
Homelessness Review 2024

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Summary of document

This is the Homelessness Review, which is a statutory evidence base document for the Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy. The Homelessness Review examines need and trends regarding homelessness and looks at possible ways of addressing these through partnership and preventative working and through statutory homelessness decisions.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

The Council produced its Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy in 2017 providing a plan for tackling homelessness in the County over the following five years. Meanwhile, the Council has produced the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Progress Report 2019 and the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Plan 2020-22. These were able to take account of the actual impact of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.

The Council is required by law to produce a new homelessness strategy at least once every five years, preceded by a statutory “homelessness review” of current and likely future levels of homelessness and the resources and measures available to prevent homelessness and to provide accommodation and support. This includes working across a wide range of Council teams and other agencies in the voluntary and housing sectors and complying with the new Homelessness Code of Guidance.

Action: Produce a new Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy.

The review therefore covers the following key areas:

- The levels, and likely future levels of homelessness
- A review of activities to prevent homelessness
- The needs of vulnerable groups
- A review of temporary accommodation
- Housing options to relieve homelessness
- Housing Register and Allocations Policy
- Implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017
- New housing supply
- Staff structure and resources

2.0 Homelessness in Rutland.

2.1 The County of Rutland

Table 1 shows the varying affordability of owner-occupation in Rutland.

	Year ending in 2020	Year ending in 2021	Year ending in 2022	Year ending in 2023
Median house price (existing dwellings)	£310,000	£324,000	£304,250	£342,500
Median earnings (residence based)	£32,489	£32,620	£33,524	£37,809
Median affordability ratio (residence based)	9.54	9.93	9.15	9.06

Source: Ratio of house price to residence-based earnings (median), published March 2024 (ONS)

At June 2024, 415 people were receiving out of work benefits in Rutland. (Source: NOMIS ONS Claimant count by sex and age.) Key sectors in terms of work-based employment are education, manufacturing, accommodation and food services, minerals, wholesale and retail and public administration. Overall deprivation is low with Rutland placed 149 out of 151 upper tier authorities in the Index of Multiple Deprivation 2019, but there are pockets of deprivation (source: English Indices of Deprivation 2019 File 11 Local Authority District Summaries (upper-tier)).

The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 (HRA)

The HRA places legal duties on English local authorities and was introduced in 2018, to ensure that everyone who is homeless or at risk of becoming homeless has access to meaningful help, as long as they are eligible for housing assistance. The Act largely amends part VII of the Housing Act 1996. It redefines the meaning of threat of homelessness by extending the period of threatened with homelessness from 28 to 56 days. There are six key aims of the Act which include:

- a) Prevention – Duty to provide casework intervention to resolve threatened homelessness. Local authorities work with applicants to draw up a personalised housing plan tailored towards their individual circumstances.
- b) Relief - Homelessness relief occurs when an authority has been unable to prevent homelessness. This was formerly known as a homeless application.
- c) Duty to provide advisory services - Local authorities must provide free homelessness advice and information to any person in their local authority area.

- d) Full Homelessness Duty - The full homelessness duty to provide one reasonable offer of settled accommodation for priority need households found unintentionally homeless where prevention or relief duties have failed remains in place.
- e) Cooperation - Applicants will be expected to cooperate with local authorities as the duties outlined can be ended if applicants are found to have deliberately and unreasonably refuse to cooperate.
- f) Duty to refer - There is a duty on other public services to refer people to homelessness teams if they are working with people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

Prior to the introduction of the HRA, Rutland already worked to an early intervention model and would routinely start preventative conversations at point of first contact, irrespective of exact dates. However, there was inconsistent recording of the breadth of work undertaken, due to no formal process in place. For Rutland, HRA and the implementation of digital software solutions has led to more robust recording of intervention work and building upon existing good practice.

2.2 Current levels of homelessness

Homelessness Approaches

The number of homeless approaches has steadily increased over the last 3 years:

Table 2 : Homeless Approaches – last three years			
Years	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Approaches	212	264	268

The increase from 2021/22 to 2022/23 was expected due to the impact of COVID –19, but the last 2 years’ case load has remained fairly even.

Reasons for homelessness

The five main causes of homelessness in the County are:

- Friends and family no longer able to accommodate
- End of Private Rental (S21)
- End of Social tenancy
- Domestic Abuse
- Non Violent Relationship breakdown

Table 3: Homeless Cases in Main Duty at end of Financial Year			
Years	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
March	6	8	20

Table 3 shows a significant rise in the number of households the local authority has accepted a main housing duty to. This means the local authority has a legal obligation to provide one offer of suitable accommodation to the household. The main reason for this increase is due to more families approaching the local authority due to loss of private rented property, coupled with a lack of social housing coming forward, which has meant the local authority has been unable to prevent or find a suitable alternative. This has also added to the increase in pressure on temporary accommodation placements both in and out of the County.

Table 4: Number of households in temporary accommodation			
Years	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Bed & Breakfast	3	4	9
Self Contained	0	2	3*

The use of bed and breakfast and self-contained temporary accommodation units over the last 3 years has changed dramatically. During 2021 (note this was during COVID-19) there was a government freeze on evictions and therefore households were not in need of temporary accommodation. This freeze was also in place during part of 2022/23. However, since the easing of lockdown and the return back to normality the numbers have steadily increased.

* The above table is a snapshot taken at the end of the March of each year. During 2023/24 this peaked at 9 families in temporary accommodation at one time. This shows that demand fluctuates and is also dependant on vacant social housing becoming available to discharge council duties via the housing register.

Homeless acceptances per 1,000 households

	Homelessness Acceptances	Households Census Day 2021 divided by 1,000	Homelessness Acceptances per 1,000 households
All England	52,800	23,435.7	2.25
East Midlands	3,010	2,037.3	1.48
Rutland CC	27	16.7	1.62
Melton	37	22.6	1.64
Harborough	44	40.4	1.09

Source: DLUHC Table MD1, ONS Census 2021 Table H01

2.3 Housing Options and homeless service

The Housing Options team are based at the Council offices in Oakham, however since COVID-19 the team have been working to a hybrid model. There is staff presence across the team every day during normal office hours – 08.30 - 17.00 and outside of these hours we provide an Out of Hours service, operated by Harborough Lifeline for those that may be homeless 'tonight' and requiring emergency assistance or advice. The team are able to offer clients face to face appointments if required during working hours. However, since COVID-19 the majority of the team's contact with customers is via telephone, Teams or email. We now see very few in person presentations at the council offices. However, should this occur there is a housing team member available on site every day for emergencies. The introduction of digital applications in 2018 via the online housing portal meant that the team were already seeing a shift in customer behaviour and expectations. Overall, negative feedback about the changes implemented has been minimal. This now aligns with Rutland County Council's transformation around digital self-service. Customers are able to access our digital portal via the Council's website or direct via

<https://rutlandhousingoptions.housingjigsaw.co.uk/>

Housing Floating Support

The Council commissions a Housing Floating Support service operated by P3 Charity, whose remit is to work with people who are at risk of homelessness and to work alongside partners to prevent the risk where possible, Where clients are identified as homeless, P3 work alongside the Housing Options team and other agencies to look at alternative accommodation or, if placed in temporary accommodation, support them into alternative housing solutions and maximise income and minimise expenditure. The service has been

operating since April 2022. In 2023/24 118 clients were supported by P3 and data shows that, over the year, the split between male and female is fairly even and the majority of those being supported are of the age 18-64. The team from P3, which is made up of 2.5FTE staff, are collocated with the Housing Options team – this has been of huge benefit, and they are able to seek support from wider colleagues across the services and really work in a holistic way. This also avoids duplication of case work. Prior to 2022 the Council’s housing floating support service was delivered by three separate partners and coordinated via Citizen Advice Rutland. There was little oversight of cases and outcomes and therefore since bringing the service direct under the Housing Options team, there are quarterly monitoring review meetings, regular management case discussions and a shared vision of outcomes for our clients.

2.4 Future levels of homelessness

Since COVID-19 there has been a steady increase in the level of homelessness reported across the County. The Housing Options team, over 2023/24, has seen a large increase in homeless presentations and the cases that are coming through are more complex than before. It is difficult to predict future levels of homelessness; however, it is predicted to continue to rise nationally. The following factors are likely to impact on the demand for services:

- Escalating private rent levels and lack of private rentals in Rutland
- Lack of new affordable housing supply and lack of movement from existing social tenants
- Cost of living increase meaning some households no longer able to afford to accommodate family living with them.

Levels of Rough Sleeping remain low for Rutland with 1 case reported to Government as of Oct 2023 – the same as the previous year. There has been a small increase in reported rough sleeping; however, this is often difficult to verify as it appears to be more short term than long term. We have a dedicated Rough Sleeper Outreach Team that works across Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland (LLR). This has proved to be an effective service, as they are able to mobilise within Rutland within 12 hours and verify and engage if needs be.

3.0 REVIEW OF ACTIVITIES TO PREVENT HOMELESSNESS

3.1 Housing Register and Allocations Policy

Housing advice and homelessness prevention will include recommending an application to the Housing Register, ensuring applicants' needs are correctly assessed and that they receive the appropriate priority points and information and advice about how the Allocation Scheme works.

Social housing in the County is provided by housing associations, the Council having transferred its housing stock to Spire Homes (now known as the Longhurst Group) on 6th November 2009. Longhurst Group are the largest provider of social housing with around 1500 rented homes. A number of other registered providers are active in the County, including Platform, Nottingham Community Housing Association, Cross Keys, Accent Homes, St John & St Anne, Muir Group and the for-profit registered provider Sage Homes. The total number of social housing stock including older person's accommodation (500 homes) and shared ownership (200 homes) has exceeded 2,000.

	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Number on Register	271	399	455

The number of households on the Housing Register has gradually increased. This is due to a number of factors, the main ones being those wishing to access more affordable accommodation in Rutland due to increased private rental costs, cost of living increases since COVID-19, increase in the cost of some social housing rentals and families no longer able or willing to house their family. Prior to 2021/22 numbers on the register were similar to those at the end of 2023/24. There was a move in 2020/21 to the digitalisation of the housing application process and which meant that numbers did fall off due to not re registering or no longer eligible to join. There is a review of the housing register due in the financial year 2024/25 which could see numbers fall slightly.

Action – Review of housing register applications

The current Housing Allocations Policy was updated in in 2023. Priority is awarded through a points-based system and nominations are made to housing providers when an applicant reaches the top of the list. Significant points are given to homeless households to whom the Council owes a statutory duty and the new policy takes account of the Homelessness

Reduction Act 2017. There is a need to review the housing allocations policy in 2024/25 as currently there are areas where the Council could tighten up on those that are eligible to join the register, e.g. older persons needing to move to a more appropriate home and currently do not need to sell current home.

Action – Review of Housing Allocations Policy

Debt and money advice

The Council funds the debt and money advice services of the Citizens Advice Rutland. They are equipped to respond to any issue, including benefits, debt, consumer, relationships, housing, employment and money advice with some specialist services available for more complex issues such as finance and debt, housing and social support.

Homelessness Prevention Fund and Discretionary Housing Payment Policy

The Council offers a number of prevention initiatives providing financial assistance in order to meet the aims of the service. Joint working across Housing Options and Housing Benefit departments is excellent with use of a shared IT system and staff responding quickly to requests for assistance. The Council receives Government funding for Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) each year. The DHP funding has dropped recently to its level for 2024/25. The Rutland DHP Policy aims to prevent homelessness, sustain tenancies for vulnerable tenants, keep families together and provide short term support for people with short-term difficulties or major life events. It also supports securing new tenancies for vulnerable people and encouraging people into paid employment. The DHP is the first fund considered if financial assistance is needed and decisions can be made quickly at officer level.

If DHP is not available, the Council also has access to other ring-fenced homelessness prevention budgets. The Homeless Prevention Fund provides additional financial support to people facing homelessness including:

- A Rent Deposit Scheme providing loans for deposits and rent in advance
- Rent in advance for homeless households where required by social landlords offering affordable housing
- Other initiatives not specified.

While the rent deposit scheme is currently available to all households, it still remains difficult to persuade private landlords to take tenants on low incomes who would be reliant on housing benefits. Increasing rent levels in Rutland is also adding to this.

The Homelessness Reduction Act requires a more pro-active approach to be taken to prevention for all households - not just those in priority need. Options are available to pay off historic rent arrears for households both threatened with homelessness and/or in temporary accommodation who are making regular payments, but where arrears are not yet at a level that will enable them to receive an offer of permanent housing.

The Lettings Policies of some housing association partners are extremely strict in terms of levels of former debt, preventing people from receiving an offer even where regular payments are being made and the debt is reducing. Some discretion with regard to this - especially where it relates to households in temporary accommodation - should be negotiated with partners in order to ensure that the Council's homeless duty can be discharged.

Funding availability is limited by budget, but with imaginative application of the available funding with perhaps modest grants available up to £1,000, this could be an effective policy that will help to prevent homelessness.

Private Landlords and Letting Agents

While the number of private landlords working with the Council directly to meet housing need is low, we continue to try and develop these relationships. This has become increasingly more difficult since COVID-19 due to rising rent levels in Rutland and declining resources. The County is home to high-earning households, who are often living in Rutland and commuting for work. This leaves lower income households unable to secure not only a social rental but also private rental properties.

3.2 MOD bases – St Georges Barracks and Kendrew Barracks

There are two Army Barracks located within Rutland both of which were former RAF bases which were re-designated Army sites within the last twenty years. The Council allows households living within the barracks to join the Housing Register and, as a signed-up partner to the Armed Forces Covenant, does not apply local connection criteria to households applying for housing.

The Council has good relations with our Army and we work collaboratively to support and prevent homelessness together. Over the years there appears to have been a slight reduction in the number of actual homeless applications from the Barracks; however, this is hard to quantify due to data recording.

3.3 Partnerships

The Council has some strong partnerships with organisations that seek to prevent homelessness. These include all registered housing providers, Citizens Advice Rutland, Housing Floating Support Services, Domestic

Violence Services, the Food Bank, Police, our Voluntary and Community Sector, local Church Community groups and other local authorities. Significant progress has been made in partnership working over the last few years and some innovative projects have emerged from these relationships.

3.3.1 Churches Together Rutland – Hope into Action (HiA)

The Council has a good relationship with local church group, Churches Together Rutland (now called HiA). There are 2 houses in Rutland that can each accommodate 2 single male tenants. Once a tenant of the Church property is ready to move on, Housing Options will work together with HiA to look at settled accommodation options.

3.3.2 Leicester, Leicestershire & Rutland partnerships

Being a small council, Rutland takes opportunities to jointly commission services with other authorities, in the main Leicester and Leicestershire councils. As a minor partner it can be difficult to influence project scope and direction significantly, but Rutland does in return benefit from some broader partnerships that help them tackle the small numbers of cases approaching. The management team from the Housing Options service are regular attendees at LLR meetings, Chief Housing Operational Group and Homeless Delivery Group, benefitting from joint working, initiatives and pooled funding where appropriate. The Housing Strategy and Enabling Officer attends the LLR Development and Strategy Officers Group.

3.3.3 Homelessness Meetings

Prior to COVID-19 there was a regular multi-agency Homelessness Forum that met quarterly. This will be relaunched in Autumn 2024. This will enable multi agency partners to come together and support the prevention of homelessness in Rutland.

Action: relaunch Homelessness Forum.

4. CONSIDERING THE NEEDS OF VULNERABLE GROUPS

In order to develop effective partnerships and homelessness prevention services, the Council has considered what the needs of vulnerable groups in Rutland are, and what services are in place to support them. Being a unitary authority means that internal communication is easier and systems and referrals are able to be carried out seamlessly across a number of client groups. This has also been strengthened by the collocation of the Housing Options team into Adult Social Care. Teams are working together with vulnerable groups in a much more joined up way approaching cases jointly

and holistically, with many vulnerable clients being assessed at the point of interview by a member of the social care duty team. This has proved invaluable especially around concerns for mental health and drugs and alcohol misuse. Both Housing Options and Adult Social Care Contact and Response front door teams are now collocated together each day which is working well. The team are also collocated with children's social care and relationships are stronger than before with various working groups, joint protocols and regular meetings.

4.1 Single homeless people / 'sofa surfers'

Currently there is no easily accessible accommodation available within Rutland for single people facing homelessness. Those eligible for temporary accommodation are often placed in either bed and breakfast or spot-purchased self-contained properties, out of the area.

4.2 Young People and Care Leavers

A joint pro-active approach is taken by Children's Social Care and Housing Options to support Rutland Care Leavers. The Care Leaver team allocates a Personal Assistant to all young Care Leavers to support them to find accommodation. During 2023/24 there has been a slight increase in the number of care leavers requiring support – all of these young people have been jointly supported.

There is a joint protocol in place between Housing and Social Care to assess the needs of young people aged 16/17 who may be at risk of homelessness. We are also working with colleagues on a joint Rutland protocol specifically for care leavers.

Action: Consider the provision of accommodation for young people at risk of homelessness/Care Leavers in Rutland.

4.3 Homeless Families

Families who are at risk of homelessness, or who have become homeless and have moved into temporary accommodation, have a variety of support needs. Over 2023/24, the Housing Options team have seen increased numbers of families requiring temporary accommodation. This is down to those who would traditionally seek alternative private rented accommodation being pushed out of the private rental market, as previously mentioned. The increase in rent levels - which remain way above the Local Housing Allowance - and coupled with the increase of living costs means that they are no longer able to find their own alternative. This has led to an increased demand in general for social housing and increased waiting times for housing. There has been a number of families accommodated outside of the Rutland

area which leads to social isolation and being displaced from their usual family support networks, and children may have to change schools which can cause disruption to education. Where possible, we will ensure a child remains at the school in Rutland by providing appropriate transport if necessary.

4.4 Resettlement

Rutland has a number of Ukrainian refugees in the County since the Government scheme launched in 2021. Over the course of the last few years the local authority has been successful in resettling a number of families and individuals into permanent accommodation. There remains a small cohort of Ukrainian families still living in sponsorship arrangements within the County, who the resettlement team continue to support should they seek permanent housing. More recently the County has also received a small number of Afghan families who are being supported to integrate into the community.

4.5 Victims of domestic abuse (DA)

The Housing Options team are involved with multi-agency partnership working around domestic abuse including attendance at the daily Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC), which aims to reduce the risk of serious harm to high-risk victims and their children by sharing information. Rutland has recently published its Domestic Violence Strategy as part of the new Domestic Violence Act 2021. The local authority's Domestic Violence responsibilities sit within children's social care with management from housing attending multi-agency meetings.

4.6 Offenders, former offenders and those at risk of offending

There are historically few approaches from offenders or former offenders, although this has increased slightly since 2022.

The Rutland Joint Action Group (JAG) provides a multi-agency approach to addressing crime and disorder and provides a forum to discuss cases where housing might be, or become, an issue. The meeting meets monthly with a wide range of partners and is Chaired by the Head of Prevention & Assurance - Adult Social Care and feeds up to the Safer Rutland Partnership meetings.

Although Stocken Prison is within Rutland, prisoners released from there generally do not seek to access housing within the County. Most return to their home areas in other parts of the country. There are systems in place for prisoners released from prisons 'on licence' to be supported by HM Prison and Probation Service, who will also provide support in relation to housing.

Council Officers are represented on the Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) panel and cases are dealt with through a partnership

approach. Links with Community Safety colleagues and housing association partners are well-developed and cases of anti-social behaviour are considered on a case by case basis and joint visits undertaken.

During this financial year LLR have developed a fortnightly meeting to discuss imminent Prison releases and a plan for the individual upon release. Rutland has been actively involved in these meetings and plan housing support when a case is identified for Rutland.

4.7 People with substance misuse or drug and alcohol problems

Services are provided by Turning Point in Rutland, who provide advice, information and support groups for anyone seeking support with substance misuse.

4.8 Supported accommodation provision in Rutland for those with eligible need

There are a number of supported housing accommodation schemes in Rutland as shown below:

Client Group	Number of Units	Provider
Mental Health (long term housing)	6	Advance Housing
Physical disability	2	Nottingham Community HA
Learning Disabilities (long term housing for clients meeting Adult Social Care thresholds)	30	Lodge Trust
Rutland County Council LD units	12	Nottingham Community HA/RCC
	17	Rutland Community HT

5. HOUSING SUPPLY

5.1 New affordable housing

Delivery of new affordable housing remains a key corporate priority for the council, as this presents a significant risk to the Council's ability to manage the demands on the homelessness service.

Table 9: New affordable housing supply 2020-2024				
	20/21	21/22	22/23	23/24
Delivery of new affordable / social rented	8	11	0	0
Delivery of shared ownership	16	5	1	0
Total	24	16	1	0

The need for both smaller units of accommodation for single people and newly formed households and larger homes for bigger families remains a key priority. There are around 30 four-bedroom properties and three six-bedroom properties within the entire social housing stock, creating issues for temporary accommodation and for larger families needing to move on from existing social homes.

The need for small units of housing, including shared ownership, will help encourage young people to remain living within the County, as anecdotally young people tend to move out of Rutland and gravitate towards the nearby cities. In order to make these attractive to young people, where possible these are designed as houses with no communal service charges, or two-storey maisonettes with individual entrances, and providing residents with their own private gardens/yard where possible. This type of property is easier to let and manage than blocks of flats and is cheaper for the tenant. In order to retain Rutland's vibrant communities it is essential that this is considered in terms of planning for housing growth. Since 2014, 34 new one bedroom properties have been built and this must remain a priority, alongside family housing, when considering housing numbers on new sites.

The number of new affordable homes produced will increase dramatically from 2024/25 onwards, as new 'planning gain' sites led by private developers come on stream. In addition, the 40 affordable homes at Brooke Road, Oakham and, subject to planning, 9 affordable homes at South Street, Oakham will make a major contribution towards meeting needs. Both these sites will be funded jointly by Homes England and the Council. The Council will principally use affordable housing commuted sums from developers.

The Council has also established an Empty Homes Group which meets every two weeks for half-an-hour. It includes representatives from Housing Strategy, Housing Options and Resettlement, Revenues, Finance, Legal, Peterborough City Council's private sector housing and their Empty Homes Officer. A grants scheme with £30,000 funding will be launched in 2024 to bring empty properties back into use and utilise for homelessness prevention.

6. RESOURCES

6.1 Income and Expenditure on homelessness services

The Government has provided additional resources in order to support local authorities to deliver the HRA each year.

	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Homeless Prevention Grant (ring fenced)	£64,000	£65,800	£66,000
Winter Top Up (ring fenced)	£13,000	£10,500	£11,000
Discretionary Housing Payments	£32,880	£37,787	Not known

7. CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

There has been an increase in homelessness in Rutland, which the Housing Options team is working hard with partners to address, alongside a preventative approach. The supply of affordable housing was low in 2022/23 and 2023/24, but will increase significantly in subsequent years. Many of the necessary actions are already in hand, but some recommendations, to feed into the Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy, are below.

- 1) Produce a new Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy.
- 2) Review of housing register applications
- 3) Review of Housing Allocations Policy
- 4) Relaunch Homelessness Forum.
- 5) Consider the provision of accommodation for young people at risk of homelessness/Care Leavers in Rutland.

**A large print version of this document is
available on request**



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