

Tunbridge Wells Borough Council

Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2026 - 2031

Preventing homelessness and rough
sleeping through early support and
intervention



Contents

Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2026 - 2031	1
Contents	2
Foreword	3
1. Introduction	5
1.1 The Strategic Plan 2024-2032	6
1.2 Our Priorities	7
2. National Context.....	8
3. Tunbridge Wells profile.....	10
3.1 Market Housing Costs.....	10
3.2 Indices of Deprivation.....	10
3.3 Population	10
3.4 Tenure types	11
3.5 Unemployment.....	11
4. Our priorities for 2026 – 2031.....	12
4.1 Sections 4.1 to 4.4 below details the aims and actions we will take to achieve against each of our four key priorities. Preventing homelessness at the earliest opportunity through early intervention and support.....	13
4.2 Increasing access to private rented sector accommodation	18
4.3 Reducing the use of nightly paid forms of temporary accommodation.....	21
4.4 Prevent rough sleeping and single homelessness, but where rough sleeping occurs, keeping this brief and non-recurring.	25
5. Putting our plans into practice	29

Foreword

Welcome to our Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2026-2031.

Everyone in our borough deserves a safe, dignified, and well-maintained place to live. This strategy sets out how we will support the people living in our borough who are most at risk of homelessness and sleeping rough.

Since we produced our previous Housing, Homelessness, and Rough Sleeping Strategy (2021-2026), we have decided to separate Homelessness and Rough Sleeping from Housing. This is largely due to the availability of housing data and the impact of Local Government Reorganisation, but it also gives homelessness and rough sleeping the special attention that they deserve.

Preventing homelessness and rough sleeping are important parts of the four Strategic Plan priorities set out by this council.

We have said that we will take action on climate change, sustainable development, a vibrant economy, and community wellbeing. When we provide at-risk residents with warm, properly insulated housing, in the right places, with the right infrastructure and support they need to lead healthy and productive lives, then everyone in our borough reaps the benefits.

I am proud of the progress that this council has already made on the goals set out in our previous Housing, Homelessness, and Rough Sleeping Strategy.

We have grown our team of dedicated workers helping residents through and away from homelessness. We implemented innovative schemes and tools, such as incentive payments and predictive modelling to identify and support the households which are most at risk of eviction.

Crucially, we have also increased the council's portfolio of temporary accommodation through renovating and purchasing further units. This achievement serves residents of our borough in so many ways: making our work more cost-effective, bringing empty units back into use, and keeping the standard of our housing up-to-date.

At the same time, these have been challenging years for our borough and the wider world.

In the past five years, we have still been dealing with the effects of the covid-19 pandemic—including providing support payments to households who were at risk of homelessness as a result of lockdowns. Global events such as war in Ukraine, the Middle East, and Iran have sent shockwaves through our economy. Here in Tunbridge Wells, we are not immune to rising inflation and a higher cost of living.

That makes this Strategy more important than ever. We have laid out four key aims to support our residents, with a detailed action plan for each one.

Those priorities include preventing homelessness at the earliest opportunity, increasing access to private rented sector accommodation, reducing the use of nightly paid forms of temporary accommodation, and preventing rough sleeping and single homelessness (or, where it occurs, ensuring that it is brief and non-recurring).

We have consulted extensively with residents and partner organisations to make sure that these are the right priorities and the right actions to take. This year, for the first time, our consultation also received a response from someone with lived experience of homelessness. Their perspective, and the perspective of everyone else who contributed, is vital; I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who responded to the consultation.

The consultation results showed overwhelming support for the priorities of this Strategy. Better yet, most respondents had confidence that our proposed action plans will be effective. They also called for clear communication, information, and accessibility of services for people at risk of homelessness or rough sleeping.

I hope this Strategy is just one step in making our services clear and accessible for everyone who needs them. We will continue to monitor our progress on the four priorities of this Strategy throughout its lifetime, and I have every confidence that we can continue to achieve good results for our most vulnerable residents.

Councillor Corinna Keefe - Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities

1. Introduction

Welcome to our new Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy for 2026-31.

Unlike our previous strategy, which was a combined Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy, we have decided to separate these strategies and bring forward just a Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy for 2026-31.

Since 2002 local housing authorities have been required to undertake a review of homelessness in their area, to inform the development of their Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy. This Strategy has been informed by our Homelessness Review conducted in April 2025 and aligns with the objectives of the governments 'A National Plan to End Homelessness' published in December 2025.

The Strategy must be published within a period of 5 years beginning with the day on which their last homelessness strategy was published. In 2018, the Government published a National Rough Sleeping Strategy which obligated local authorities to include a special focus on rough sleeping.

The decision not to combine both strategies this time around has been made due to the need to ensure our Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy is published to run consecutively from our 2021-26 strategy and because the Council does not currently have the necessary data to inform a review of the Housing Strategy. Furthermore, the move to local government reorganisation by April 2028 is likely to limit any housing ambitions that the Council may have over the next two years.

The requirement for local housing authorities to publish a Housing Strategy was removed in 2015.

During the lifecycle of the Council's Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2021-26, there have been several significant events global and national events including:

- recovering from the Covid-19 Coronavirus pandemic;
- the invasion of Ukraine by Russia;
- a cost-of-living crisis; and
- significant rises to the UK's annual inflation, which peaked at 11.1% in October 2022.

All of these have presented extreme challenges to the Council's Housing Service. However, alongside these challenges we have had numerous opportunities to tailor the way we work and provide services to the local community.

Summary of achievements of the Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2021-26

Some of the key achievements made include:

- Restructuring the Housing Options Team to grow the team and improve service delivery, enabling a greater focus on preventing homelessness and management of temporary accommodation.
- Securing funding through the Next Steps Accommodation Programme to renovate three council owned properties to provide six self-contained units of supported accommodation for former rough sleepers.
- Introducing a new housing Allocation Scheme to aid homelessness prevention through the awarding of additional preference to households at risk of homelessness.
- Delivering the three-year Rough Sleeper Initiative (RSI-5) programme to support rough sleepers away from the streets, including providing 'housing-led' accommodation and leasing a 7-bedroom house of multiple occupation as 'off-the-street' accommodation.
- Supporting over 50 households adversely financially impacted by the CoronaVirus pandemic and who were a risk of losing their accommodation, with £175,000 of funding awarded to the Council by the Kent Housing Group.
- Introducing a Landlord Incentive Scheme and Family Incentive Scheme to provide financial incentive payments to help access the private rented sector and prevent family home exclusions respectively.
- Acquiring 14 additional units of temporary accommodation, including bringing back into use 4 long-term empty properties, and a further 16 social housing properties to support the Afghan and Ukraine resettlement schemes, utilising the Local Authority Housing Fund and Homes for Ukraine funding.
- Launching the OneView predictive analytics data project, in partnership with KCC and Xantura, which use data to alert to the Council households identified as being at risk of homelessness and provides a single view of a household, to target early support and intervention.

1.1 The Strategic Plan 2024-2032

This Strategy is a key document that supports the delivery of the Council's [Strategic Plan 2024-2032](#). The Plan sets out the Council's strategic priorities for the next eight years that we believe will make Tunbridge Wells an even better place to live, work and play. There are four overarching priorities:

- **Climate Action** – We will continue our work to create a cleaner, green and carbon zero future for our Borough.
- **Sustainable Development** – We want the right types of homes in the right places with the right infrastructure, jobs and local businesses, whilst protecting our nature and heritage.
- **Vibrant Economy** – We want to support our urban and rural economies to thrive, creating local jobs in our communities.

- **Community Wellbeing** – We will continue to look after the vulnerable and support all of our communities to flourish and fulfil their potential to be caring, healthy, connected and inclusive.

1.2 Our Priorities

In developing this Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy, we undertook a strategic Homelessness Review which helped enable us to identify the key priority areas for the Strategy. We held two stakeholder events, a service user event for persons with lived experience of homelessness, and consulted with staff within the Housing Service, who are key to the delivery of the Strategy. We also carried out a six-week public and stakeholder consultation in 2025 to consult on the four proposed priority areas for the Strategy and an 8-week consultation between January and March 2026 on the draft Strategy.

We cannot do this work alone and working with partners is essential to ensure that we can make progress and deliver these priorities over the next five years, improving outcomes and opportunities for our residents.

The findings from our strategic Homelessness Review and responses from consultation events strongly support our four priorities:

1. Preventing homelessness at the earliest opportunity through early intervention and support
2. Increasing access to private rented sector accommodation
3. Reducing the use of nightly paid forms of temporary accommodation
4. Prevent rough sleeping and single homelessness, but where rough sleeping occurs, keeping this brief and non-recurring.

Each of these four priorities has a series of aims and associated actions to help us deliver the priorities.

The progress of the Strategy will be monitored by the Council and reported regularly to the Cabinet Member responsible for Housing and Communities and to the Housing Advisory Panel.

2. National Context

Official government statistics paint a bleak picture of the current homelessness and rough sleeping situation in England.

The number of people estimated to be sleeping rough on a single night in autumn 2025 is 4,793. This number has risen for the fourth year in a row, increasing 3% since 2024. It is 171% higher than in 2010 when the snapshot approach was introduced. The rate of people sleeping rough in England has increased to 8.2 people per 100,000 in the population in 2025, from 8.0 per 100,000 in 2024, remaining only slightly lower than the peak in 2017 (8.5 per 100,000). Nearly half (43%) of all people sleeping rough on a single night in autumn are in London and the South-East, a 2% reduction compared to 2024.

The annual statistics released for statutory homelessness assessments and activities in England between 1 April 2023 and 31 March 2024, showed an increase in the number of initial assessments made, up by 10.4% from the previous year. There were 146,430 households assessed as being threatened with homelessness and therefore owed a prevention duty in 2023-24. This is a 3.1% increase from 2022-23. The increase from 2022-23 has been influenced by a 4.6% increase, to 57,340 households, in those threatened with homelessness due to the end of an assured shorthold tenancy. Conversely, there was a 5.2% decrease in households owed a prevention duty due to family or friends no longer willing or able to accommodate.

There were 178,560 households assessed as homeless and owed a relief duty in 2023-24. This is up 12.3% from 2022-23. Similar to the increases in prevention duties, this also has been influenced by an 8.9% increase, to 22,160 households, homeless due to the end of an assured short hold tenancy. There has also been a 4.8% increase in households owed a relief duty due to family or friends no longer willing or able to accommodate.

The number of single households who were either threatened with homelessness or already homeless increased by 9.9% compared to 2022-23. There were 83,930 single households owed a prevention duty in 2023-24, a 4.6% increase from 2022-23, and 130,930 single households were owed a relief duty in 2023-24, a 13.7% increase from 2022-23.

Other notable changes in 2023-24 compared to the previous year include:

- Increase in households owed a prevention duty (up 113.9%) or a relief duty (up 251.2%) on being required to leave accommodation provided by the Home Office as asylum support. This makes up 3% of prevention duties owed and 8% of relief duties owed. This increase relates to action to clear the backlog in asylum decisions, with households becoming eligible for homelessness assistance if they are granted refugee status.
- Increase in households owed a prevention duty (up 92.0%) or a relief duty (up 79.2%) due to rent arrears from an increase in rent, although this comprises less than 1% of households owed each type of duty.

Local authorities made 94,280 main homelessness duty decisions in 2023-24, up 25.1% from 2022-23. Of these, 68.9% (or 64,960 households) were accepted as owed a main

homelessness duty in 2023-24. This represents a decrease of 2.4% compared to the proportion of main duties which were accepted in 2022-23.

On 31 March 2025, 131,140 households were in temporary accommodation, an increase of 11.8% from the same period last year. Households with children in temporary accommodation increased by 11.6% to 83,150, while adult only households increased by 12.0% to 47,990, compared to same period the previous year.

Overall, 83,150 households or 63.4% of households in temporary accommodation included dependent children, with 169,050 dependent children living in temporary accommodation. Households with children increased 2.6% from the previous quarter and increased 11.6% from 31 March 2024.

Local authorities made 94,280 main homelessness duty decisions in 2023-24, up 25.1% from 2022-23. Of these, 68.9% (or 64,960 households) were accepted as owed a main homelessness duty in 2023-24. This represents a decrease of 2.4 percentage points compared to the proportion of main duties which were accepted in 2022-23.

In relation to other main duty decisions:

- 4.2% (3,970 households) were homeless and with priority need but considered to be intentionally homeless. This represents a decrease of 0.2 percentage points compared to the proportion in 2022-23.
- 25.7% (24,270 households) were homeless but with no priority need. This represents an increase of 3.1 percentage points compared to the previous year.
- 1.1% (1,080 households) were found to be not homeless at main duty decision. This represents a decrease of 0.4 percentage points compared to the proportion in 2022-23.

3. Tunbridge Wells profile

The Borough of Tunbridge Wells is a local government district with borough status in the county of Kent. It takes its name from its main town, Royal Tunbridge Wells. The borough also contains the towns of Paddock Wood, Southborough and Cranbrook, along with numerous villages and surrounding rural areas. Large parts of the borough fall within the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and the borough has a border with East Sussex on the northern edge of the High Weald.

The neighbouring districts are Sevenoaks, Tonbridge and Malling, Maidstone, Ashford, Rother and Wealden.

3.1 Market Housing Costs

The average Tunbridge Wells house price in June 2025 was £472,000, up 13.2% from June 2024. This was higher than the rise in the South-East (2.8%) over the same period. Tunbridge Wells house prices are higher than all other districts in Kent, except for Sevenoaks, and are higher than the average in the South-East region and England.

The average rental cost in the private sector in Tunbridge Wells is £1462 per-month (ONS, July 2025), an annual increase of 10.1% from £1,328 in July 2024. It is generally more expensive to rent in Tunbridge Wells than it is in most areas of Kent, with rental prices being more expensive only in Dartford (£1524) and Sevenoaks (£1731).

3.2 Indices of Deprivation

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government publishes the English indices of deprivation, the most recent version being 2025. The indices show where residents experience significant levels of deprivation, characterised by poorer health, lower skills, educational disadvantage, fuel poverty and reduced access to quality housing. In 2025 Tunbridge Wells was ranked 212 out of 296 local authorities indicating a relatively good position in relation to levels of deprivation, but does represent a fall from 2019 where Tunbridge Wells ranked 273 out of 317 local authorities. However, the Sherwood ward and Broadwater ward contains areas that ranks amongst the most deprived 20% of neighbourhoods in the country.

3.3 Population

The Borough of Tunbridge Wells has an area of 127.9 square miles (331.3 km²) and a population size of approximately 115,300 in 2021. The population size has increased slightly (0.2%), since 2011 from around 115,000 in 2011 to 115,300 in 2021. This is significantly lower than the increase for England (6.6%), where the population grew by nearly 3.5 million to 56,489,800 and lower than the increase for the South-East (7.5%)

3.4 Tenure types

Households who own their home outright is largest housing tenure in the borough (16,324), closely followed by households who own their own home with a mortgage or loan (15,069).

In terms of the tenure, the breakdown is:

- 65.1% owner-occupied (with or without mortgage);
- 19.2% private rented;
- 14.6% social rented;
- 1.1% shared ownership;

Between the 2011 and 2021 Census, there has been a small fall in households owning their own home (0.6%) and increase in households living in private rented sector accommodation (2.3%).

3.5 Unemployment

Around 1,700 people aged 16 and over in Tunbridge Wells were unemployed in the year ending December 2023. This is a rate of 2.7%. This was a decrease compared with the year ending December 2022 when the unemployment rate was 3.5%.

Compared to the South-East this is a lower rate of unemployment at the end of December 2023, and its representative of a larger decrease in unemployment from the year ending December 2022 to December 2023. Across the South-East, from the year ending December 2022 to the year ending December 2023, there was a decrease in the unemployment rate from 3.1% to 2.9%.

The Claimant Count in Tunbridge Wells was 1690 in March 2024, up from March 2023, when there were 1595 claimants. The Claimant Count is an experimental statistic that measures the number of people who are claiming unemployment-related benefits.

The proportion of people aged 16 to 64 years in Tunbridge Wells who were claiming unemployment-related benefits was 2.4% in March 2024, a slight increase compared with March 2023 when it was 2.3%.

4. Our priorities for 2026 – 2031

Our priorities for this Strategy have been developed following the undertaking of our strategic Homelessness Review, stakeholder consultations and having consulted with service users with lived experience of homelessness.

Our four key priorities for the next five years are:

1. Preventing homelessness at the earliest opportunity through early intervention and support
2. Increasing access to private rented sector accommodation
3. Reducing the use of nightly paid forms of temporary accommodation
4. Prevent rough sleeping and single homelessness, but where rough sleeping occurs, keeping this brief and non-recurring.

These priorities are set out in more detail in this part of the Strategy and provides details of the actions we will take to deliver these, how we will deliver these, by when, and the lead officer with responsibility for delivery.

As a condition of the Homelessness Prevention, Rough Sleeping and Domestic Abuse grant funding from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), local authorities must have an action plan in line with paragraph 2.11 of the Homelessness Code of Guidance which must be published by Autumn 2026 and regularly updated.

This action plan must include:

- Targets against each metric with the homelessness and rough sleeping category and a description of how the local authority, working with partners, will achieve these targets
- Local governance structures that hold authorities and partners accountable for delivering the plan.
- How they will work in partnership across their local areas to manage homelessness and rough sleeping pressures to shift from crisis response to a culture rooted in prevention.
- Policy for ensuring suitability of temporary accommodation, following an assessment, including procuring sufficient units of temporary accommodation and allocating them.

4.1 Sections 4.1 to 4.4 below details the aims and actions we will take to achieve against each of our four key priorities. Preventing homelessness at the earliest opportunity through early intervention and support

Why is this a priority?

Preventing homelessness before it occurs is the most effective way to reduce housing instability and its associated social, economic, and health impacts. We are committed to a proactive, prevention-first approach that identifies and supports households at risk of homelessness as early as possible. The evidence from our Homelessness Review clearly demonstrates that early intervention is not only effective - it is essential.

Single-person households are particularly vulnerable, making up 56.9% of those owed a prevention duty and 78.2% of those owed a relief duty. The Council recognises the need to tailor early support to this group, including young people aged 16–24, who represent 17.7% of applicants seeking housing assistance.

Families experiencing multiple disadvantage, including poor mental health, parental conflict, financial insecurity, domestic abuse, and unstable housing, are at significantly higher risk of homelessness. Many of these challenges cluster in early childhood, and without coordinated support can escalate into crisis. Children experiencing housing instability are more likely to experience disrupted education, poorer health outcomes, and long-term socioeconomic disadvantage. Embedding a more holistic and family-centred approach to prevention is therefore essential to stopping homelessness before it occurs.

By continuing to invest in early intervention, we aim to avoid households reaching the crisis point of homelessness. This approach not only improves outcomes for individuals and families but also reduces demand on temporary accommodation and other crisis services. It is a compassionate, cost-effective, and evidence-based strategy that reflects our commitment to supporting residents before they reach the point of homelessness.

Registered Providers (housing associations) are key strategic partners in preventing homelessness, increasing the supply of affordable homes and supporting vulnerable tenants. The Council will work more closely with housing associations operating in the borough to increase stock, improve nomination pathways, and identify vulnerable tenants at risk of homelessness at an earlier stage.

Through strengthened partnership arrangements, the Council aims to ensure social landlords actively contribute to homelessness prevention, tenancy sustainment, safeguarding, and pathways for larger or extended families who may be at higher risk of future homelessness.

Evidence of Impact

Our Homelessness Review highlights the success of early intervention efforts:

- 13.1% reduction in approaches for housing advice and assistance between 2021–22 and 2024–25.
- 22% reduction in cases where homelessness was caused by the end of assured shorthold tenancies.
- 25.9% reduction in cases where homelessness was caused by family or friends being unable or unwilling to accommodate.
- Only 9.8% of prevention duties ended in homelessness in 2024–25, compared to the national average of 26.2%.
- 69.82% of prevention duties ended with suitable accommodation secured for at least six months, outperforming the England average (50.99%) and South-East average (52.19%).

These figures demonstrate that we are successfully identifying and supporting households before they reach crisis point, in contrast to rising national homelessness trends.

Target

In line with the governments new Outcomes Framework for local government, our aim is to prevent at least 69% of homelessness for applicants threatened within homelessness, by helping them remain in their existing accommodation or securing alternative accommodation. Whilst this target seeks is only a small improvement on our performance in 2024-25, it recognises that we are overachieving in performance when benchmarked against regional and national averages.

We have also set a target to relieve 55% of homelessness, during the period the Relief Duty is owed.

Our plans

We aim to strengthen early intervention to prevent homelessness at the earliest opportunity, with the aim of keeping people in their existing homes or finding a new place to live. To achieve this, we will:

Aim	How we will deliver	By when	Allocated to:
Work in partnership with the private, voluntary and public sectors, including health providers, ensuring a complete range of support and advice is accessible	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Develop early intervention multi-agency case panel meetings for client groups such as care leavers and people leaving institutions such as hospital or prison	Years 1-2	Housing Options Manager

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initiate regular panel meetings with social landlords and supported housing providers to explore and resolve key issues that threaten individuals with homelessness, which may be prevented by early intervention • Establishment of a multi-agency housing/homelessness prevention multi-agency forum with partner agencies and organisations 		
<p>Strengthen early identification and support for families and children experiencing multiple disadvantage</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Embed homelessness prevention pathways within the Tunbridge Wells Family Hubs through regular co-location and joint outreach. • Establish routine early-warning referrals from schools, health visitors, children's centres and Early Help teams where housing instability or wider family stressors are identified. • Work with partners of the Health Action Team to deliver the Tunbridge Wells Health Inequalities Action Plan 2026-29 and design a "whole family" support approach that addresses the underlying causes of homelessness such as parental conflict, 	<p>Years 1–3</p>	<p>Housing Options Manager / Housing Services Manager / Kent Family Hubs Partnership Lead</p> <p>Housing Services Manager / Health Team Leader/Health Action Team</p>

	financial hardship, domestic abuse, and mental health needs.		
Explore options to support individuals not in employment, education or training into work, apprenticeships or training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with employment and skills agencies to identify pathways into training and apprenticeships • Develop referral protocols with Jobcentre Plus and local colleges • Promote opportunities through housing advice services and outreach 	Years 2–3	Economic Development Team / Housing Options Manager
Use data and tools, such as AI and predictive analytics, to better profile risk and inform who may be at risk of homelessness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore use of predictive analytics tools to identify early risk indicators • Collaborate with Digital Team to use homelessness data for risk profiling, to aid early identification of homelessness risks for targeted intervention • Train frontline staff to interpret and act on data insights 	Years 1–3	Housing Services Manager / Housing Options Manager / Digital Team
Support tenants to sustain tenancies and through early intervention and avoid repeat homelessness.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assist households to tackle rent arrears and sustain their tenancy • Continue to develop the landlord liaison service to support landlords and tenants throughout the life of the tenancy • Explore options to fund independent advice for 	Years 1–4	Housing Options Manager / Accommodation Team Leader

	renters facing a claim for possession through the county courts.		
Reduce the number of households becoming homeless due to family exclusions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue and enhance the Family Incentive Scheme to prevent exclusions. Explore options for the provision of mediation service for persons experiencing relationship or family breakdown 	Years 1 - 5	Housing Options Manager
Strengthen partnership working with Housing Associations to prevent homelessness and support vulnerable tenants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work with housing associations to increase the supply of affordable homes aligned with evidenced local need, including family-sized accommodation, supported housing and move-on units To ensure that housing associations are utilising the Kent Housing Group Pre-Eviction Protocol and create early-alert mechanisms to identify and support tenants at risk of eviction, overcrowding, extended family occupation, or tenancy breakdown. Strengthen nominations agreements to ensure Registered Providers support vulnerable applicants, contribute to preventing homelessness, and accept a fair proportion of high-need households. 	<p>Years 1–5</p> <p>Year 1–2</p> <p>Year 1–2</p>	<p>Affordable Housing and Enabling Officer / Housing Associations</p> <p>Housing Options Manager / Housing Associations</p> <p>Housing Services Manager / Housing Associations</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage housing associations to support long-term residents to downsize, release larger homes and reduce future homelessness pressure on extended families living in overcrowded or informal arrangements 		
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4.2 Increasing access to private rented sector accommodation

Why is this a priority?

The private rented sector (PRS) plays a vital role in preventing and relieving homelessness in Tunbridge Wells. It offers a level of flexibility and speed of access that social housing cannot always match, particularly given high demand for social homes and lengthy waiting times for allocations.

However, affordability and availability remain significant barriers. The Renters’ Rights Act 2025 introduces major reforms to the PRS, and the Council must adapt its approach to ensure households can continue to access and sustain private rented tenancies under the new framework. Many households struggle to meet upfront tenancy costs such as deposits, rent in advance, and guarantor requirements, even when support is available. This challenge is particularly acute for households with low incomes, no savings, or limited access to credit.

Affordability also continues to be a major constraint. The average private rent in Tunbridge Wells is £1,385 per month, significantly higher than Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates, with a gap of up to 24.3% for four-bedroom properties. This disparity increases the risk of households being priced out of the sector without early intervention, pushing them closer to crisis.

Some landlords also remain reluctant to let properties to households in receipt of benefits, particularly due to concerns about the housing element of Universal Credit being paid directly to tenants. However, under the Renters’ Rights Act, discrimination against prospective tenants on the basis of receiving benefits or having children is now unlawful, ensuring a fairer and more transparent private rented sector.

Legislative Changes: Renters’ Rights Act 2025

The Renters’ Rights Act 2025 introduces major reforms to the private rented sector. These changes are being implemented in phases. The Council will need to ensure both tenants and landlords understand how the new framework affects them, and adapt services accordingly to maintain access to suitable, affordable accommodation.

The first phase of the Act came into force on 1 May 2026, introducing the following changes:

- All new tenancies becoming periodic, removing fixed-term assured shorthold tenancies and giving tenants greater flexibility.
- Abolition of Section 21 “no-fault” evictions, replacing them with a strengthened system of possession grounds to ensure both tenant security and landlord confidence.
- Reform possession grounds in the PRS so they are fair for both parties – landlords will only be able to evict tenants when they have a valid reason
- Ban on discrimination against tenants with children or those in receipt of benefits, making it unlawful for landlords or agents to refuse applicants on these grounds.
- Limit rent increases to once a year, to strengthened protections against excessive rent increases, including a clearer process for tenants to challenge unreasonable increases.
- Ban rental bidding and rent in advance so that landlords and letting agents will not be able to ask for, encourage, or accept an offer that is higher than the advertised rent. Landlords and agents will also not be able to request more than 1 month’s rent in advance
- Require landlords in the PRS to consider tenant requests to rent with a pet
- Additional regulatory and enforcement measures, including enhanced local authority powers and new compliance requirements for landlords.

Further elements of the Act will come into effect in subsequent phases. These include:

- Mandatory landlord registration, requiring landlords to be listed on a national register to improve transparency and accountability.
- Establishment of the new PRS Ombudsman, providing a single route for tenants and landlords to resolve disputes without the need for court action.
- Extension of the Decent Homes Standard to the PRS, ensuring all privately rented properties meet minimum quality and safety standards, implementing the review of the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS), and extending Awaab’s Law to the private rented sector.

The Government has published an [Implementing the Renters' Rights Act 2025: Roadmap for Reforming the Private Rented Sector](#), setting out a three phase approach for implementing the changes to the private rented sector. The Council will monitor implementation closely and adjust its homelessness prevention tools and landlord engagement activity accordingly.

Our plans

We aim to address these barriers and help increase access to the PRS. We will:

Aim	How we will deliver	By when	Allocated to:
Support tenants to address the barriers in accessing private rented accommodation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support with upfront tenancy costs such a rent deposit, deposit bonds and rent in advance 	Years 1–3	Housing Options Manager / Housing Options Team Leader

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support access to rent guarantor scheme to increase access to the private rented sector for low-income households. • Offer landlords a financial incentive to offer properties to households who are homeless or at risk of homelessness • Develop pre-tenancy training to best prepare and equip individuals to find and sustain private rented sector tenancies 		
Explore the development of a private sector leasing scheme and/or social letting agency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct feasibility study and stakeholder engagement • Identify funding sources and operational models to develop business case • Pilot scheme in partnership with local landlords 	Years 2–4	Housing Services Manager
Monitor the impact of the Renters' Rights Act 2025 and adjust support schemes accordingly.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthen partnerships with landlords through engagement and education on legislative changes to the private rented sector 	Years 1–2	Housing Options Manager / Private Sector Housing Manager
Improve financial resilience of households to access and sustain private rented accommodation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop budgeting and financial literacy workshops tailored to housing costs and tenancy management • Partner with credit unions to promote savings 	Years 2–4	Housing Options Manager / Financial Inclusion Officer

	schemes and financial support services		
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4.3 Reducing the use of nightly paid forms of temporary accommodation

Why is this a priority?

Nightly paid temporary accommodation (TA), such as bed and breakfast (B&B) and hotel placements, is often used in emergency situations to meet statutory duties. However, it is not a sustainable or cost-effective solution. These placements can be expensive, unsuitable for families, and disruptive to individuals' health, education, and employment. Statutory guidance also prohibits the use of B&B accommodation for families with children or pregnant women, except in genuine emergencies, and then only for a maximum of six weeks, and specifies that B&B accommodation is never suitable for homeless 16- and 17-year-olds. We are committed to reducing reliance on nightly paid accommodation by investing in more stable, appropriate housing options and eliminating the use of B&B accommodation for families.

Frequent moves or placement in unsuitable temporary accommodation can be particularly destabilising for children, affecting school attendance, wellbeing and long-term outcomes. Reducing use of nightly paid accommodation and being able to provide more stable forms of temporary accommodation is therefore central to improving outcomes for families experiencing multiple disadvantage.

Local Context and Progress

Our Homelessness Review highlights significant progress in reducing the use of nightly paid accommodation:

- Between Quarter 1 of 2021–22 and Quarter 4 of 2024–25, there was a 67.3% reduction in the use of nightly paid accommodation.
- At the end of March 2025, 82 households were in temporary accommodation, of which only a portion were in nightly paid placements.
- This reduction contrasts with national trends, where the number of households in temporary accommodation has continued to rise.
- The borough's rate of households in temporary accommodation is 1.52 per 1,000 population, significantly lower than the England average of 5.21 and the South-East average of 3.93.
- This progress reflects the Council's strategic focus on prevention, early intervention, and the development of alternative accommodation pathways.

Challenges

Despite improvements, several challenges remain:

- Limited availability of affordable, self-contained accommodation for emergency placements.
- High costs associated with nightly paid accommodation, which strain the Council's budget and divert resources from long-term solutions.
- Unsuitability for families and vulnerable individuals, particularly in shared or hotel settings.
- Pressure from rising homelessness nationally, which may increase demand for emergency placements.

Target

In line with the governments new Outcomes Framework for local government, we will seek to avoid the use of Bed & Breakfast or temporary accommodation with shared facilities accommodation for households with children, only using such accommodation in emergencies, and limiting the length of stay in this accommodation for a maximum of 14 nights.

To reduce the rate of households with children living in temporary accommodation. At the end of December 2025, the rate of households with children in temporary accommodation was 0.46 households per 1000 population. We will aim to reduce this to 0.41 households per 1000 population.

Our plans

We aim to reduce reliance on nightly paid temporary accommodation, by:

Aim	How we will deliver	By when	Allocated to:
Ensure temporary accommodation remains suitable, safe and minimise disruption to essential services, in line with statutory requirements and the Council's Temporary Accommodation (TA) Policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To review and update the Council's Temporary TA to ensure it meets statutory requirements. 	August 2026	Housing Options Manager
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete and document suitability assessments for every TA placement, including emergencies, addressing location, health, education, employment, risks, and family welfare needs in line with the Homelessness Code of 	Ongoing	Housing Options Manager / Accommodation Team Leader

	<p>Guidance and the Council's TA Policy.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apply the prioritisation criteria set out in the TA Policy when allocating in-borough units, focusing on households with welfare, educational or medical needs. • Where TA placement is out-of-borough and suitability assessment identifies vulnerabilities or safeguarding issues that will require services to be provided by the receiving authority, ensure liaison with the receiving authority prior to the placement being made, in order to ensure the necessary services or provision can be delivered. 		
<p>Improving our existing Council-owned temporary accommodation to meet the Decent Homes Standard</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct a full condition survey of all Council-owned temporary accommodation to identify areas requiring improvement • Develop a phased refurbishment programme prioritising properties with the greatest need • Ensure all works meet Decent Homes criteria including energy efficiency, safety, and modern facilities 	<p>Years 1–2</p>	<p>Housing Services Manager / Housing Options Manager</p>

<p>Continue to access funding opportunities to invest in alternative temporary accommodation, including self-contained units and houses of multiple occupation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access funding from the Local Authority Housing Fund to support capital investment in temporary accommodation • Submit bids to Homes England for grant funding under affordable housing and supported accommodation programmes • Explore opportunities to partner with registered providers and developers to deliver bespoke temporary accommodation schemes 	<p>Years 1–4</p>	<p>Housing Services Manager / Affordable Housing and Enabling Officer</p>
<p>Explore options to provide specialist and safe accommodation for survivors of domestic abuse</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with domestic abuse services to co-design safe accommodation models • Secure funding for specialist units through Homes England grants • Ensure trauma-informed support is embedded in accommodation provision 	<p>Years 2–5</p>	<p>Housing Services Manager / Domestic Abuse Co-ordinator</p>
<p>Strengthen move-on pathways from temporary accommodation to permanent housing</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop tailored resettlement plans for households in temporary accommodation • Increase access to tenancy sustainment support and financial assistance • Prioritise main duty households in temporary accommodation for 	<p>Years 2–4</p>	<p>Housing Options Manager / Housing Options Team Leader / Accommodation Team Leader</p>

	suitable social and private rented housing options		
Carry out regular monitoring of nightly paid temporary accommodation to ensure they remain safe, suitable, and compliant with statutory requirements.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that prior to any placement into nightly paid temporary accommodation, all necessary property compliance documents are provided i.e. gas safety certificate, EIRC, EPC, fire risk assessment and meets statutory suitability standards. • Undertake periodic inspections of nightly paid TA units to ensure they remain safe, suitable, and compliant with statutory requirements. 	Ongoing	Housing Options Manager / Accommodation Team Leader

4.4 Prevent rough sleeping and single homelessness, but where rough sleeping occurs, keeping this brief and non-recurring.

Why is this a priority?

Rough sleeping is the most visible and acute form of homelessness. It is often associated with complex needs, including mental health issues, substance misuse, and trauma. We are committed to preventing rough sleeping wherever possible, and where it does occur, ensuring it is brief, non-recurring, and resolved with dignity and support.

From 2027, the Council will take on new duties under the Supported Housing (Regulatory Oversight) Act 2023, which introduces enhanced oversight, quality standards and licensing arrangements for supported housing. These reforms aim to improve the safety, support, and outcomes for vulnerable residents who rely on supported accommodation, including individuals experiencing homelessness, domestic abuse, mental ill-health and long-term disadvantage.

As these duties are implemented, the Council will strengthen its partnership with supported housing providers, ensure compliance with new quality standards, and develop local oversight arrangements to safeguard residents and prevent tenancy breakdown

Local Context and Trends

Our Homelessness Review provides a clear picture of the local situation:

- The annual rough sleeper estimate for November 2024 recorded 5 individuals, a slight increase from the previous year, but still lower than neighbouring districts.
- In 2024–25, the Council engaged with 58 rough sleepers, supporting 46 individuals off the streets into temporary accommodation.
- 22 individuals were successfully resettled into longer-term housing, including social housing, private rented tenancies, supported housing, or reunification with family.
- As of 31 March 2025, 24 rough sleepers were accommodated in discretionary temporary accommodation.
- Our approach is supported by a dedicated in-house Single Homelessness Pathway Team, commissioned supported accommodation, outreach services and transitional support services, and partnerships with health and voluntary sector providers.

These figures demonstrate the Council's proactive and compassionate approach to rough sleeping, with a strong emphasis on prevention and rapid response.

Challenges

Despite progress, rough sleeping remains a complex issue:

- Many rough sleepers have multiple and overlapping support needs, requiring coordinated multi-agency responses.
- Single-person households dominate homelessness presentations, accounting for 78.2% of relief duty cases, with 55.6% being single males.
- Youth homelessness (ages 16–24) and older adults (45–64) are increasingly represented among rough sleepers.
- The availability of suitable accommodation, particularly for single people, remains limited.
- Nationally, rough sleeping has increased, and local pressures may rise without sustained funding and support.

Target

In line with the governments new Outcomes Framework for local government, we will seek to ensure that no rough sleeper in the borough becomes entrenched in long-term rough sleeping, by providing targeted needs-based support. Long term rough sleeping is defined as the number of people seen within the reporting month, who have been seen sleeping rough in 3 or more months out of the last 12 months. We will ensure that rough sleeping is not seen as the means to access support and accommodation, by targeting the prevention of single homelessness.

We have set the ambitious target to have no long term rough sleeping in the borough and to have nobody sleeping rough in the borough on a single typical night, as measured by the annual estimate/count of rough sleeping on a single night between 1 October and 30 November.

Our plans

To prevent and reduce rough sleeping and single homelessness, we will:

Aim	How we will deliver	By when	Allocated to:
Ensure rapid access to accommodation through discretionary rough sleeper placements and Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP) activation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain a flexible supply of emergency accommodation for discretionary rough sleeper placements • Ensure SWEP is activated promptly during adverse and extreme weather conditions 	Years 1–5	Housing Options Manager / Rough Sleeper and Resettlement Manager
Support resettlement into long-term housing, including social and private rented tenancies, with wraparound support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide tenancy sustainment support and access to mental health and substance misuse services • Prioritise rough sleepers for social housing allocations where appropriate 	Years 1–4	Housing Options Manager / Rough Sleeper and Resettlement Manager
Strengthen partnerships with health services, including mental	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to work in collaboration with the West Kent and Medway RSI-funded Rough 	Years 1–3	Rough Sleeper and Resettlement Manager

health and substance misuse support	<p>Sleeper Mental Health Outreach Team</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formalise referral pathways with NHS, mental health, and drug/alcohol services • Co-locate services where possible to improve access and coordination 		
Prepare for and implement new Supported Housing oversight duties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify gaps in supported accommodation types (e.g., high-need mental health, complex needs, step-down accommodation) by commissioning the undertaking of a supported housing needs assessment • To formulate and publish a local Supported Housing Strategy in line with statutory guidance. 	Year 1	Housing Services Manager
Maintain and expand short- and medium-term accommodation options, including HMOs, housing-led models, and supported housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with registered providers and voluntary sector partners to increase supported housing capacity • Identify and convert suitable properties into HMOs for single homeless individuals 	Years 2–5	Housing Services Manager / Rough Sleeper and Resettlement Manager
Develop Housing First scheme in partnership with Registered Providers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop an effective Housing First project to house the most complex rough sleeping clients with a full package of support 	Years 1–3	Rough Sleeper and Resettlement Manager

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitor outcomes and adapt the model based on client feedback and performance data 		
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5. Putting our plans into practice

Monitoring, evaluation and review of the Strategy will be carried out by the Housing Advisory Panel bi-annually to ensure that our priorities remain in the right direction and reflect local and national priorities. The panel consists of six councillors, including the Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities.

We have undertaken an equality impact assessment and we will review this annually alongside the Strategy to ensure that our services can be accessed by all members of the community, with particular relevance to people with protected characteristics, and that we meet our public sector equality duty.

The action plans set out when we will undertake our aims.

- Year 1 is 2026/27
- Year 2 is 2027/28
- Year 3 is 2028/29
- Year 4 is 2029/30
- Year 5 is 2030/31