleeping is viewed in communities; previously a rough sleeper in society was identified in a negative way, as being culpable for their own situation. However, following the pandemic and the financial impact on households including unfavourable housing and labour market conditions, reduced welfare and benefits coupled with rising levels of poverty, society could be perceived as viewing rough sleepers in a more sympathetic way.

➤ Survey Results

Survey respondents were asked about their perception of progress towards the 5 ambitions set out in the Vision of the Current Homelessness Reduction and Rough Sleeping Strategy:

Vision Ambition:	Achieved this ambition:	Significant Progress made:	Progress Made:	No Progress made:	Situation Worse:	No knowledge:
To have ended Rough Sleeping in our districts	0%	11.1%	44.4%	0%	0%	44.4%

Respondents were also asked to comment on why/why not this ambition has/has not been achieved:

*The current situation nationally (the housing crisis, the cost-of-living crisis, the growing gaps in the social security system, the shortage of mental health services and the limited availability of services to help people with addictions) is not conducive to ending rough sleeping. The short-term response to Covid-19 ("Everyone In") shows what can be done with the right level of support and action from central Government. Because of this, the aim is laudable but not necessarily achievable unless things change nationally.*



*We are not seeing any increases in clients who are 'rough sleeping'. However, we are seeing an increase in the number of clients who have no home but are sofa surfing.*

*Our perception is that BMSDC are helpful, proactive, and pragmatic in their approach to resolve homelessness/rough sleeping.*

In Conclusion, following our successful bid in 2022 for the Rough Sleeper Initiative funding we consider that we have ended repeated rough sleeping in our districts by rapid intervention for those individuals who are new to rough sleeping and by prevention methods for those that are at risk of rough sleeping. However, many long-term rough sleepers have high levels of complex needs including mental health problems, drug and alcohol dependencies, and institutional experiences which needs a more tailored approach alongside supporting agencies.

➤ VISION AMBITION 2: To have proactively worked with clients at an early stage, prior to the 56 days we have too statutorily Preventing homelessness in a timely manner is of benefit to both the Council and applicants. Extended periods of homelessness and time spent in temporary accommodation can result in isolation from family support, employment and schooling and have a negative impact on both adults and children.

Early intervention strategies are designed to work quickly to support individuals and families to either retain their housing, or if that is not possible, to use rapid rehousing strategies to ensure people move into safe and appropriate accommodation with the supports that they need. The Housing Solutions Team has a frontline service comprising of early Intervention officers and a triage team who identify households contacting the service at an early stage before they become homeless and ideally before a significant risk of homelessness arises and they do this by:

- Talking through options
- Trying to help keep households in their current home where possible
- Working with households to secure alternative accommodation

Since 1<sup>st</sup> April 2021, the Tenancy Support Team have achieved 617 positive outcomes across both Districts (Babergh 351, Mid Suffolk 266). Many of these outcomes have taken place at an earlier stage that statutorily necessary (which has been enabled by Duty to Refer). For example, early intervention where financial support has been offered prior to a Notice to Quit being served, means that any rent arrears were addressed early to prevent any formal eviction action from taking place.

➤ Survey Results

Survey respondents were asked about their perception of progress towards the 5 ambitions set out in the Vision of the Current Homelessness Reduction and Rough Sleeping Strategy:

Vision Ambition:	Achieved this ambition:	Significant Progress made:	Progress Made:	No Progress made:	Situation Worse:	No knowledge:
To have proactively worked with clients at an earlier stage, prior to the 56 days we have to statutorily	11.1%	11.1%	33.3%	0%	0%	44.4%

Respondents were also asked to comment on why/why not this ambition has/has not been achieved:

*We are increasingly confident that Duty to Refers are responded to at the earliest opportunity to maximise the time the customers is worked with.*

*We are not seeing clients who state that it is not being met.*

*I believe progress has been made here but I am not sure I have enough information about how frontline services are delivered in practice. I would imagine that finite resources make it more difficult to achieve this objective when there are an increasing number of homelessness applications from people who are already homeless or who are imminently homeless.*

*We are aware they do some homelessness prevention pre the 56 days*

In conclusion, we consider that we have achieved the ambition of working with clients at an earlier stage than the statutory 56 days. The Duty to Refer has enabled the establishment of more collaborative working and more open channels of communication with other agencies and as such we are able to intervene and make a positive difference at an earlier stage.

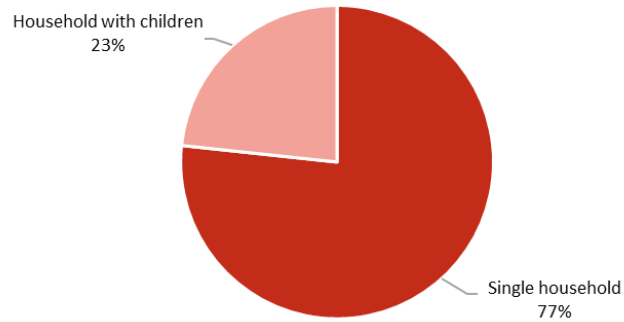
➤ VISION AMBITION 3: To have significantly reduced the usage of Bed and Breakfast

Since 2019 Babergh and Mid Suffolk have increased the number of temporary accommodation units we can offer to those experiencing homelessness by 44 across both of our districts. This helps to reduce the number of households accommodated in Bed and Breakfast accommodation. We have recently reviewed our temporary accommodation acquisitions policy and our temporary accommodations placement policy to ensure that we are monitoring the demand to our service, and we will use these documents to inform a new Temporary Accommodation Strategy in 2024.

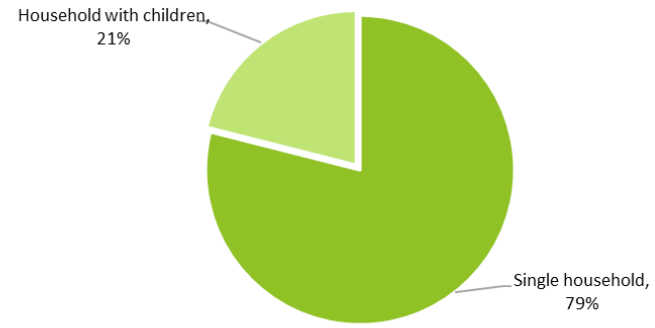
In Babergh, B&B usage fell by 38.9% in 2022-23 compared to 2019-20. However, in Mid Suffolk, B&B usage rose by 26% when comparing the same period.

85% of households with children that were accommodated in B&B were not accommodated there longer than 6 weeks.

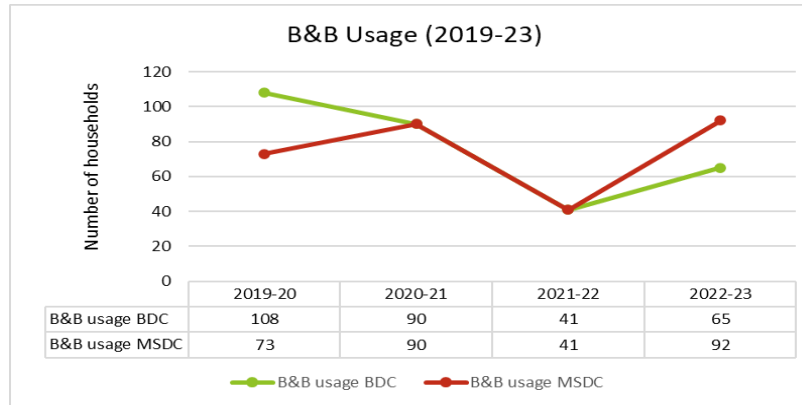
Mid Suffolk - B&B Usage by Household Type (19-23)



Babergh - B&B Usage by Household Type (19-23)



B&B Usage (2019-23)



- Survey Results
- Survey respondents were asked about their perception of progress towards the 5 ambitions set out in the Vision of the Current Homelessness Reduction and Rough Sleeping Strategy:

Vision Ambition:	Achieved this ambition:	Significant Progress made:	Progress Made:	No Progress made:	Situation Worse:	No knowledge:
To have significantly reduced the usage of Bed and Breakfast	0%	11.1%	11.1%	0%	11.1%	66.7%

No comments have been included from respondents due to the high percentage who stated they had no knowledge of this subject area.

In conclusion, although there has been significant progress in terms of an increase in the number of Temporary Accommodation units available, this has not been sufficient to end the use of Bed and Breakfast accommodation due to the increase in homelessness presentations and applicants needing temporary accommodation, this could be attributable to the ending of the covid 19 eviction ban and the national cost of living crisis. We are actively seeking further temporary accommodation both within our own stock and that of registered providers to mitigate the use of bed and breakfast/hotel accommodation.

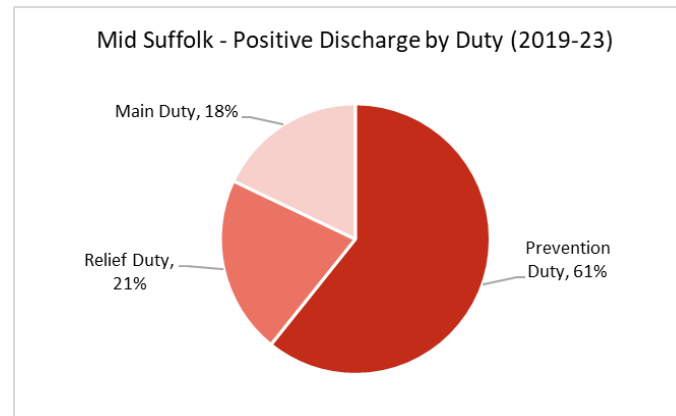
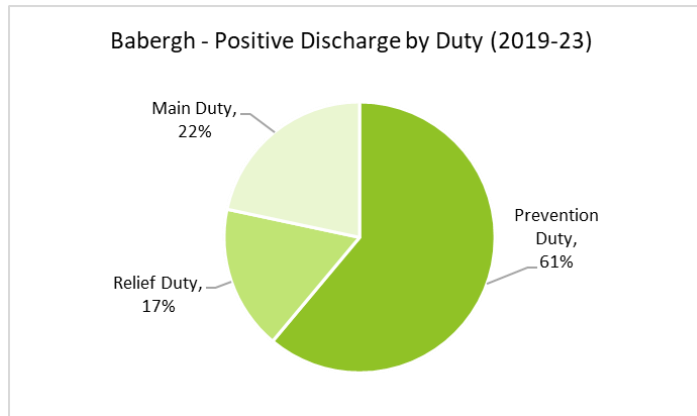
➤ VISION AMBITION 4: To have successfully prevented homelessness in the private rented sector

The cost-of-living crisis has and will continue to push more people to possible homelessness. The government actions during the pandemic, such as providing emergency housing, halting evictions and the temporary lifting Universal Credit payments have come to an end when millions of people face high housing costs and rises in inflation, fuel prices, and for some people on lower incomes, a rise in National Insurance contributions.

As a service we will always find ways to sustain tenancies such as incentives for landlords to offer and maintain tenancies for people on low incomes or with a history of homelessness, mediation and targeted legal advice for tenants. The Central Suffolk Lettings Team, the Housing Solutions Officers and the Tenancy Support Officers all complete work with clients encompassing the following points:

- We have encouraged private landlords to rent to tenants with experience of homelessness and have offered cash incentives, guarantees and deposit bonds.
- Changes to legislation around evictions have removed 'no fault' evictions and this will continue transitioning to provide a more protective environment for renters
- Forms of intensive case management are effective for those who require support for multiple disadvantages, with unconditional housing, such as Housing First, demonstrating strong outcomes

- Mediation and legal advice for tenants play an important role in securing better outcomes for people facing evictions



For the period 1st April 2019 – 31st March 2023, 61% of all positive outcomes were discharged within the prevention duty. Of all relief duties accepted throughout 2019-2023, 79% of relief duties accepted by Babergh District Council were initial duties (meaning the household had not been threatened with homeless prior). For Mid Suffolk, this figure was 76%.

From 1<sup>st</sup> April 2019 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023 there were 597 successful preventions in Babergh and 542 successful preventions in Mid Suffolk.

- Survey Results:
- Survey respondents were asked about their perception of progress towards the 5 ambitions set out in the Vision of the Current Homelessness Reduction and Rough Sleeping Strategy:

Vision Ambition:	Achieved this ambition:	Significant Progress made:	Progress Made:	No Progress made:	Situation Worse:	No knowledge:
To have successfully prevented homelessness in the Private Rented Sector	0%	33.3%	11.1%	11.1%	0%	44.4%

Respondents were also asked to comment on why/why not this ambition has/has not been achieved:

*We continue to have a number of clients who are being evicted from private rented accommodation and again your data should show you how successful you have been in preventing this. I know that the officers work hard to achieve this but it is really outside of their control unless they can secure funding to pay of arrears and persuade the landlord to keep people on.*

*The Central Suffolk Lettings Team have made a felt contribution.*

*I am aware that some homelessness will have been prevented by using the homelessness prevention fund, household support fund and discretionary housing payments to reduce and clear rent arrears. This is a big help but it doesn't address the real problem, which is the unaffordability of so much private rented accommodation and a growing problem with the affordability of social housing.*

*Evictions under section 21 of the Housing Act 1988 remains the main obstacle to reducing homelessness from the private rented sector, which means local housing authorities remain reliant on the Renters Reform Bill and overdue commitments made by central Government.*

*They have developed the Central Suffolk Lettings to work with landlords to source properties*

*We are getting significantly more landlords selling rental properties or issuing S21s for other reasons. This includes clients who have rented a property for many years and look on it as home. Private rented housing is very precarious for our clients and we are expecting it to get worse.*

In conclusion, we feel that significant progress has been made towards preventing homelessness from the Private Sector, our service provides a wider range of advice and services to people seeking homelessness assistance, and we have developed schemes to address the problems that most commonly result in homelessness applications. Our early intervention team are developing smarter processes to prevent private rented sector tenancies from ending including incentive payments to landlords to keep tenants, assistance with rent arrears, fast-tracked Housing Benefit claims and early warning systems, encouraging landlords to report problems with a tenancy early on so that we can provide support to reduce the risk of problems resulting in eviction

- VISION AMBITION 5: Ensured that everyone contacting the service receives in depth advice and assistance on their housing rights and housing options:

Within the lifetime of the current strategy, there have been several initiatives and new ways of working that have been set up and established, to ensure that this ambition is achieved:

The Triage and Early Intervention Team

- Deal with initial contacts to the Housing Solutions Team, prioritise and allocate cases to the appropriate officer.
- Provide in depth housing and homelessness advice and assistance and take positive action to help prevent homelessness with an Early Intervention Officer

- A Housing Solutions Officers works alongside the Triage Team to intervene on households threatened with homelessness in a swift way, mediating with landlords, family and friends and external agencies. New Advice Aid Website – start date March 2023
- AdviceAid ‘SelfServ’ is a self-service web app that is accessible from the BMSDC website providing tailored, quality, and localised housing advice in response to our customer’s needs and circumstances. The web app is branded in line with our website. <https://babberghmidsuffolk.adviceaid.uk/>
- Advice Aid covers the advice duty in section 179 of the Homelessness legislation, including tenant rights, benefits, harassment, S21 notices, mortgage arrears, domestic abuse, rights of occupation, welfare reform, illegal eviction, rent arrears, housing disrepair and much more.

The demand for the Housing Solutions advice and assistance service has increased dramatically in the most recent years. The number of calls to the service has increased from 7196 calls per year in 2020-21, to 12249 calls in 2022-23. This is an increase of just over 70% in two financial years.

➤ Survey Results

Survey respondents were asked about their perception of progress towards the 5 ambitions set out in the Vision of the Current Homelessness Reduction and Rough Sleeping Strategy:

Vision Ambition:	Achieved this ambition:	Significant Progress made:	Progress Made:	No Progress made:	Situation Worse:	No knowledge:
Ensured that everyone contacting the service receives in depth advice and assistance	22.2%	0%	22.2%	0%	11.1%	44.4%

In conclusion, following the change in structure to include an early Intervention team and the addition of Advice Aid we feel that this ambition has been achieved.

## EVALUATION OF PRIORITIES:

The current Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2019 – 2024 set out 5 priority areas to focus on. These are:

### ➤ PRIORITY AREA 1: Prevention of Homelessness

Homelessness prevention is not something that Babergh and Mid Suffolk Councils can do alone, and it requires a combination of action from our partner agencies in the public sector and support from the third sector.

Opportunities for us to prevent homelessness since the 2019 strategy can be explained in the following way:

**Targeted Prevention:** focussing on groups at particular risk of homelessness, for example those who are leaving institutions and care.

- Duty to refer - on specified public authorities to refer service users who they think may be homeless or threatened with homelessness to local authority housing solutions teams
- Working 'upstream' with prison and probation staff, Leaving Care Teams, Registered Providers and supported housing schemes
- People at risk of rough sleeping receive targeted support and advice to maintain their accommodation or find an appropriate alternative.

**Crisis Prevention:** Babergh and Mid Suffolk Councils hold statutory homelessness prevention responsibilities, and we focus on preventing homelessness when risk is imminent. This is in line with the Homelessness Reduction Act, where a person is "threatened with homelessness" when they risk losing their home within 56 days.

- Talking to landlords, friends or family to try and mediate to find a way for applicants to stay in their homes
- Assisting with applications to our Rent Guarantee Scheme and Rent Deposit scheme for assistance to move into the private sector
- Referrals to our Tenancy Support Team who offer budgeting advice, affordability assessments and referrals to the Citizens Advice for support with debts
- Support from our Tenancy Support Team to claim Discretionary Housing Payments, welfare benefits and housing benefit to increase income maximisation
- Advice to help you secure private rented accommodation
- Assistance to complete an application for our housing register [Home - HomeChoice \(gatewaytohomechoice.org.uk\)](https://gatewaytohomechoice.org.uk)
- Referrals to housing related support providers [Apply for housing related support - Suffolk County Council](#)
- People at risk of rough sleeping are identified at the earliest opportunity and their needs are understood and met
- Services for victims of domestic abuse, upstream advice on 'target hardening' enabling them to remain in their home.
- Housing rights, housing status, security, and rights of occupation; discrimination, harassment, and illegal eviction.



- Consequences of relationship breakdown, and implications for homelessness.
- Private Rented Sector access services: rent and mortgage arrears, and other money or debt issues which could lead to homelessness.
- Housing conditions
- Supported housing projects, and support services.

**Emergency Prevention:** focussing on those at immediate risk of homelessness, who may not have anywhere to sleep that night. The Councils currently have access to the following range of options for emergency and temporary accommodation:

- Units within our own housing stock, self-contained bedsits, flats, bungalows, houses, and houses of multiple occupation.
- 44 units in Babergh district and 40 units in Mid Suffolk district.
- 15 units of self-contained accommodation owned and managed by Registered Providers (RPs) where we have 100% nomination rights to the units.
- 4 supported and specialist domestic abuse satellite accommodation units.
- Spot-purchased private hotel rooms with some shared facilities (i.e., kitchens and/or bathrooms) for use in emergency placements out of hours.

**Recovery Prevention:** ensuring we minimise repeat homelessness among those who have already experienced it and who are most marginalised in our society.

- Longer term needs of people with a history of sleeping rough are identified and plans developed to respond to them.
- A personalised offer to meet every individual's needs, and sufficient capacity to maintain flow through a pathway of services.
- A personalised and holistic offer to best support someone with a history of sleeping rough be integrated into their community.

**Universal Prevention:** seeking to reduce the population-wide risk of homelessness, for example by ensuring that everyone has access to affordable housing and sufficient income to maintain that housing.

➤ **PRIORITY AREA 2: Supporting vulnerable households to secure and maintain accommodation**

Tenancy Support Officers work with any tenure of Landlord in supporting tenants and their households to financially prevent them from becoming homeless. A high percentage of their cases are Babergh and Mid Suffolk District tenants and the team work closely with Income Officers and the Housing Solutions team.

The Team begins with a financial assessment to make sure that households are in receipt of the correct benefits and will assist in benefit claiming if applicable to maximise their income. The Team will also assist with things like applying for Discretionary Housing Payments, attempting to get

benefits backdated and applying to charitable funds for household items and furniture. This work supports the wider housing team in preventing evictions in respect of affordability and rent arrears.

The Tenancy Support Team signpost individuals to organisations such as Citizens Advice when relevant to do so for advice on debt and debt relief.

At present the team are also administering the Household Support Fund for housing costs alongside Suffolk County Council who will assess essential items under the same provision.

The team are a valuable part of Housing Solutions and make a large contribution to the number of households that are classed as having been “prevented” from becoming homeless, keeping tenancies sustainable and avoiding court action and eviction.

➤ **PRIORITY AREA 3: Mitigating against the impacts of Welfare Reform**

The Tenancy Support Team have been administering the Governments Household Support Grant for housing costs and referring households to Local Welfare Allowance for essential item costs since June 2022 - [Suffolk Local Welfare Assistance Scheme - Suffolk County Council](#)

- Tenancy Support Officers work with any tenure of Landlord in supporting tenants and their households to financially prevent them from becoming homeless. A high percentage of their cases are Babergh and Mid Suffolk District tenants and the team work closely with Income Officers and the Housing Solutions team. The Team begins with a financial assessment to make sure that households are in receipt of the correct benefits and will assist in benefit claiming if applicable to maximise their income. The Team will also assist with things like applying for Discretionary Housing Payments, attempting to get benefits backdated and applying to charitable funds for household items and furniture. This work supports the wider housing team in preventing evictions in respect of affordability and rent arrears. Tenancy Support have:

- Administered Tranche 3 of the Household Support Fund, administering a total of £100,000 to 90 households.
- Received a total of 2074 referrals between 1<sup>st</sup> April 2019 and 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023 across both Districts.
- Recorded 617 positive outcomes between 1<sup>st</sup> April 2021 and 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023
- Secured funding of £338,055.25 for households via welfare benefit applications, Discretionary Housing Payments, and charitable applications (£202,519.81 for Babergh applicants and £135,535.44 for Mid Suffolk applicants)
- Secured 879 food parcels via foodbanks (428 in Babergh and 451 in Mid Suffolk)

The team also work with clients referring to Citizens Advice as necessary for in depth debt advice and working alongside the Accommodations Resettlement Officer to ensure that those households moving on from our temporary accommodation are ‘set up’ financially and have access to the furniture they require via charitable organisations and local furniture projects.

➤ **PRIORITY AREA 4: Increasing access to suitable accommodation**

To successfully prevent homelessness, we also needed to increase the accommodation options available. Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils source a number of accommodation options including supported housing, lodgings, private rented, temporary accommodation, shared housing and social housing.

The high house prices across Babergh and Mid Suffolk means that a lot of households are unable to access the housing market. Therefore, the private rented sector is in higher demand. High demand for private rented property has dramatically increased since the Covid pandemic with a huge reduction in re lets coming onto the market and in 2022 there were a record number of private landlords leaving the rental market and not returning due to constant government legislation imposed on private landlords, high interest rates, high build and property costs and the cost-of-living crisis impacting tenants ability to pay rent. The market has become a riskier place to operate for a landlord/investor.

From the tenant point of view affordability and availability are the main issues with many homeless households having low or no income, no guarantors, and a bad credit rating. Competition for property is high and often homeless households will not be able to access the open private rented market without assistance.

In 2020 Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils established Central Suffolk Lettings (CSL) with the aim of increasing access to good quality homes in the private rented sector for eligible residents. CSL is a fully integrated private lettings service within Housing Solutions and is a well-established brand with an online presence and a portfolio of 80 properties, CSL have good relations with local letting agents as well as directly with Private landlords. They offer a rent guarantee scheme which offers private landlords – tenant find, guaranteed rent, tenancy management and a cash incentive on joining. CSL have recently taken on their first House of Multiple Occupation re housing 3 homeless households.

There has been a total of 181 homeless duties discharged into the private sector via Central Suffolk Lettings since 1<sup>st</sup> April 2020, either via the Council’s Guaranteed Rent Scheme, or Rent Deposit Scheme.

Ongoing CSL tenancies as of 31 <sup>st</sup> March			
	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
MSDC	3	12	30
BDC	16	27	49

Delivery of affordable housing remains a key priority for BMSDC. Between 1<sup>st</sup> April 2019 and 31<sup>st</sup> March 2022 there have been 333 additional affordable housing homes built in Babergh and 517 in Mid Suffolk:

Year	BABERGH			MID SUFFOLK		
	Net Completions:	Of which Affordable:	% Affordable:	Net Completions:	Of which Affordable:	% Affordable
2021-2022	758	130	17%	862	196	23%
2020-2021	402	89	22%	672	193	29%
2019-2020	293	114	39%	451	128	28%

**Data Source: BMSDC Annual Monitoring Report 2021-2022. Net Residential Completions**

We continue to work closely with the Housing Related Service at Suffolk County Council to ensure need and demand is considered when commissioning Housing Related Support services.

➤ **PRIORITY AREA 5: Raise aspirations of positive health & wellbeing amongst homeless people**

This is being achieved with the support of a new role Resettlement Officer in the Temporary Accommodation Team, this role created in 2021 is key in assisting and encouraging customers to meet their personalised housing plans, as set through our statutory homelessness duties, and helping them to access support from a wide range of agencies including employment, training and voluntary work. This work aims to focus on the whole person to improve the customer’s wellbeing and eradicate barriers to sustaining accommodation, reducing the incidence of repeat homelessness.

Being homeless can also have such a negative impact on someone’s health and wellbeing sometimes making them feel marginalised in society and causing difficulties in accessing health services. Babergh and Mid Suffolk Housing Solutions Team begin signposting individuals identified as having a need on accessing the homelessness journey to services for support with mental health, physical health, drugs and alcohol and for help in contacting and registering with health provision and we work closely with The Marginalised and Vulnerable Adult Team - [NHS Health Outreach Team – Ipswich Outreach](#)

➤ **PRIORITY AREA 6: End Rough Sleeping**

Rough Sleeper Initiative 2022-2025 is funding that Babergh and Mid Suffolk successfully bid for, and it underpins the service and team that supports rough sleeping in our districts.

The Tenancy Sustainment Team funded by the Rough Sleeper Initiative (RSI) funding are working closely with households at risk of rough sleeping and offering targeted support and advice to maintain their accommodation or find appropriate alternatives, this work is informed by the rough

sleepers the team have worked alongside as we need to hear the issues and barriers that rough sleepers faced prior to rough sleeping and the problems they experience while rough sleeping. The Tenancy Sustainment Officers will continue the work with rough sleepers after their placement and into settled accommodation as floating support.

Those sleeping rough in our districts are assessed and supported from the street to our assessment (Step) beds and are identified by calls from members of the public, professionals or via self-referral. Rough sleepers are also located during routine patrols visiting popular rough sleeping sites by our Rough Sleeper Outreach Team whose posts are funded through RSI. The posts are flexible and responsive and supported by the RS Tenancy Sustainment Team when necessary.

The verification of rough sleepers is completed within 24 hours but without compromising safety. Efforts are made prior to verification to gather information from the referrer and the rough sleeper. The Customer Alert List is checked, and a comprehensive map reconnaissance and contingency plan made. Direct communication to CCTV teams is also used if required. Support from colleagues, police or other agencies is requested if appropriate.

The Outreach Team will offer an immediate short term emergency bed 'Step Bed' for a period of 56 days, we have 4 across both districts, and assess the needs of a rough sleeper using a 'vulnerability assessment' which will inform the journey identified for the rough sleeper, this could include supported housing, a transitional bed for up to 2 years funded by RSI, private rented sector offers or social housing.

We have 12 transitional beds for use of up to 2 years in order that we can respond to changing needs of a rough sleeper over a course of time and ensure that they are ready to sustain a tenancy before moving into long term settled accommodation.

## ACHIEVEMENTS IN LIFETIME OF CURRENT STRATEGY (2019-2024)

During the lifetime of the current strategy, we have:

- **Embedded auditing Housing Solutions as ‘business as usual’ to ensure consistency in service delivery and to capture opportunities for continual improvement.**

The Housing Solutions Team Manager and Assistant Manager complete periodic and random monitoring of cases and recording alongside 121 meetings every four weeks with officers and team meetings ensuring the officers have a consistent and fair approach to case management and identifying opportunities for continual improvement through training and development.

- **Developed and implemented a comprehensive online advice service for clients to access housing options advice.**

Advice Aid implementation May 2023 - <https://baberghmidsuffolk.adviceaid.uk>

- **Continued to ensure that all cases are accurately recorded.**

Housing Solutions Officers complete a ‘housekeeping’ meeting monthly to ensure that all cases are recorded and progressed as per our statutory duties under homelessness legislation.

- **Developed a process for offering short term support and ongoing contact to monitor the progress of clients and to reduce the risk of repeated homelessness from temporary accommodation.**

Creation of a new Resettlement Officer post 2021 within the temporary accommodations team who will be assisting and encouraging customers to meet their personalised housing plans and helping them to access support from a wide range of agencies. This is with an aim to focus on the whole person to improve the customer’s wellbeing and eradicate barriers to sustaining accommodation, reducing the incidence of repeat homelessness.

- **Participated in multi-agency panels to manage, monitor and find housing solutions for the hardest to house clients.**

The Rough Sleeping Team Manager attends the Ipswich Rough Sleeper housing for us for hard to house clients across Suffolk and neighbouring counties including Colchester Borough Homes, this enables the team to monitor clients who are geographically mobile to provide the best bespoke support alongside our colleagues in different agencies, districts and boroughs.

➤ **Continued to work with Public Health to support services for vulnerable adults and provide data as required to understand costs associated with homelessness, including the commissioning of dedicated services (such as DAROS). Provided Public Health with meaningful data to inform commissioning decisions, to help maintain services for marginalised adults.**

- SODA (Suffolk Office of Data Analytics) is a virtual hub, set up as a collective endeavour among Suffolk's public services with a view to make better use of data and generate new insights.
- SODA originated from the Suffolk System-wide Data and Insight workstream, funded through the Transformation Challenge Award (TCA) in 2015, which saw the collaboration of Suffolk police with all local authorities and other public sector organisations.
- Following this, an official ODA was established in June 2018. This project has been awarded funding for the next two years (2018/19 - 2019/20) from all partners, each equally contributing financially to the ODA.
- With all partners contributing equally, there is no lead organisation. This means that the whole system will benefit from SODA's work, with issues being tackled with a place-based approach.

➤ **Reviewed our approach to transitional support for those moving on from supported accommodation in case the Supported Lettings Funding ends in March 2021, to consider improvements which could be made to further reduce the risk of repeated homelessness.**

The Supported Lettings Team have now been made permanent within the organisation and continue to offer support to those at risk of repeated homelessness.

➤ **Continued to work closely and meet with the DWP and CAB to tackle the impacts of welfare reforms and the roll out of Universal Credit, on an ongoing basis.**

The Tenancy Support Team and the Tenancy Management Officer in the Central Suffolk Lettings Team work regularly from our local Job Centres attending meetings to discuss cases. Housing Solutions continues to work with Citizens Advice alongside our Communities Team and the new Cost of Living Coordinator role.

- **Monitored repayment agreements and the number of evictions for rent arrears to consider the success of our budgeting advice and affordability checks, so we can help clients to manage their income effectively.**

There has been a total of 552 referrals received by Housing Solutions from the Income Team (Babergh 316, Mid Suffolk 236)

- **Rebranded the Rent Deposit Scheme and monitored the work of Central Suffolk Lettings, to report back to members on key indicators.**

Central Suffolk Lettings (CSL) are now a well-established brand with an online presence and a portfolio of 80 properties, CSL have good relations with local letting agents as well as directly with Private landlords. CSL offer a rent guarantee scheme which offers private landlords – tenant find, guaranteed rent, tenancy management and a cash incentive on joining. CSL have recently taken on their first House of Multiple Occupation re housing 3 homeless households. [DLUHC presentation Oct 22.pptx \(sharepoint.com\)](#)

- **Ensured continued workforce training and development on the links between homelessness and; mental health, drugs and alcohol, PREVENT, gangs, county lines, Making Every Contact Count and Domestic Abuse/ Violence; and worked with the Communities Team to review training.**

Housing Solutions Officers have completed the new Domestic Abuse Champions Training and continue to have refresher training on all aspects which impact homelessness.

- **Ensured that everyone in temporary accommodation has access to appropriate health services on an ongoing basis and determine whether and how we can improve the health and wellbeing of those clients, with research and recommendations.**

Collaboration with NHS Health Outreach and support of the Resettlement Officer.

- **Continued to ensure that all temporary accommodation is regularly inspected to ensure it meets all regulatory standards.**

Weekly and monthly room and property checks by officers, asbestos, legionella, PAT, gas and electric checks completed when units become void.

- **Enhanced our Tenancy Support Service and investigated the possibility of a resettlement scheme for those in temporary accommodation.**



A new Resettlement Officer post has been created.

- **Continued to ensure that we make suitable provision for rough sleepers in extreme weather conditions under Severe Weather Emergency Provision.**

Working in alignment with our neighbouring districts and boroughs for decisions about when to activate SWEP – Communications on our websites and social media outlets.

- **Continued to access funding streams when available for additional support to tackle rough sleeping.**

Rough Sleeper Initiative funding 2022-2025 and Rough Sleeper Accommodation Programme were both successful bids.

- **Ensured contact is made with all rough sleepers within 24 hours of being notified of them.**

We can be contacted directly from members of the public, by referrals from professionals or by [Streetlink](#)

- **Ensured that rough sleepers presenting from another area, where safe to do so, are reconnected back to the area they originated from.**

The process by which people sleeping rough, who have a connection to another area where they can access accommodation and/or social, family and support networks, are supported to return to this area in a planned way.

## STAKEHOLDER AND PARTNER ENGAGEMENT

- A survey was conducted to capture the views of our Stakeholders and Partners, so that their expertise, perceptions and insight could feed into this review.
- Question 1  
Respondents were asked what organisation they worked for. The 9 respondents came from a range of organisations: Suffolk County Council, Citizens Advice Bureaux, Probation, Mental Health Services, Welfare Rights and Housing Associations.
- Questions 2-6  
Respondents were asked their view on if BMSDC has achieved the ambitions that it set out in the vision of the Joint Homelessness Reduction and Rough Sleeping Strategy. The outcome of this has been weaved in previous sections of this review, however for completeness the Survey showed:

Vision Ambition:	Achieved this ambition:	Significant Progress made:	Progress Made:	No Progress made:	Situation Worse:	No knowledge:
To have ended rough sleeping in our districts	0%	11.1%	44.4%	0%	0%	44.4%
To have proactively worked with clients at an early stage, prior to the 56 days we have to have done statutorily	11.1%	11.1%	33.3%	0%	0%	44.4%
To have significantly reduced the usage of Bed and Breakfast	0%	11.1%	11.1%	0%	11.1%	66.6%
To have successfully prevented homelessness in the Private Rented Sector	0%	33.3%	11.1%	11.1%	0%	44.4%
Ensured that everyone contacting the service receives in depth advice and assistance	22.2%	0%	22.2%	0%	11.1%	44.4%

➤ Question 7

Respondents were asked what they thought were the biggest challenges/ barriers currently facing BMSDC residents in terms of housing/homelessness? Respondents were asked to rank the list in order. The survey showed:

Challenge/ Barrier to Housing:	Ranked:
Access to affordable private rented accommodation	1 <sup>st</sup> (Biggest Challenge/Barrier)
Shortfall between LHA rates and average rents	2 <sup>nd</sup>
Lack of affordable accommodation for single under 35s	3 <sup>rd</sup>
Lack of accommodation for people with complex needs	4 <sup>th</sup>
Cost of Living Crisis – leading to rent arrears	5 <sup>th</sup>
Rural location making it more challenging to support people	6 <sup>th</sup>

The question also asked for comments and received the following responses:

*From clients accessing our service, all the above have been cited by clients and are hard to prioritise. Rural locations are also a major factor.*

*I am unable to rank the list above because they are all so relevant but I note that the chronic lack of social housing does not appear in it. An increase in the supply of social housing (especially council housing) remains the best and most obvious solution to homelessness. The fact that it seems so far out of reach (an indictment in itself) should not result in it being excluded from the list of challenges/barriers.*

➤ Question 8

Respondents were asked if they were currently doing anything to prevent homelessness? 100% of respondents answered yes. Further comments received highlighted the following:

*We provide crisis support to clients that will include helping them to remain in their homes and supporting them when they are homeless. We provide debt advice and the largest debt is council tax arrears.*

*Working as Accommodation Support Officer for National Probation Services, aiming to work closely with LAs across Suffolk to establish good working relationships and make as many early interventions as possible to prevent/relieve homelessness.*

*The usual stuff through the Welfare Rights Helpline: income maximisation, housing advice, involvement with defending possession proceedings. ICCARS (Ipswich County Court Advice and Representation Service. Joint working (e.g. Young Persons Housing Action Group, Suffolk Homelessness Officers Group). Work with care leavers (via SCC's Children's Services and Leaving Care Teams, especially in the area of supported accommodation and staying put.*

*We provide 19 beds in MSDC of HRS accommodation for single people - contracted by Suffolk County. 24 HRS beds in Babergh. We work in partnership with other providers in HRS group and other organisations. Raise awareness of homelessness. If we can find the bed spaces, we have funding for a Womens Accommodation Service - for women in the CJS. Help other agencies with move on. Work with Multiply Suffolk - help to access in employment. Refer to advice agencies for debt and welfare benefit advice.*

*We provide accommodation for those with enduring mental health conditions who would otherwise be homeless or in a cycle of homelessness. We also provide skills in small non classroom based setting to those who are ready to move on so they stand a better chance of sustaining their tenancies.*

➤ **Question 9**

Following on from the previous question, respondents were asked if BMSDC could offer support with these activities? The responses showed:

*We receive a revenue grant that supports the delivery of our cores service. Debt is not a core service. There are opportunities to work jointly to tackle homelessness and the risk of homelessness but these would need to be funded by BMSDC. Previous projects have been delivered with BMSDC but there is a lack of engagement to move this forward.*

*BMSDC are very supportive in my experience and this is demonstrated through their willingness to carry out assessment for people in Custody prior to release, to follow up with relevant enquiries and conversations with practitioners, to treat people fairly without bias.*

*It would be good to be invited to any future meetings to be involved and have a better awareness where we can link in with Mid Suffolk District Council and Babergh District Council.*

*Yes, by helping us to find suitable properties, removing barriers to rent deposit scheme to help move on, facilitate a forum and regular communication and provide a Point of contact with benefit teams - to help our relationship with Suffolk Revenue Partnership.*

➤ **Question 10**

Respondents were asked if they felt they had sufficient opportunities to contribute to multi agency discussions and are involved in partnership working around housing and homelessness.

Comments showed that there is an appetite for more multi-agency discussions and increased partnership working, with 6 out of 9 respondents stating that they did not feel that they had sufficient opportunities to contribute to multi-agency discussions.

*I think the pandemic caused us all to lose touch, we were attending meetings in all areas but now we are not sure what meetings are taking place.*

➤ Question 11

Respondents were asked if they would you be interested in being part of a BMSDC homelessness forum?

Comments demonstrated that there is an appetite to be part of a Homelessness Forum; 100% of respondents stated that they would be happy to proactively be part of such a forum with concerns over data sharing agreements from one respondent.

➤ Question 12

Respondents were asked if they had any further comments that they wanted to feed into the development of BMSDC's next Homelessness Reduction and Rough Sleeping Strategy?

*More collaborative working to develop processes that deliver better results for the individuals and reduce demand of ours and BMSDC services.*

*Needs greater focus on homelessness prevention and proactive approaches to homelessness prevention - a wider focus than just the statutory requirements. Needs a more holistic approach to prevent homelessness. Reduce bureaucracy and system approach. Needs more communication about RS services and emergency provision - not sure what the outreach team does - they need to target the more rural areas*

## OTHER INITIATIVES & ACTIVITIES SUPPORTED BY MSDC WHICH CONTRIBUTE TO PREVENTING HOMELESSNESS

### ➤ BEAM

Funded by the RSI allocation to support individuals accessing homelessness services in our districts into jobs and homes that lift them out of homelessness for good. Each person receives a dedicated caseworker who connects them with a supportive online community who provide funding and mentorship, finally matching them with forward-thinking employers and landlords.

Program overview:

- 10 residents completed their first meeting with Beam
- 20 sign-up forms completed
- 39 residents referred
- 4 residents joined Beam - 1 started work

Further Details can be found: [Beam Homeless Social Enterprise - Sponsor a Homeless Person in the UK Into a Job](#)

### ➤ Rough Sleeper Initiative

Funding successfully allocated 2022-2025, this underpins our bespoke rough sleeper service.

### ➤ Rough Sleeper Accommodation Programme Initiative

Providing longer term accommodation for rough sleepers – currently in progress.

### ➤ Homelessness Prevention Fund 2023-2025

Provided to councils in England over the next 2 years through the Homelessness Prevention Grant, to support the delivery of services to prevent and tackle homelessness.

### ➤ Domestic Abuse Link Worker and Domestic Abuse Burdens Funding

To cover the cost of new burdens associated with the expansion of priority need to those forced into homelessness by domestic abuse, following the landmark Domestic Abuse Act 2021.

### ➤ Domestic Abuse Link Worker

- Received a total of 212 referrals since Domestic Abuse Link Worker came in to post in March 2022.

- Of these 212 households referred, 116 were households with children. A total of 226 children (as part of households) were referred during this period.
- Households experiencing domestic abuse (DA) have been accommodated within the Council's Satellite Refuge provision and we have worked closely with other Suffolk LA's regarding sourcing provision outside of our districts.
- As well as rehousing households experiencing DA we have also supported households to carry on occupying the home they presented from, with safety measures being put in place and supporting households to access legal advice.

➤ Babergh and Mid Suffolk Citizens Advice Services

Referring people for help with problems relating to debt, benefits, employment, housing, relationships and legal issues. Advisers provide free advice to help clients with their issue; they also make referrals to third parties, fill out forms, write letters, negotiate with creditors and can even represent them in court or at a tribunal. [About Us - Mid Suffolk Citizens Advice Bureau \(midsuffolkcab.org.uk\)](https://midsuffolkcab.org.uk) [Home page \(sudburycab.org.uk\)](https://sudburycab.org.uk)

➤ Empty Homes Project

Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils aim is to reduce the number of long-term empty properties within the districts by bringing empty properties back into use and discouraging owners from leaving them empty.

In Babergh and Mid Suffolk, there are approximately 582 long term empty homes (December 2022 – Stats taken from Revenue & Benefits data). The government wants to increase the number of empty homes that are brought back into use, as a sustainable way of increasing the overall supply of housing, and to reduce blight on neighbourhoods. The government wants builders, investors, and local councils to increase the supply of repurposed empty homes. A dedicated Empty Homes team, within Private Sector Housing, at Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils was established in November 2021, and expanded in May 2022.

Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Council have developed a branded identity to launch its own Empty Homes service into a customer facing solution. Houses 4 Homes is the rebranded name of the existing Empty Homes team within both combined authorities. The rebranding took effect from 1st February 2023 with a series of Communication messages and marketing to highlight the service

➤ Collaborative working and pathways for vulnerable cohorts

Transition - previously looked after children (care leavers); people released from prison; people leaving the armed forces, and people discharged from NHS care. It also includes people who have been the responsibility of the Home Office through the asylum and immigration system.

## REVIEW FINDINGS

### ➤ Summary

When the current Joint Homelessness Reduction and Rough Sleeping Strategy was published in 2019, nobody could have predicted the Covid-19 Pandemic and the impact it would have locally, nationally and globally. This fundamentally changed the landscape within which the Strategy was operating, and this backdrop needs to be kept in focus when evaluating the past and looking ahead to the future.

### ➤ Major Issues

This Homelessness Review has identified the following major issues to be addressed in the next strategy:

- Access to affordable private rented accommodation
- Shortfall between LHA rates and average rents
- Lack of affordable accommodation for single under 35s
- Lack of accommodation for people with complex needs
- Cost of living crisis – leading to rent arrears and mortgage arrears
- Rural location making it more challenging to support people

### ➤ Gaps in Provision

This Homelessness Review has identified the following gaps in provision to be addressed in the next strategy:

- Lack of coded properties within our own stock
- Lack of positive collaboration at County level regarding Social Care and capacity
- Not enough adequate mental health support
- No support for dual diagnosis – pin pong of clients from agency to agency
- The idea that Housing Solutions provide support for clients in TA
- We are continuing to work at a County level with District & Borough partners on referral routes particularly from prison services, mental health primary care and supported housing to prevent homelessness and rough sleeping, however this is still a major gap in our joint services.
- We have no suitable 'high needs' supported housing projects – low to medium needs supported housing projects are unable to cope with many complex clients which results in eviction and a move into TA.
- A single assessment tool used by all services to establish 'capacity' of a client – work needed alongside Adult Social Care to avoid the placement of individuals who will ultimately not sustain their tenancies.



- We need a more flexible use of DHPs to prevent homelessness i.e.: rent in advance, deposits and other costs associated with a housing need such as removal costs.
  - More accurate information from health regarding clients being discharged from hospital.
  - We need to work with the larger Registered Providers in relation to ongoing support for recently housed former rough sleepers and work with them to assess what ongoing support is required to enable the longer-term sustainment of new tenants beyond the starter tenancy stage.
- Emerging Vision, Themes & Priorities for Next Strategy
- Build on foundations to empower residents to self-advocate, support residents to take action themselves
  - Shift discussion – homelessness is a life event that could happen to anyone – support with preventative steps to avoid
  - Destigmatise homelessness
  - Early Intervention should be the driver for the next Strategy – refocus work on preventative ‘upstream’ action

➤ Ambitions for Next Strategy

➤ Housing First

During the Pandemic and in the following stage of recovery local authorities and partner agencies have become stuck in a cycle of response. The Teams are exceptional at putting out fires, dealing daily with emergency situations and households in crisis, still struggle to make our way upstream to fix the systems that caused the problems.

This strategy resolves to push upstream and to actively prevent problems rather than respond to them and in this new way of working engage the services of partner agencies ultimately drawing attention for our multi agency successes in the way we approach the issue of homelessness in providing an exemplary service.

We should no longer be trying to just take care of the problem of homelessness but ending the problem and one of the ways in which we can achieve this strategic aim is by looking at ‘Housing First’ for those applicants who fall into a complex needs category.

Housing First is an approach to ending homelessness through housing and support provision. It prioritises access to permanent housing with tailored, open-ended, wraparound support for the resident that emphasises choice and control. The intensive support is free from conditions, apart from the willingness to sustain a tenancy. Individuals are not required to be housing-ready before moving into their home; rather, secure housing is a stable platform from which to address other issues.

It focuses on a specific group of people with histories of repeat homelessness, very complex needs, experience of multiple disadvantages and for whom other services have not been successful in ending their homelessness. Evidence shows that the model helps these people housed and helps them to make improvements in their health, wellbeing and social and economic integration.

There is no unified national policy around Housing First. According to Housing First England, mostly local authorities or voluntary sector providers develop the services locally. The approach can be funded through local authority commissioning, other statutory funding sources (such as public health and adult social care), or non-statutory funding such as trusts, foundations and philanthropy. [Mobilising Housing First toolkit: from planning to early implementation - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

➤ **The Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance**

This strategy recognises that our Domestic Abuse Link Worker has coordinated an organisational response to the Suffolk Domestic Abuse Champions Network who are now entering their fourth year with more than 1200 people across the county trained as champions, Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils have had 37 members of staff trained as champions however we need to ensure that this strategy continues to strengthen our commitment to responding to domestic abuse alongside all housing providers.

The Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA) accreditation is the UK benchmark for how housing providers should respond to domestic abuse in the UK. They are the only project in the UK offering a domestic abuse accreditation for the housing sector. DAHA accreditation is recognised in the governments Ending Violence against Women and Girls Strategy: 2016 to 2020. [VAWG Strategy FINAL PUBLICATION MASTER vRB.PDF \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)

By becoming DAHA accredited, Babergh and Mid Suffolk Councils would be taking a stand to ensure we deliver safe and effective responses to domestic abuse.

In terms of commitment, there is no getting away from the fact that there is a big commitment of time and effort. There are 43 standards in 8 Priority Areas of practice that are required to be embedded in practice to achieve accreditation. There is also a training investment required. The costs payable includes Membership fees (annual) and assessment fees (assessment takes place every 3 years after first accreditation. This is however an investment and working to these standards reduces homelessness, saves lives and saves money.

Adopting and embedding standards takes time. The average length of time it takes local authorities to complete their accreditation varies depending on size and directorates and whether they have and manage stock, but 18 months-2 years is commonplace. Throughout this time, we would get the support of experienced Regional Leads to guide us plus access to many resources and all the other benefits that membership gives. Sign up to the accreditation would need to be agreed to and supported at a senior leadership level.

[Whole Housing Toolkit - daha - Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance \(dahalliance.org.uk\)](https://dahalliance.org.uk)

➤ Early Intervention

The Housing Solutions Team are currently recruiting two extra Housing Solutions Officer posts to work 'upstream' on cases that lend themselves to early intervention processes, these cases will not be within the 56 days statutory guidance within homelessness legislation and will prevent households moving into the legislative duties thus decreasing the number of cases that move into main duty phase.

Once fully recruited the Early Intervention Team will consist of four Housing Solutions Officer roles and two Triage posts.

This service will continue to build on the priority area 1: Prevention of Homelessness covered in the current strategy.

➤ Strategic Review of Temporary Accommodation

We need to review the options available to Babergh and Mid Suffolk Districts to better meet the needs of families in temporary accommodation. This will enable delivery of the right type of temporary accommodation across the districts, to achieve quality and value for money, responding to the acute shortage in housing supply and meeting identified demand from households who face challenges in accessing social and affordable housing.

Guiding Vision and key outcomes:

- A district wide framework to improve outcomes and life changes for households who are temporarily homeless.
- Analysing projected demand for temporary accommodation regarding numbers, size, and location of units, and managing delivery to ensure a sufficient supply of suitable accommodation.
- Secure, sustainable long-term improvements in accommodation arrangements that meet our lettable standard, reducing the use of bed and breakfast, hotel or similar private sector accommodation.
- A consistent approach to temporary accommodation across the districts that can respond to local issues and changing demand.

➤ . Next Steps

- Engagement with Members
- Direction from Corporate Plan Refresh
- Joint Cabinet Briefing – 14<sup>th</sup> November 2023

- Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee – 16/20 November 2023
- Public Consultation – November/December/ January
- Babergh Council – TBC – March 2024
- Mid Suffolk Council – TBC – March 2024