

# Homelessness Strategy 2020-23

Lancaster City Council

October 2019

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Tackling homelessness is a key part of Lancaster City Council (LCC)'s Corporate Plan.

In it, the council states it will:

*'Prevent homelessness by providing help and advice'*

and that, by 2022,

*'Fewer people and families will be homeless'*

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## Foreword

I am pleased to be presenting to you the new Homelessness Strategy 2020 – 2023. Over the years covered by the previous strategy Lancaster, in common with all cities, saw a rise in homelessness and rough sleeping, which created a challenge to us all as a community.

Now, writing in the midst the powerful effects of Covid 19, I know that we are growing into a new situation and new ways of working. Homelessness and the extreme health vulnerabilities of people without homes cannot be acceptable to us. As a city council we are committed to making rough sleeping a thing of the past. Rather than rehousing homeless households, we will make sure tenancies are supported so as few people as possible have to leave their homes. We don't underestimate the challenges we face and we know that we have no possibility of achieving our aims without the co-ordinated, active and creative support of other agencies, of voluntary groups and of the whole community.

We have a number of key concerns which are reflected in the statistics and recommendations of the report

- Too many individuals and households come forward and ask us for support with homelessness at a late stage – working with agency and community partners, we want to reach people early and give them the confidence to work with us.
- There isn't enough suitable accommodation for rent for homeless individuals and families. We will work to provide more accommodation and to include homelessness provision in our planning for new building in the district.
- Some individuals have lived for years on our streets. We are determined to work with our communities during and post Covid 19 to find strategies, including Housing First, to provide the skilled and sensitive support individuals need to change lives and create new futures.
- Rough sleepers are vulnerable and unsafe. Through agency and voluntary service support, our district will have enough suitable accommodation so as to ensure those who are homeless do not need to sleep rough.

We cannot do without skilled city council officers, who play the key role, along with a number of agencies, in 'getting people off the streets,' and supporting them. But people newly homed also need new, accepting communities. We will work with some of our main voluntary partners to change the focus of generous local people. Rather than giving money or food on the street we would like to develop an active community that will wrap round those recovering from homelessness and inspire them to create new lives.

My thanks are due to housing and homelessness officers who despite this unprecedented time and the huge increase in work, have continued to develop and refine this strategy. Thanks to agencies, voluntary groups and third sector partners for their past advice and input in the process and to Imogen Blood Associates for the work of consultation. I look forward to much good discussion and many changes and refinements as we move on with this strategy.

Councillor Caroline Jackson - Lead Member for Housing

# Review of homelessness

## Introduction

### This commission/ report

Lancaster City Council commissioned the independent social research consultancy Imogen Blood & Associates (IBA) to conduct a Homelessness Review and to facilitate the development of a Homelessness Strategy and Action Plan.

In line with the Homelessness Act 2002 guidance<sup>1</sup>, the review has:

- Involved relevant partners, including statutory partners, voluntary sector and specialist providers, and people with lived experience, listed in Appendix B;
- Considered other relevant local plans and wider but related programmes, to assess strategic alignment, e.g. Corporate Plan, Empty Homes Strategy;
- Reviewed data on current levels of homelessness, its causes and the profile of those experiencing homelessness;
- Reviewed activities to prevent homelessness and to provide support and/or temporary/ settled accommodation to those experiencing homelessness.

### The evidence base

Between February and June 2019, IBA collected and analysed the following sources of data in order to inform the recommendations for the strategy:

- Qualitative research conducted by our team of peer researchers, with 30 people who are experiencing homelessness in a range of settings including day centre, supported housing and temporary accommodation;
- Engagement of 33 professional stakeholders in total: through an event held on 22 May 2019 at The Storey in Lancaster, attended by 24 people, and through 8 in-depth phone interviews (one of which involved two people);
- A data capture exercise conducted with 4 supported housing providers encompassing 6 projects in Lancaster and Morecambe;
- Secondary analysis of the H-CLIC and P1E data collated and published by MHCLG;
- Review of documents and data supplied by the council and its partners; and
- Review of relevant practice examples drawn from other authorities.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/homelessness-code-of-guidance-for-local-authorities/overview-of-the-homelessness-legislation>

## Progress and developments since the last strategy

Lancaster City Council's last Homelessness Strategy and Action Plan ran from 2014-19.

There have been a number of significant changes to the national policy context since 2014. This has included:

- **Homelessness Reduction Act 2017** (which came into effect in April 2018): this widened the duties of local authorities, who are now required to provide certain types of advice and support (but not necessarily accommodation) to all individuals or households who are homeless or assessed as being at risk of homelessness within the next 56 days.
- **The national Rough Sleeping Strategy 2018** sets out the government's vision for halving rough sleeping by 2022 and ending it by 2027.
- **Universal Credit (UC)** - Lancaster became a UC full service area in July 2016; there is evidence<sup>2</sup> that the implementation of UC has reduced the willingness of private sector landlords to accept people on benefits and that delays with UC payments has led to increased evictions as a result of arrears.
- **Freezing of the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates** from 2016. Research conducted by Crisis<sup>3</sup> and the Local Government Association<sup>4</sup> suggests that the gap between average rents and the LHA reduces the affordability of decent quality accommodation in the private rented sector for those dependent on benefits. This is a particular issue for the majority of those aged 35 and under who are only entitled to the Single Room Rate of the LHA.
- **The re-structuring of the probation service** under the *Transforming Rehabilitation* programme, creating Community Rehabilitation Companies to run independently of the National Probation Service.
- **COVID 19<sup>5</sup>** measures required local authorities to bring in off the streets those who were sleeping rough to protect their health and stop wider transmission including closing shelters which have not been able to comply with social distancing advice. By the end of March 2020, Lancaster City Council had complied with this and accommodated 22 individuals.

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<sup>2</sup> RLA PEARL (2019) *State of the Private Rented Sector: Finance, Tax & Supply: Quarter 3, 2019*. Manchester: Residential Landlords Association Ltd. Available at: [https://research.rla.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/State-of-the-PRS-Q3-Survey-FINAL\\_compressed-1.pdf](https://research.rla.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/State-of-the-PRS-Q3-Survey-FINAL_compressed-1.pdf) [Accessed 10 January 2020].

<sup>3</sup> Crisis (2019) *Cover the Cost: How gaps in Local Housing Allowance are impacting homelessness*: [https://www.crisis.org.uk/media/240377/cover\\_the\\_cost\\_2019.pdf](https://www.crisis.org.uk/media/240377/cover_the_cost_2019.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> LGA (2020) *Evidencing the link between the Local Housing Allowance freeze and homelessness*: Summary report:

<https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/Evidencing%20the%20link%20between%20the%20LHA%20freeze%20and%20homelessness-Summary%20report-5Feb20-pub.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/letter-from-minister-hall-to-local-authorities>

Our Priorities from the 2014-19 Homelessness Strategy and Action Plan were:

1. Preventing Homelessness
2. Developing the Council's Services
3. Facilitating Effective Multi-Agency Working
4. Developing the Private Rented Sector
5. Addressing 'Inward Migration' and Rough Sleeping
6. Monitoring Performance and Keeping Abreast of Changes in Legislation and Policy

Highlights of progress against these priorities since 2014 include:

### **1. Preventing Homelessness**

- Opened an afternoon housing drop-in for all ages at the YMCA in Lancaster. This aims to encourage engagement and access to supported accommodation for those who struggle to keep to appointments.
- Roll-out of the Duty to Refer, encouraging partner agencies to inform the council of those who are at risk of or experiencing homelessness
- Set up housing drop-in sessions at Job Centre Plus/ Department of Work & Pensions
- Established weekly CAB outreach surgery in Lancaster and Morecambe Town Halls

### **2. Developing the Council's Services**

There has been a significant increase in the provision of supported housing in Lancaster since the last strategy. This is described in more detail in appendix A, but new provision since 2014 includes:

- Oak Tree House – following a successful bid for capital funding, developed and delivered a purpose-built 23-bed hostel for people with complex needs.
- Commissioned a 6-bed refuge for women fleeing domestic violence in partnership with Lancashire County Council; and a safe-house male-only provision for up to 2.
- Domestic Violence provision is also due to be expanded to a 20-bed unit, which will include provision for 5 singles with complex needs opening in 2020. A successful bid to MHCLG with Lancashire County Council will fund complex needs and resettlement workers for the new refuge.
- New shared housing provision for young people (7 units): this has been funded using Places 4 People (to purchase properties), City Council funding (carpets and furniture), with ongoing revenue funding from exempt Housing Benefit.
- Commissioned supported temporary accommodation beds: 8 at Aldcliffe House and 4 at Portland Street, Lancaster both funded by the City Council and exempt Housing Benefit.
- 14 recovery supported housing beds at Walter Lyon House, following the closure of a Tier 4 rehabilitation facility on that site.

### 3. Facilitating Effective Multi-Agency Working

- *Lancashire Reducing Re-offending: Housing and Resettlement Protocol* agreed, in order to prevent homelessness wherever possible for prisoners on short sentences, and to coordinate the response to those released without accommodation. This is discussed in more detail in A.4.2
- *Lancashire Joint Protocol (2017-2020) Joint Working Arrangements – Meeting the Needs of Homeless 16/17 year olds* agreed to promote a consistent approach across the county. This is discussed in more detail in A.4.1. There has been no use of Bed & Breakfast temporary accommodation for this age group.
- *Homeless in Hospital Guidelines* have been produced with the Royal Lancaster Infirmary with the aim of reducing the numbers of people discharged to no/ inappropriate accommodation and to reduce delayed discharges due to housing problems.
- The Rough Sleeper/ Complex Needs Panel has been merged with the Royal Lancaster Infirmary Frequent Attenders/ Mental Health multi-agency meetings, since it was recognised that there was overlap between the cohorts.

### 4. Developing the Private Rented Sector

- Introduced a Rent Deposit Scheme: all those experiencing homelessness (regardless of priority need) have access to rent in advance and deposit payments from the Homelessness Prevention Grant. Those already in receipt of Universal Credit housing element or Housing Benefit can claim a Discretionary Housing Payment to cover rent in advance and deposit.
- Extended the accommodation finding service (discussed in more detail in C.2)
- Commissioned Pre-Tenancy training

### 5. Addressing rough sleeping (including ‘Inward Migration’)

- The City Council has funded 6 spaces on the cold weather provision at Aldcliffe House using the communal lounge;
- A number of successful bids from the MHCLG Rough Sleeper Initiative to fund:
  - Rough Sleeper Outreach Worker with bespoke budget
  - Rough Sleeper Navigators and Supported Lettings Officer (Rapid Rehousing Pathway)
  - Funding for Trauma-informed counselling for adverse childhood experiences (ACEs)
- By the end of March 2020, rehoused 22 individuals who were sleeping rough or in shelters as part of the Councils COVID 19 response.

### 6. Monitoring Performance and Keeping Abreast of Changes in Legislation and Policy

- Implementation of Homelessness Reduction Act



## Preventing homelessness: the evidence

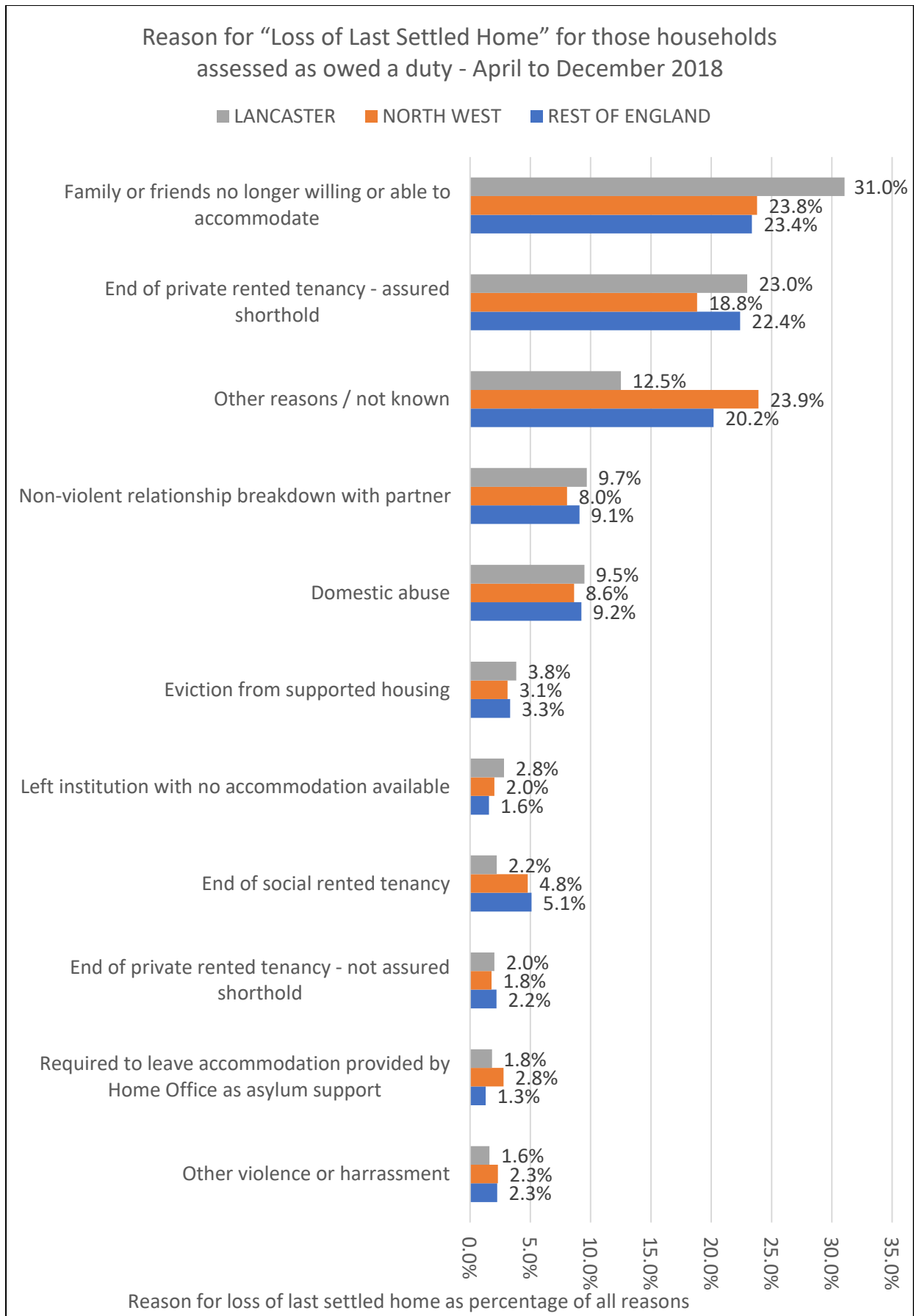
### 1. The causes of homelessness in Lancaster

#### 1.1. Statutory homelessness data

The following chart shows the reason for loss of last settled home for those owed a homelessness duty by the council between April and December 2018.

We have compared Lancaster's data (in grey) with equivalent data from the North West and the rest of England (excluding London) to provide a benchmark.

*NB: There may well be other people who are homeless in Lancaster but who have not sought help from the council, or have not re-presented during this period.*



<b>What the data shows</b>	<b>What this means for Lancaster's strategy</b>
A wide range of reasons why people are becoming homeless	There is a need for a <i>range</i> of prevention activities
Family and friends no longer being willing to accommodate is the largest cause	Mediation, education about housing options, and early intervention for families may help to reduce unplanned moves of this kind
End of private rented sector tenancy is slightly higher than regional and national averages	Ongoing interventions are needed to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• educate PRS landlords and tenants of their rights and responsibilities;</li> <li>• enforce where landlords behave unlawfully;</li> <li>• manage and support access to the PRS</li> </ul>
Eviction from social tenancies is relatively low, which suggests that the council's and local Registered Providers' tenancy sustainment offer is working	The tenancy sustainment offer to those in social housing should be continued.
A total of 42 individuals became homeless having left a range of institutions (including prison, hospital, supported/ asylum seeker accommodation)	Continue to improve clear protocols and pathways with these institutions to prevent homelessness and ensure smooth transitions wherever possible

## 1.2. Findings from the lived experience research

When we asked people experiencing homelessness in Lancaster what had caused their homelessness, the following reasons were frequently mentioned:

### *Breakdown of relationships with family, partners, friends or neighbours*

Sometimes this was due to the end of a romantic relationship, or friends/ family needing space in their homes for other purposes; sometimes this was linked to problems with alcohol, drugs or violence, or to domestic violence. In some cases, the person's own issues with offending or substance use seem to have caused the relationship breakdown, but there were examples of relationships or tenancies breaking down due to other people's issues, e.g. an adult son effectively 'cuckooing' a tenancy and turning it into a 'drug den', or people leaving their family home due to the drinking or violence of their parents or partner.

Although most of these people felt there was nothing that could have been done by services to prevent the loss of their home, it is possible that more could have been done to mediate, advise or support in some of these cases. For example, one woman told us she had been advised to give up her tenancy and move into a refuge because her violent ex-partner was due to be released from prison; she was then unable to get another tenancy due to arrears.

### *Landlord action*

Typically, this was due to a private landlord wanting to sell, modify, renovate or re-let the property at a higher rent. Some interviewees linked this directly to increases in demand within the local housing market, e.g. being able to charge higher levels of rent to people working at the power station. Sometimes private landlords had not followed the correct procedure for serving notice, but people were either not aware of this or did not see the point in trying to challenge it:

*'The landlord threw me out. He wanted me to leave anyway... I don't recall him giving me notice... He just told me to go. And he's changed the locks.'*

### *Affordability*

Several people told us they had lost their jobs, spent any savings they had and then been unable to afford the rent. Others told us about reductions in their benefits or sanctions which had meant they could not afford to pay rent. Some had racked up debts, sometimes through what they described as 'poor money management', gambling or other addictions.

### *Lack of support for longer term needs/ trauma*

A few interviewees described longer-term struggles with poor mental health, family histories involving violence and substance abuse, or traumatic experiences such as the death of a partner. These people often felt that they had received inadequate support from services historically:

*'The times where I've branched out for help because of my[gambling] addiction... I find sometimes I have tried to get that help but it's disregarded.'*

*'A bit more support mental health wise [might have helped prevent homelessness as a teenager] 'cos I'd been sort of telling people, trying to get a bit of help but nothing was happening. I still struggle with it really bad now, severe depression, anxiety and OCD as well.'*

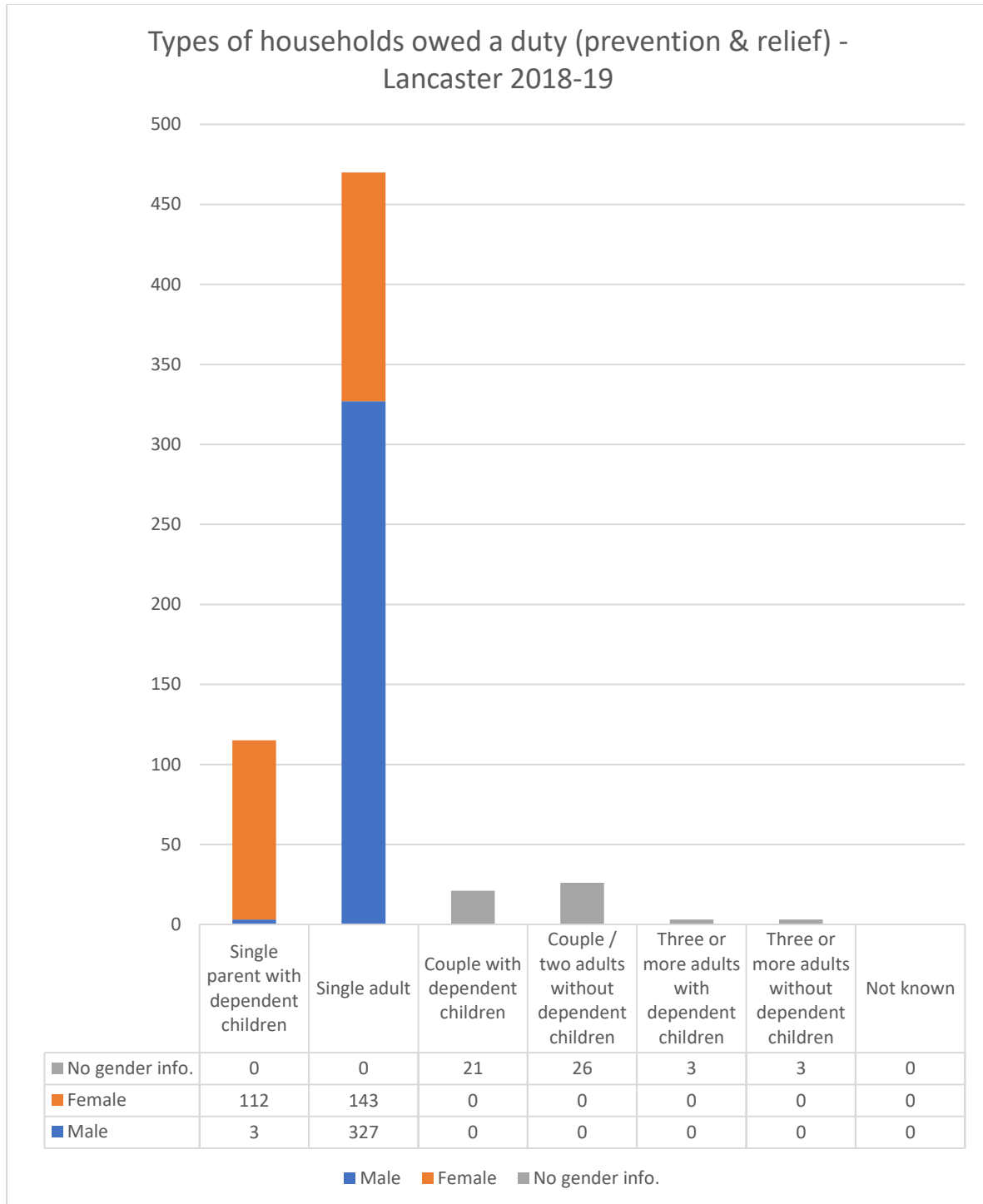
Sometimes these people felt stuck on account of the local connection rules: they did not want to return to their last place of residence because of difficult memories, fear, or a desire to make a fresh start, but had been told by the council they could not help.

### *Other reasons*

We also met people who had come into the homelessness system in Lancaster for a range of other reasons – for example, because they had been granted leave to remain and were no longer eligible for accommodation through their asylum seeker scheme; or because their previous home was no longer suitable to live in.

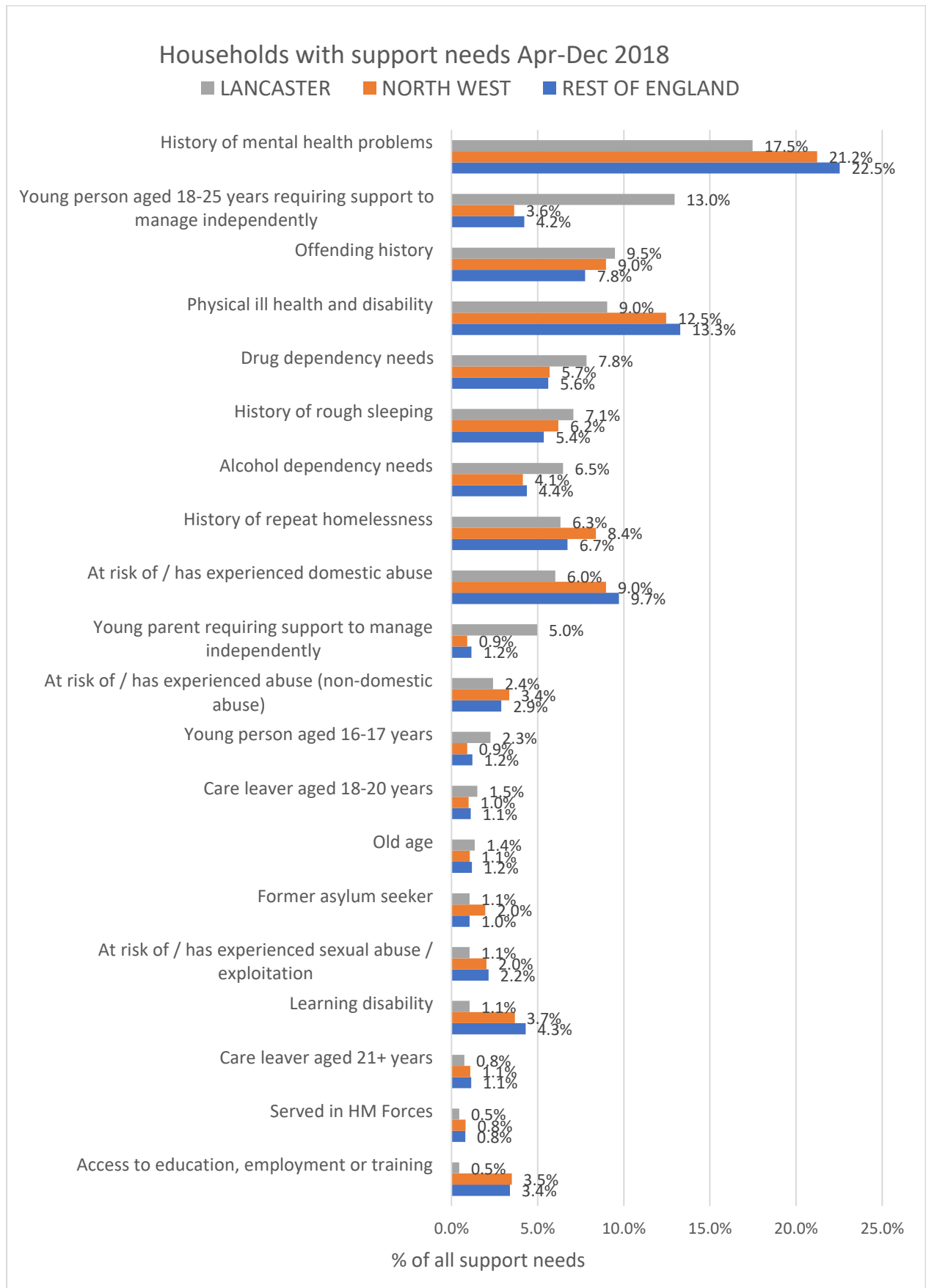
## 2. Profile of those presenting to the council

### 2.1. Types of Households



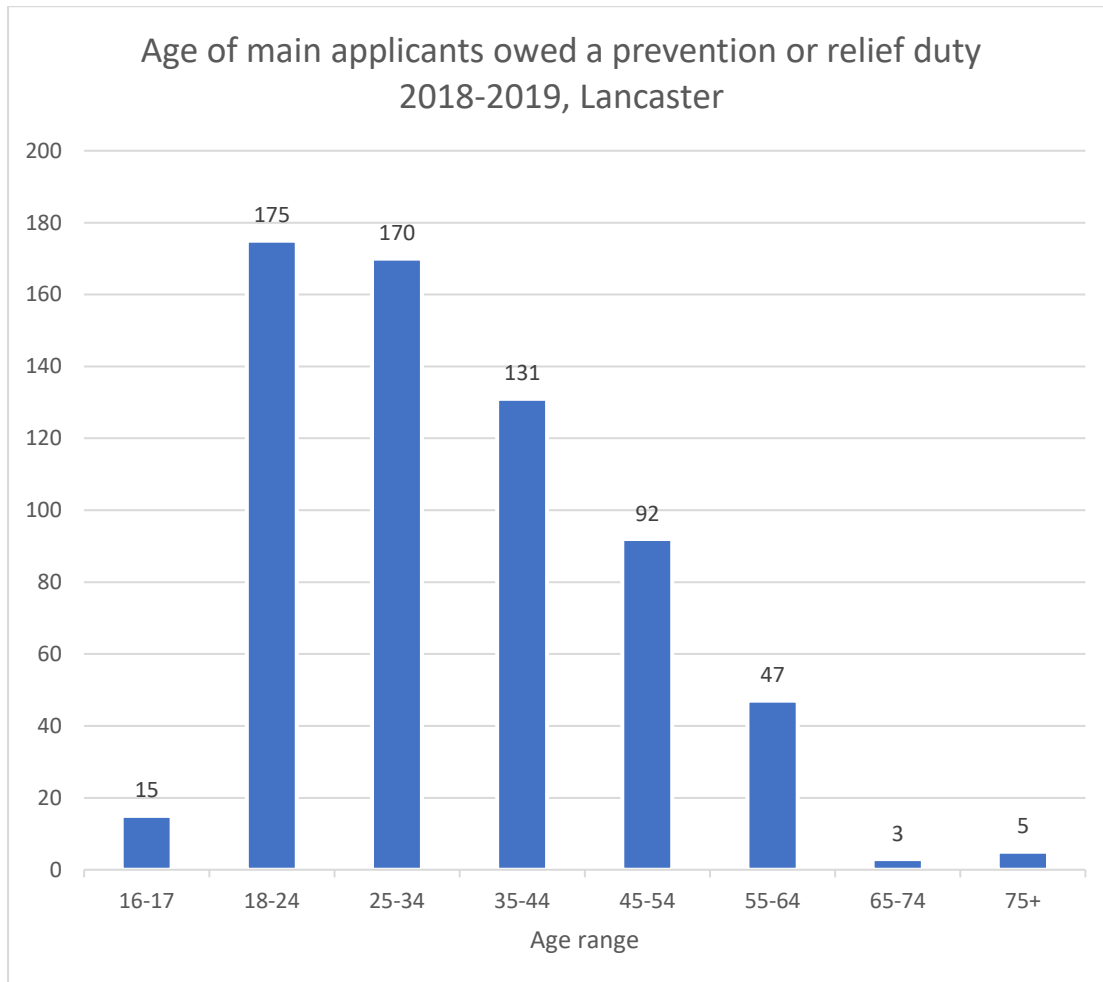
As can be seen from the above table, the largest single group presenting as homeless is that of single males, accounting for over 51% of all households owed a duty and almost 66% of those owed a relief duty.

2.2. Support needs



The nationally published data does not allow us to compare the support needs of different groups (e.g. single households versus families; those owed a relief and a prevention duty). The software currently used by the Housing Department cannot run further reports on the H-CLIC data.

### 2.3. Age



The chart above shows that the largest age groups presenting to the council are the 18-24 and the 25-34 age groups.

### 2.4. Ethnicity & Nationality

95% of main applicants owed a prevention or relief duty by Lancaster for the year 2018-2019 were white. This is in line with the census finding that 95.6% of Lancaster’s population

were white in 2011<sup>6</sup>, though it is possible that the proportion of black and minority ethnic people living in the district has increased over the past decade.

Nationality wise, 95.6% of Lancaster main applicants were of UK nationality, compared to 87.8% and 88.4% for the North West and the Rest of England respectively.

## Homelessness Strategy

### 3. How prevention is currently working

In this section, we consider further how the council and other agencies can work together to prevent households from becoming homeless in this first instance. This forms the evidence base for LCC's first strategic priority.

#### 3.1. Impact of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017

The Homelessness Reduction Act (HRA) 2017 places duties on local authorities to intervene at earlier stages to prevent homelessness in their area.

A triage system was set up within the Housing Options Team (HOT) on implementation of the HRA in order to filter and manage the additional work. People who are homeless that night are seen on the day; others are booked in for an appointment with the Homelessness Prevention Officers, typically within a fortnight.

Homelessness Prevention Officers felt that the implementation of the HRA had not caused a huge shift in practice within Lancaster – given the high demand nature of the housing market, the team had already been focused on preventing homelessness wherever possible. However, they felt that the HRA had brought a much greater administrative burden:

*'I think we spend a lot of time applying the definitions [relating to the HRA]. In the past we would just have worked with her [young care leaver who had received Section 21 from landlord, then moved in with her mother and was thus deemed "no longer owed a duty"] if and until it made sense to do so.'*

This is borne out in the statistics:

- In the year 2018/19, the council assessed a total of 673 households, finding that 638 of them were owed a duty.

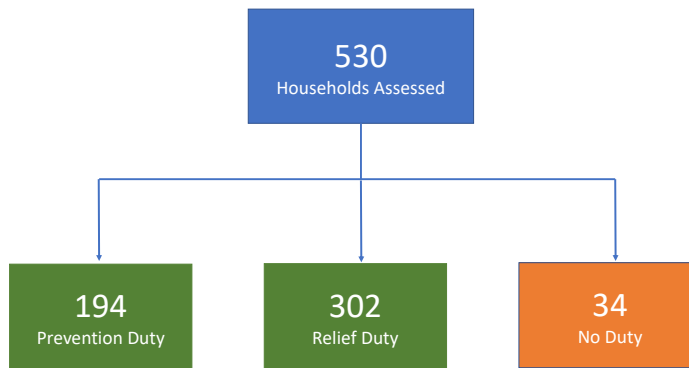
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<sup>6</sup> Lancashire's population by ethnicity, 2011 Census of Population: <https://www.lancashire.gov.uk/media/903536/census-2011-districts-ethnicity.pdf>



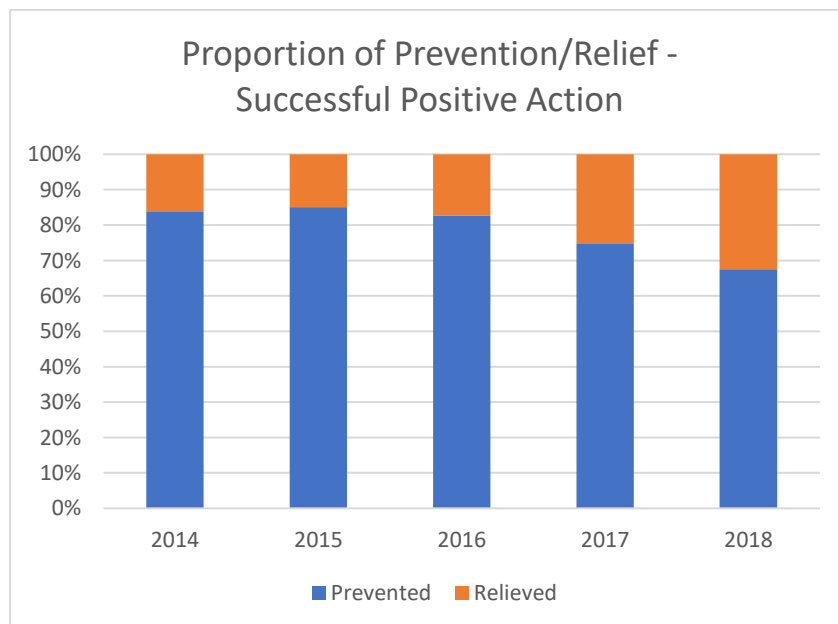
- In the previous *five* years (2014-18), a *total* of 620 statutory homelessness decisions were taken for applicant households, yet a total of 2427 positive actions were taken to prevent homelessness over that period.

The following chart shows the numbers of households assessed and the statutory decisions made as a result of these assessments during the 9 months from April to December 2018.

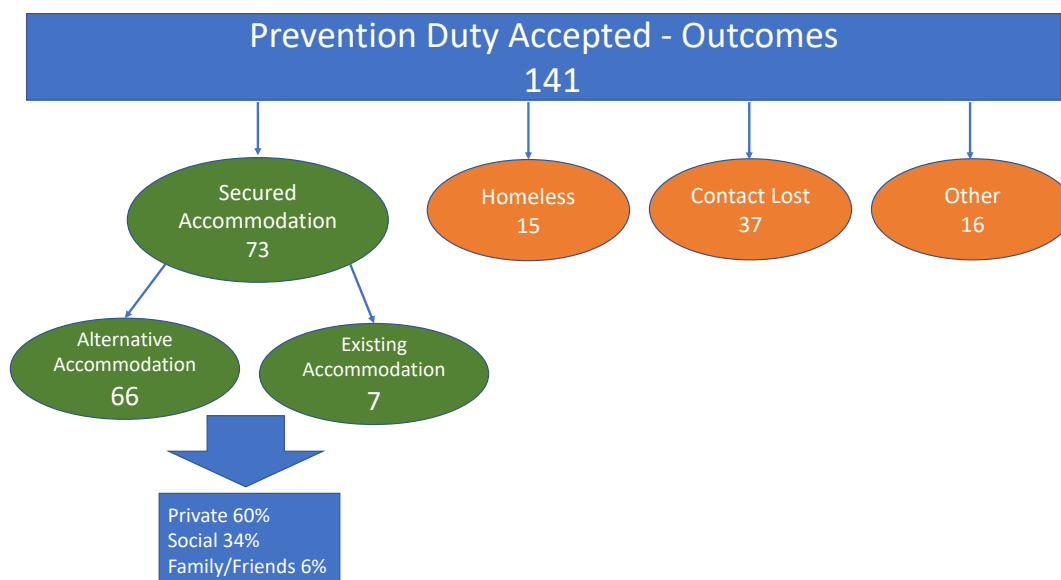


39% of those owed a duty were owed a prevention rather than a relief duty; this is significantly lower than the national (55%) and regional (51%) averages. In other words, a **higher proportion of Lancaster’s presentations are already homeless.**

It is hard to draw a direct comparison with the figures from previous years since the recording system and categories have changed since the implementation of the HRA. Nevertheless, the P1E returns from 2014 to 2018 show that a falling proportion of prevention to relief interventions (i.e. once already homeless) since 2015.



The following chart shows the outcomes secured for those owed a prevention duty in the 9 months April to December 2018:



The chart above shows:

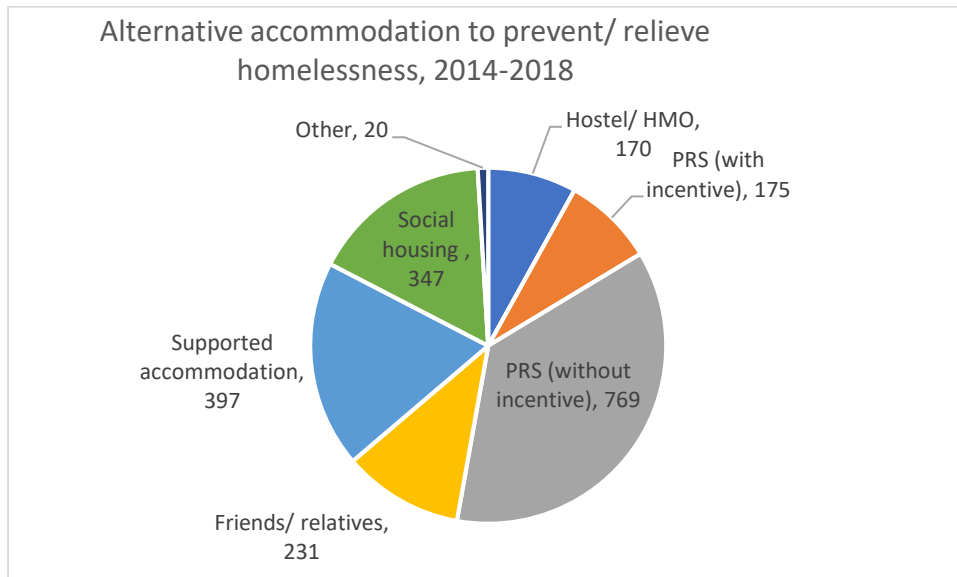
- There was a known positive outcome in 52% of Lancaster's Prevention Duty cases for the 9 months from April to December 2018. This is slightly below the national and regional averages (60%, 58% respectively).
- **Contact is lost in 26% of prevention cases**, which is significantly higher than the regional (14%) and national (9%) averages. Some of this may be attributed to the geography and relative desirability of Lancaster and Morecambe: some people may move to the area, drawn by the seaside location of Morecambe, the historic appeal and geographical location of Lancaster, or by the night-shelter provision in winter, hoping to find work and/or accommodation, moving on quickly when they realise the challenges.
- 90% of successful prevention outcomes between April to December 2018 were achieved by **securing alternative accommodation**. This is significantly higher than the national and regional averages (69%, 76% respectively).

LCC was more likely to:

- help to secure accommodation found by the applicant with a financial payment (19% of cases with a successful outcome, compared to national (12%) and regional (6%) averages) or
- secure alternative accommodation for applicants (40% of cases with a successful outcome, compared to national (29%) and regional (31%) averages).

They were less likely than the national and regional averages to provide negotiation, mediation or advocacy with landlords or family and friends to prevent applicants losing their homes.

Analysis of P1E data from the previous five years shows that a total of 904 people were supported to stay in their previous homes in order to prevent homelessness; 2109 were helped to find alternative accommodation to prevent or relieve homelessness.



### Prevention case study

A couple with three young children had got in touch with Housing Standards at LCC as they were struggling to live comfortably and affordably in their privately rented home. The property was facing extreme subsidence and they were unable to close windows and doors as a result. They were living in one room to keep warm and spending £150 a week on additional heating. The landlord was waiting for the insurer to arrange for work to commence on the property. LCC decided that the property would become inhabitable once the work began, and referred the family to the Homelessness Prevention Team. When the builders arrived, the family was moved into temporary accommodation in a terraced house. They reported that the communication with the council has been ‘really good’: ‘we’ve come here and we are warm, the kids are sleeping now’.

## 4. Preventing homelessness at key transitions

People are at particular risk of homelessness following transition from state institutions, for example young people leaving local authority care, prison leavers, people leaving asylum supported accommodation people being discharged from hospital, and people leaving the armed forces. At least 23 individuals presented to LCC as homeless during the last 9 months of 2018 as a result of leaving either prison or asylum support.

LCC was successful in its application to the MHCLG Rapid Re-housing Pathway Fund for 2018/19. This should enable the LCC, working in partnership with Fylde and Wyre District Council to pilot a Navigator post, working with the A&E Coordinator at Lancaster Royal Infirmary, Shelter and the CRC in prisons and Acorn Recovery to better coordinate the prevention of homelessness at key transition points from hospital, prison and rehab.

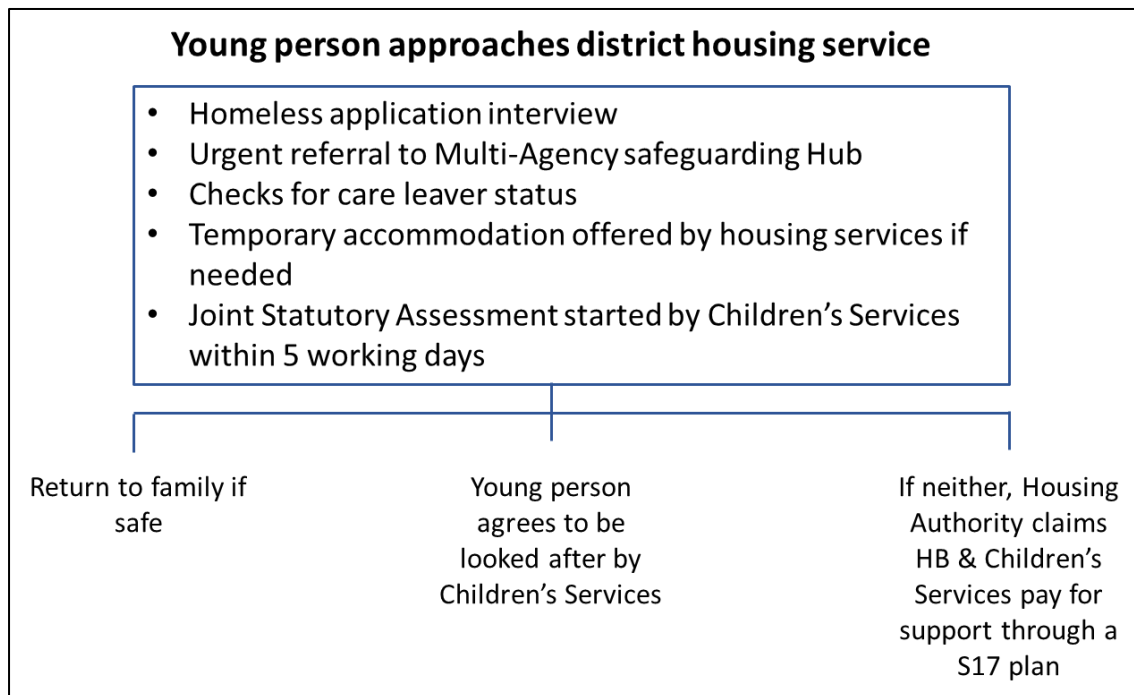
#### 4.1. Young people leaving home and/or local authority care

Younger people make up a significant proportion of those assessed by Lancaster Housing Options Team. Of the 638 owed a duty in 2018/19:

- 16 were care leavers, aged 18-20
- 5 were care leavers, aged 21+
- 17 were young people aged 16-17
- 38 were young parents requiring support to live independently
- 108 were young people aged 18-25 requiring support to live independently

*The Lancashire Joint Protocol (2017-2020) Joint Working Arrangements – Meeting the Needs of Homeless 16/17 year olds* has been developed by the County Council, District Councils and Supported Housing Providers in order to promote a consistent approach across the county. A county-wide Accommodation Resource Team (ART) was also established in order to find accommodation for homeless young people.

The following simplified process is extracted from the Lancashire Joint Protocol Flowchart:



Professional stakeholders at our event in May 2019 felt that the protocol, the Accommodation Resource Team and the monthly Young People’s Housing Panel are generally working well in Lancaster. However, they felt that more could be done by schools and Children’s Services, working in partnership with LCC, to educate young people and their parents about their housing options. Sometimes young people and their parents believe the council will provide a permanent tenancy if the young person leaves home.

The county council is conducting a review of the Lancashire Protocol, from February 2020.

Young care leavers should be identified through the protocol where they present as homeless to LCC. However, *preventing* such housing crises wherever possible for this vulnerable group is a priority for the district and county councils.

The Lancashire Leaving Care Development Officer explained that the county is working to implement the Care Leavers Accommodation and Support Framework (developed by Barnardos and St Basil’s<sup>7</sup>). This emphasises the importance of planning – both with individual young people, and in relation to developing a full local offer of housing and support options for them. As we see in section 5.4, there is a plentiful supply of supported housing for young people in Lancaster and Morecambe; however, professional stakeholders suggested some gaps in the *type* of provision available, especially in relation to :

- Self-contained but potentially highly supported flats where young people can get a taste of independent living and build their skills and resilience
- A flexible floating support offer to prevent homelessness and support move-on.

#### 4.2. Prison release

Shelter is commissioned to provide *Through the Gate* housing advice and needs assessment in prisons across Lancashire and Cumbria. Shelter workers aim to meet with and assess the needs on return to the community of those who are 12 weeks away from release.

The *Lancashire Reducing Re-offending Housing and Resettlement Protocol* has been developed by councils and criminal justice agencies across the county in order to plan in advance, wherever possible, to prevent homelessness. The LCC single point of contact (SPOC) is notified where people are likely to be released with no fixed abode – though it is, of course, hard to predict where people will choose to go on release.

LCC offers housing options assessments over the phone to prisoners identified through this process, and can put people on the housing register at this stage. Where people are serving short-term sentences, they will aim to retain the tenancy if possible.

At the Stakeholder event in May 2019, concerns were expressed about delays in decision-making and communication between Shelter, probation, prisons and the council. It was felt that opportunities to prevent homelessness on release from prison were being missed as a result of these. In the past, any agency could make referrals to Oak Tree House (see section 5.4); however, this had resulted in an unmanageable waiting list so it was decided that all referrals should come through LCC. This was felt to be working better from the provider’s

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<sup>7</sup> [https://stbasils.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Finalframework2a\\_CareLeavers\\_A4.pdf](https://stbasils.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Finalframework2a_CareLeavers_A4.pdf)

perspective; however, it was causing frustration by those working in the criminal justice system who felt that the council was acting as a 'bottleneck' in the process and that assessments were being unnecessarily duplicated.

In order to improve multi-agency working at this key transition point, the council and its partners have since established a Prison Release Panel, which had met once at the time of writing. Additionally, LCC now also runs a fortnightly housing advice drop-in at West Road Probation.

#### 4.3. Leaving asylum seeker support

Lancaster has become a dispersal area for asylum seekers in the last few years and the number of people being placed in the town has increased substantially, from around 5 at the start of the programme to over 100 currently. 9 of those assessed by the council under the HRA during 2018/19 were known to be former asylum seekers.

There are arrangements in place with local charities which support asylum seekers and refugees (Global Link and RAIS) that they will refer people who have been given leave to remain and have not been able to find accommodation to the Home Options team. Global Link fed into our review and praised the council for responding with limited resources to this rapidly changing landscape with increased numbers of asylum seekers and refugees locally. Remaining challenges from their perspective included:

- Lack of interpreting service available during homelessness assessment;
- Lack of funding for advocacy/ support from Global Link to attend homelessness assessment with the person; and
- A need for more regular multi-agency forum meetings, with a wider focus than on the Syrian Resettlement Programme.

#### **Case study**

We interviewed one asylum seeker who had been granted leave to remain and, once her asylum seeker accommodation had come to an end, had been supported by the local charity RAIS to present to LCC as homeless. She had found the uncertainty around where she would live during the 28 days' notice period 'very stressful'; however, on the day this expired, the council 'did not let me down'. She was placed at Oak Tree House – where she was quickly moved to a self-contained flat and is now looking for PRS accommodation outside of Lancaster. LCC has offered to pay deposit and first month's rent in advance, which represents good practice in this scenario. Staff at the hostel felt that it was not ideal supporting a refugee within an accommodation project for people with substance use/ mental health issues; though the self-contained flats were a great asset.

#### 4.4. Hospital discharge

There are a number of positive initiatives in place to promote multi-agency homelessness prevention with and within local NHS services. These include:

- A monthly Complex Needs Panel Meeting to jointly discuss individuals, which is attended by representatives of Accident & Emergency, the council homelessness team and the police.
- Bi-monthly 'Familiar Faces' meeting, at which individuals with complex needs (some but not all of whom are homeless or insecurely housed) who are attending A&E regularly are discussed. This is attended by the police, alcohol and mental health liaison team, community alcohol/ substance abuse teams (Inspire/The Wells).
- Alcohol and Mental Health Liaison Team representatives, based in A&E, who can identify, support and refer people with these issues. On average, they see two or three people experiencing homelessness a week.
- Hospital Discharge Guidelines in place: these include the addition of an alert onto the hospital's patient monitoring system where an individual is known to the Complex Needs Panel.

However, health professionals engaged in this review identified a number of ongoing challenges, including:

- People presenting at A&E in crisis but not wanting to access wider support services/ change their lifestyles – some self-discharge, some behave in ways that staff or other patients find challenging. Often these presentations take place out of hours.
- Cuts to mental health services and staff shortages in A&E mean that fewer staff are struggling to cope with increased demand from those with mental health/ complex needs.

#### 4.5. Leaving the armed forces

Data for 2018/19 show 3 people presenting to the council as homeless or at risk of homelessness as a result of leaving the armed forces. A recent national study<sup>8</sup> into the needs of this group suggests that, although featuring in small numbers within the statutory homelessness statistics, this group often face complex housing pathways. They are often not identified as veterans within generic homelessness services and are not always linked into specialist services as a result.

Lancaster benefits from a FirstLight Trust Cafe Hub, which provides emotional and social support, alongside advice and assistance with housing, benefits/ debts, health and employment for veterans and those who have served in the emergency services. However, there is at present no dedicated housing-related support offer for this cohort in the area.

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<sup>8</sup> Centre for Housing Policy (2018) Accommodation for Single Veterans: Developing Housing and Support Pathways, <https://www.stoll.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/FINAL-REPORT-ON-HOUSING-FOR-SINGLE-VETERANS-9-Feb-2018-EMBARGOED.pdf>

#### 4.6. Leaving violent or abusive relationships

56 people were assessed by the council's Housing Options team during 2018/19 as a result of domestic abuse. Given this relatively high level of need, LCC has worked in partnership with the County Council and the specialist provider Safenet over the past five years to commission a range of supported housing options for those fleeing domestic violence. A six-bed refuge was established around five years ago and this has recently been replaced by a new 20-bed facility. There is also a 2-bed safe house for men experiencing domestic violence.

#### 4.7. Older people

5 people aged 75 years and over and 55 people aged 55 years and over presented to LCC as homeless or at risk of homelessness during 2018/19 (MHCLG data). Citizen's Advice trends data for 2019 shows a slight (3%) increase from the previous year in the proportion of older people approaching their North West advice centres due to being threatened with homelessness.

Homelessness is not just about not having a roof over your head; it can also be about living in conditions which affect your health.

Key trends affecting this age group include:

- Numbers of older people in the private rented sector are projected to increase by two thirds over the next twenty years<sup>9</sup>. With less security of tenure, greater risk of fuel poverty, poor housing conditions and more barriers to adaptations, this can put people at greater risk of homelessness or of living in unsuitable accommodation.
- Increasing numbers of older people with complex support needs who may also experience housing instability, e.g. older drug users, older people with learning disabilities (who are at greater risk of a diagnosis of dementia).
- Low income, older home owners who may not be able to afford repairs, heating and adaptations to their properties and may have limited options for downsizing. The North West of England has a particularly high proportion of older people living in owner occupied properties deemed non-decent<sup>10</sup>.

LCC recognises the importance of working in partnership with the County Council to ensure that there are a range of affordable and accessible housing options, including support and care where needed, and access to good quality advice about these options if homelessness for older people is to be prevented.

To this end, cabinet is currently considering the merits and opportunities for LCC to develop its own extra care housing scheme.

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<sup>9</sup> Independent Age (2018) Unsuitable, insecure and substandard homes: the barriers faced by older private renters: <https://www.independentage.org/unsuitable-insecure-and-substandard-homes-barriers-faced-by-older-private-renters>

<sup>10</sup> Northern Housing Consortium (2018) The hidden costs of poor quality housing in the North, p.10: <https://www.northern-consortium.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/The-Hidden-Costs-of-Poor-Quality-Housing-in-the-North.pdf>



#### 4.8 Duty to Refer

Since October 2018, a range of public bodies including prisons, secure estate and probation, NHS, social care and Jobcentres, are required to identify and refer a service user who is homeless or who may be threatened with homelessness, to a local housing authority of the service user's choice, with their consent.

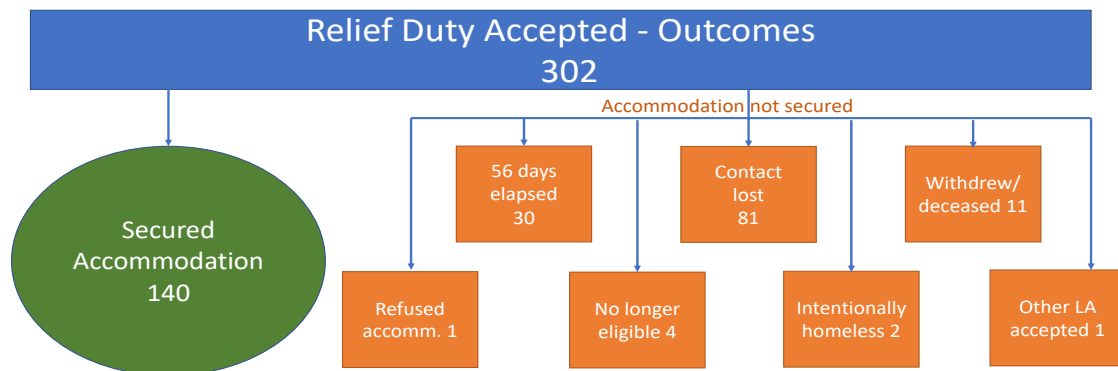
Figures supplied by the Department of Work and Pensions show 51 people were referred to LCC under the Duty to Refer (i.e. because they were homeless or at risk of homelessness) by local Jobcentres between November 2018 and February 2019 (i.e. around 12 or 13 people a month, on average). This rate is similar to Blackpool, but lower than Preston, both of which have similar populations. DWP fed into this review that they would welcome opportunities for more active partnerships with Housing Options, e.g. individual and/ or general feedback on those referred via DTR, closer coordination of case management, or opportunities to raise awareness about the circumstances in which an Alternative Payment Arrangement can be applied for.

## 5. Tackling rough sleeping and supporting people out of homelessness: the evidence

In this section, we consider the response of the council and other agencies to those who are already experiencing homelessness. This forms the evidence base for LCC’s second strategic priority.

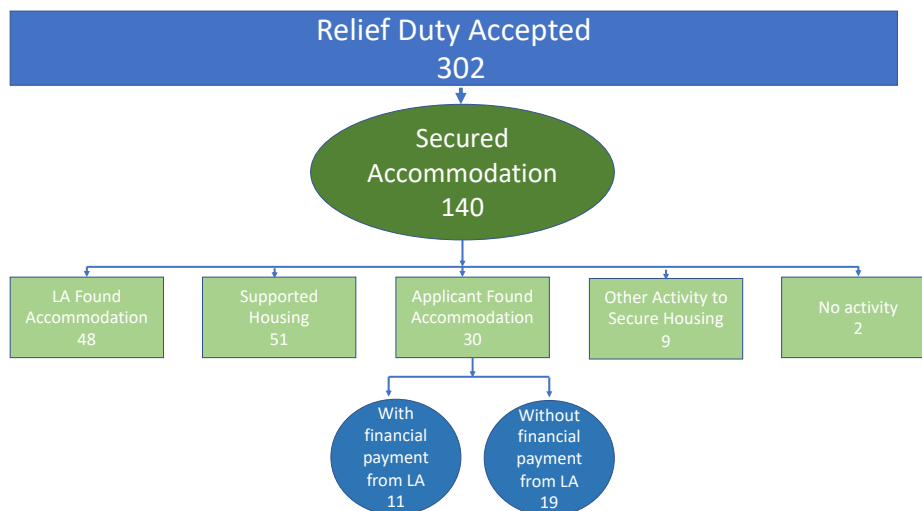
### 5.1 Relief Duty Outcomes

The following diagram shows the relief duty outcomes for the 9 months from April to December 2018.



52% of those owed a relief duty, secured accommodation which might reasonably be expected to last for 6 months or more. This positive outcome is higher than both regional and national averages (at 44% and 46% respectively).

‘Contact lost’ is high for those owed a relief duty: accounting for 30% of cases, compared to 18% in the North West and 14% in the rest of England.



36% of those securing accommodation via a relief duty did so by a placement in supported housing; compared to 21% regionally and 24% nationally. Since the statistics for support needs (Section A2.2) suggest that support needs of those presenting to LCC are no higher than average, we must assume this is being driven by the increasingly high demand housing market in Lancaster. Ensuring alignment between the homelessness and wider housing strategies, policies and processes is therefore critical for LCC if it is to move towards a more 'housing-led' approach, in which people are resettled in ordinary housing as quickly as possible.

## 5.2. Rough sleeper statistics

Whilst official rough sleeper count statistics for the LCC district<sup>11</sup> for the past nine years have identified between 4 and 8 rough sleepers on the census night. The methodology for the count is often criticised for under-counting rough sleepers and the numbers in LCC are too small to identify trends with any confidence. However, the numbers identified on census night dropped from 8 in 2015 and in 2016 to 4 in 2017 and 2018, before rising again to 6 in 2019.

Demographic data collected from the rough sleeper count shows that of the 6 people identified in autumn 2019, 5 were male, 1 was female. They were all UK nationals aged over 26.

This section should be read in the context of the current COVID 19 measures. At the end of March 2020, 22 rough sleepers or those in shelters where social distancing could not be complied with were provided with accommodation. Lancaster City Council is committed to keeping this group of individuals off the streets in the long-term and with the support of agencies and partners developing strategies to support this. A key focus of this strategy will be focussing on ensuring no one needs to sleep rough in the District in the future.

## 5.3. Feedback from people experiencing homelessness

### *Need for clearer information about what is available*

Most people interviewed told us that they had found out about homelessness services by word of mouth: 'it's a small place'. Some were concerned that it had taken them a while to realise that help was available or wondered what would happen to others who did not know the 'system' or someone else who knew it:

*'There's nothing that says, if you need a helping hand, there's this place'.*

### *Experience of Housing Options Team*

Interviewees' feedback regarding the council's response varied considerably, depending on the outcome. Where temporary accommodation could be provided quickly, the feedback was very positive:

*'10 out of 10'*

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<sup>11</sup> MHCLG (2020) Annual Rough Sleeping Snapshot in England: Autumn 2019

*'I went to the council and I told them I was homeless and I don't know what the guy was called in there but he was a really good help.'*

Others encountered a range of barriers, from not being able to show proof of identity or of local connection, to not being able to complete the forms, or being told to come back much later. Some of those who do not have – or could not easily evidence – a local connection said they experienced a lack of empathy from the council. Some felt that their stories were not listened to, they were flatly told 'We don't have duty, so we can't help you', or had a sense that they were just being 'processed' through the system.

*'I think they [the council] could be a bit more understanding, you know. When I went to see them it was more or less, "oh, away you go", you know, "come back another time"... I think that's the council policy.'*

*'They [the council] should just listen to the background, you know...'*

### *Barriers facing those with complex needs*

We heard how systems are often experienced as complex and inaccessible by people who are homeless, especially those with multiple needs and/or those who are digitally excluded. This includes applications for housing, homelessness presentations, the Jobcentre. People described feeling fatigued and frustrated by having to 'self-serve' online and/or go 'back and forth' to appointments.

*'...when they're telling you to come back and come back and come back... You give up in a way and... you just get caught up in it.'*

*'I speak to a man [in the job centre], "You know all the jobs, can you show me what jobs are out there?". No, no, no, they expect you to search for it, which is fine. Help me, you know and they don't.'*

*'I have a meeting once a fortnight with a [council] housing officer, which isn't a great deal of good to be honest. "What have you done this time?" "Well, I've looked for this, this and this." "Oh, okay then." And that's pretty much it.'*

This is part of a wider and well-evidenced<sup>12</sup> pattern of barriers in welfare and healthcare systems for those experiencing homelessness who have multiple needs, poor mental health are survivors of trauma or loss, and/or are lacking in confidence or resilience. The experience of navigating their way through the 'hoops' of the system can be so overwhelming and dispiriting, that it can result in people feeling 'stuck' and unsupported:

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<sup>12</sup> See for example, MEAM (2018) Multiple needs: time for political leadership at <http://www.meam.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Multiple-needs-time-for-political-leadership.pdf>

*'Everything is hard work. The whole world. The world is hard work and everybody can handle it but I can't... I had all this stuff... when I was a kid stuff was really hard... It was horrible....I thought I'd go to work and do all that stuff, try build a family but then it just impacted on me, it came back to me. Now I'm older it's just the way things are now.'*

### *Engaging rough sleepers*

During 2018/19, the combination of a reduction in proactive outreach and the introduction of a fixed appointment system at the Home Options Team was felt to have created particular barriers for people with complex needs who can find it particularly difficult to remember appointments or 'self-serve':

*'They used come and just check to see if you was alright. This time, this winter, they wasn't even coming to Christ Church..... they used to come like once a week with the police, the council, you know and check. This time they didn't even come once'.*

The council has taken steps during 2019/20 to make their Housing Options service more accessible to rough sleepers and/or those with complex needs. As we saw in the section on *Progress since the last strategy*, this has included:

- Re-commencing their outreach service, with 2 or 3 sessions per week
- Opening an afternoon housing drop-in for all ages at the YMCA in Lancaster in order to encourage engagement and access to supported accommodation for those who struggle to keep to appointments.
- Securing MHCLG funding to develop a hub and employ navigators and supported lettings workers to work with rough sleepers.

### *Response of Police and wider public*

There seems to be a high degree of interaction between the Police and the town centre homeless community. This tended to be viewed quite positively by members of the homeless community, who reported that the Police response to them was – for the most part – fair:

*'I think the police they are worried what it looks like to the general public so if you're there and you're not causing any problems, they'll leave you alone... why the police come over is not because we're homeless and they want to cause us trouble it's because of a general duty... the police, they've helped me. '*

However, people also spoke of the stigma and threat they experienced from some members of the public and when using mainstream services.

*'They kind of paint every homeless person with the same paintbrush... I can't say everyone but that has been an experience in the library that you get judged, but I'm not there for the judgement, I'm there [to use the internet] to better my life by getting a job.'*

Physical safety is a concern, mostly for rough sleepers, particularly women:

*'I'm concerned about people who are passing by they... get aggressive with you because they think that you're some sort of complete garbage.....even in the centre now there are cameras, there are cops but they're not there all the time...So, its best if you find a place that is safe'. (Female rough sleeper)*

### *Support valued by those experiencing homelessness*

People told us they valued emotional support:

*'I still have ongoing support [from Victim Support] with [domestic violence issues]...They're doing the best they can and it does help knowing there's somebody there that understands what I'm going through.'*

*'I didn't speak to anyone in here 'cos anxiety wise and now, now I'm so confident being here and that is down to the project workers here [in supported housing]'*

People told us that the practical support, such as food and bedding, they received from Edward Street, The Ark, faith groups, food banks (e.g. Olive Branch), was key to survival.

Many said they valued help accessing the internet or completing applications:

*'It stresses me out when I'm looking on the computer for a place, it just stresses me out because I can never, like, I don't know how people do it just to look at a flat and then go for it. The staff [in supported housing] know, they're helping with it'.*

*'My key worker [in supported housing] has helped me get my Ideal Choice Housing application set up so I can, soon I can start bidding for places of my own'.*

### *Priorities of those experiencing homelessness*

- Access to affordable housing: Many people spoke about the barriers they faced finding permanent accommodation, especially if they are under 25 (we consider this in more detail in the next section).
- Some said they needed practical help to access the internet in a safe space where they would not be judged:

*'A facility to be able to apply for stuff online so, a constant place to charge my phone, internet access'*

- Some people needed a more trauma-informed support, with less judgement:

*'I think just people talking to me and treating me like a human being, not looking at me, prejudging me before you've even spoken to me... they look at the substance we use or the addiction that takes over. 'What made you take those drugs?' is the question they should be asking.'*

## 5.4. Supported Housing

Key facts and figures from our survey of supported housing providers is included in the table below. This covers the period 2018-19. See Appendix A for a more detailed description of each project.

Project name	Aldcliffe Ho./ Portland St.	Oak Tree House	Barnardo's Foyer	Safenet DA	Walter Lyon	Total
Bed spaces	12	23	29	6	14	84
Target group	Homeless & Local Connection	Homeless/ complex needs	Homeless 16-24 years	Women & children dva	Substance use, now abstinent	
% of referrals accepted	48%	66%	82%	21%	46%	
Referral sources	100% LCC	82% LCC (rest Fylde & Wyre DC)	72% LCC (rest County Council)	Wide range (¼ are local residents)	Wide range, including self	
Funding	HB only	HB + County Council	HB + County Council	HB only	HB only	
Number of new people accepted	53	67	59	24	29	232
Occupancy rate	87%	96%	Not given	96%	Not given	
Average length of stay	1.5-3 months	3 ¾ months	Up to 1 year	2.5 months	6 months	
% planned move-on	50%	55%	93%	96%	55%	

In addition to the survey respondents:

- Sanctuary Housing: provides a further 8 shared and 4 self-contained supported units for people with complex mental health issues
- Adactus/ Jigsaw: provides 6 dispersed houses for homeless families and 11 self-contained flats for 16-18 year olds.
- Barnardo's provides a number of other housing-related support projects for 16-18 year olds, including care leavers in the area in addition to the Foyer (for which data is captured above). These include supported lodgings and house shares.

## Feedback from professionals and people with lived experience

Strengths within current provision:

- The design and layout of Oak Tree House (including self-contained flats) means that couples with complex needs, people completing community detoxification, former asylum seekers or others who need more space and privacy can be accommodated.
- Many of those we interviewed praised the relationships they had with support staff and the practical support they had received from them, in relation to different aspects of their lives – housing, health, relationships, benefits, shopping, etc.

*'The staff here [supported accommodation] will help me look for flats. The staff are incredible. They've put me onto tenancy ready training, which can work as a landlord reference... They also help actually 'with getting benefits. We're really lucky to have it'*

Areas for development:

- Oak Tree House provides some resettlement support to those moving on in a planned way; however, there was generally felt to be a need for floating support and social support for those moving from supported to independent housing.
- All of the accommodation for homeless adults is based in Lancaster, not Morecambe, which can be a barrier for some people.
- Higher levels of rents in supported accommodation can be a barrier to those who are in work or are trying to get back into work.
- Congregate supported housing may not be suitable for some people with higher levels of complex needs, especially when well-established groups are placed together.

*'The trouble is when you come to these places [supported accommodation], they're all, you know you're walking back into like addictions and stuff like that... Well you fall back into the wrong crowd again'*

### 5.5. Temporary accommodation

LCC's returns to MHCLG for households in temporary accommodation (TA) for 2018/19 show some ongoing use of Bed & Breakfast, including for families with children, with between 2 and 5 households in this type of accommodation at the end of each of the three quarters for which data is published.

LCC has had success in reducing its use of Bed & Breakfast accommodation during the last strategy by setting up an arrangement with Adactus (Jigsaw Group) which supplies 6 dispersed family homes to provide TA for homeless families.



## 6. Access to settled housing: the evidence

Access to affordable and secure housing must be at the heart of the homelessness strategy. In this final section, we consider the council's strategic response to ensuring those who are homeless and / or in housing need can access accommodation.

### 6.1. Challenges and barriers

Throughout our engagement, we heard a number of recurring challenges with access to housing.

- **Barriers created by Welfare Reform**, for example:
  - Those under 35 restricted to a reduced rate of Housing Benefit (Local Housing Allowance)

*'Because I'm 34, I don't qualify for the full amount of housing benefit.'*

- Bedroom Tax meaning that a young woman who is currently living without her children but has them to stay and is fighting for custody can only get Housing Benefit for a bedsit; and
- Private sector landlords' reluctance to accept people on Universal Credit.

*'I've been looking for flats, private rent flats that accept benefits but there's not much out there to be honest'*

- **Financial barriers** in relation to deposits, fees, guarantors or payment of former tenant arrears. This was compounded for many by a lack of work opportunities or other barriers to finding work.
- **Local housing markets:** Lancaster has limited affordable properties for rent, given increasing demand from students and professionals for rented accommodation and the high cost of land. Morecambe has more affordable housing but properties can be of lower quality, concentrated in the deprived West End, which means they are not suitable for some people, especially those with complex needs.

Despite these challenges, there is much that is positive to build on in Lancaster and Morecambe, including:

- A successful PRS Procurement model, which improves access to and sustainability of private rented sector tenancies;
- LCC's ongoing ownership and direct management of a considerable amount of diverse housing stock;

- Local Registered Providers (i.e. housing associations) who are developing in the area and may be interested in further partnership working with the council in relation to Housing First, leased Temporary Accommodation, etc.;
- Synergy with the council's Empty Homes strategy which has already generated some new lets for previously homeless households;
- A strategic commitment to the development of affordable housing through the Housing Strategy, which is in the process of being renewed.

## 6.2. PRS Access/ Social lettings

### Calico Accommodation Finding Service

Calico is commissioned by LCC, following a successful pilot, to broker suitable PRS tenancies for people with a local connection referred by the Housing Options team. Their part-time (24 hours per week) Support Officer provides move-in and some ongoing ad hoc, low level support to both tenants and landlords, certainly for the first six months, sometimes longer. In the past, the scheme had a small budget for bonds and deposits, but more recently the officer has applied for Discretionary Housing Fund payments, Homelessness Prevention Fund and charitable funding to cover direct costs.

The worker received 179 referrals during 2018/19, 64% of whom were under 35. Of these:

- 17% (31) were housed by Calico into private rented tenancies
- 10% found their own privately rented accommodation having received some information from Calico
- 46% lost contact or declined the service
- The remainder had a mix of housing outcomes, from supported, to social housing, to remaining with families.

The service's success in finding accommodation should be seen in the context of the increasing challenges of persuading landlords to continue (or start) accepting tenants who are claiming Universal Credit, especially where they have a history of failed tenancies, in an increasingly buoyant local housing market:

*'It's so important to try and keep landlords on board... being honest with landlords... building rapport.'*

Support Officer

### Methodist Action

Methodist Action ran a social lettings agency in Preston, Lancaster and Morecambe, and worked with LCC from 2013 up until their liquidation in summer 2019. Their model provided sustained low level support to tenants around finances, budgeting and benefits, maintaining a tenancy/ property, and getting children into school. They signposted for more focused support in relation to alcohol, offending, domestic violence, etc. Over their 6 years of operation in the LCC district, they built up a portfolio of 28 properties, mostly in Morecambe and Carnforth, and were owned by private sector landlords (typically leased to Methodist Action). Their tenants were diverse: some families, some single people, especially older men

with histories of homelessness and/or prison. All referrals came through LCC Housing Options Team.

Methodist Homes worked in partnership with the council's Empty Homes Officer to bring a number of empty properties back into use to be let to people receiving benefits. This model has worked well, since the Empty Homes grant funding (used to bring the property up to a decent standard) 'acts as the carrot' and landlords are then committed to leasing to Methodist Action once the works are complete. Outside of these arrangements, the funding was limited to Local Housing Allowance and, with no deposit and high risks of damage to properties from this client group, it seems that this funding model is not sustainable. However, this is an important area of development and other models – perhaps drawing on social investment and/or linking into commissioned tenancy sustainment support - may prove to be feasible.

### 6.3. Social housing

LCC owns over half (56%, 3720) of the local stock of social housing (6540 properties in total). Social housing in total makes up 10% of all housing stock in the LCC area<sup>13</sup>. The following table shows the breakdown of this stock by property size and compares this to regional and national averages.

		Total Number of Dwellings owned by Local Authority as at 1 April 2018 (including PFI & Shared Ownership)						
		Bedsits	One bedroom	Two bedrooms	Three bedrooms	Four or more bedrooms	Equivalents of HMOs Hostels	TOTALS
<b>England</b>	Number	38,539	458,849	533,994	511,727	44,873	2,460	<b>1,590,439</b>
	% of total dwellings	2.4%	28.9%	33.6%	32.2%	2.8%	0.2%	
<b>Lancashire</b>	Number	136	3,095	2,411	3,573	434	0	<b>9,649</b>
	% of total dwellings	1.4%	32.1%	25.0%	37.0%	4.5%	0.0%	
<b>Lancaster</b>	Number	100	1,180	1,159	1,186	92	0	<b>3,717</b>
	% of total dwellings	2.7%	31.7%	31.2%	31.9%	2.5%	0.0%	

<sup>13</sup> MHCLG: Live tables on dwelling stock, 2019 Table 100, No of dwellings by tenure at April 2018 at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-dwelling-stock-including-vacants>

This table shows that LCC's stock contains a relatively healthy supply of one-bedroom flats (1,180 or 31.7% of its total stock), which is – given the 'Bedroom Tax' – a key asset for re-housing single households. However, demand for smaller or high quality shared affordable accommodation continues to outstrip supply.

Registered providers (RP) (housing associations) own 2820 properties in the LCC authority area<sup>14</sup>. We engaged two key local RP contacts (from a total of three supplied by the council) by email as part of this review, and asked them about the steps they take to prevent and respond to homelessness, their views on the current allocation system and their appetite for future partnership work in this area. These responses are summarised below and also referred to in Section 6.4.

#### **Guinness:**

In terms of homelessness prevention, Guinness has a dedicated Customer Liaison Service which provides a patch-based response to tenants who are struggling with arrears or other aspects of their tenancy. The team can provide one to one support to ensure tenants are claiming all the correct benefits, apply for a Discretionary Housing Payment and support them with other issues. Vacant Guinness properties are allocated through Ideal Choice lettings, and Guinness would be more than happy to work on finding a suitable home for anyone referred through the homeless system. The organisation would be interested in receiving more information on what would be required in relation to 'leased' temporary accommodation or taking a role in the future development of alternative accommodation in the Lancaster City area.

#### **Places for People:**

Places for People (PfP) works with tenants where it can to prevent homelessness, for example, its Money Advice Team members can assist with finances and rent arrears, working with local authorities and DWP as necessary. PfP is able to provide tenancies to those who have come through the homeless system. Not all of its properties go through the Ideal Choice Homes System and PfP has a nomination agreement with the council. PfP also discusses any new developments directly with them to agree on the lettings. PfP would be interested in taking a role in the future development of alternative accommodation in the Lancaster City area and is already looking at similar partnerships in both Preston and Manchester.

### **6.4. Allocations and lettings to homeless households**

The council's and some housing association's properties are allocated via the Ideal Choice choice-based lettings system, though the council does sometimes make direct offers (i.e. of a particular property) to homeless households and/or those with particular needs.

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<sup>14</sup> MHCLG: Live tables on dwelling stock, 2019 Table 100, No of dwellings by tenure at April 2018 at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-dwelling-stock-including-vacants>

Statutory homeless households are placed in Band A within the allocation system. Our analysis of Band A applicants who received an offer of housing during the nineteen-month period 12.9.17 - 1.5.19, shows that:

- 67 such households were made an offer during this period
- Three-quarters of them accepted the offer (51 households); the remainder refused;
- 10 (15%) of the applicants were classed as having 'exceptional needs'; half of this group accepted the offer
- The largest proportion (45%) of Band A Statutory Homeless applicants was single adult households with children (or pregnant). 28% were single adults, 11% had incomplete data, the remainder were households of 2 or more adults with or without children.
- There was huge variation in the length of time people waited for an offer, ranging from 0 days to just over a year, though the average wait was much shorter where offers were accepted (33 days for those with exceptional needs; 43 for those without) than where they were refused (54 days for those with exceptional needs; 97 for those without).
- Those in Band A were much more likely to receive a direct offer (i.e. of a particular property) than to bid for their properties online through the choice-based lettings system. For example, for those 46 households who accepted accommodation and who were not classified as having exceptional needs, 65% received offers via direct means, 26% received offers via a bid process, the remaining 9% being uncategorized.

These figures demonstrate that some homeless households, including single people, are being re-housed locally within a reasonable timeframe, given the relatively high demand housing market within which LCC is operating. They confirm the comments of LCC staff that there are often properties available, but that these sometimes do not meet the expectations or needs of applicants, especially in relation to location. The data does not tell us how many other Band A statutory homeless applicants are still awaiting an offer, or how many others at risk of or experiencing homelessness are placed in other bands and what the outcomes are for them.

The two registered providers who fed back to us felt that the current banding system is working to help those experiencing homelessness to access social tenancies.

For people with lived experience of homelessness, the key concerns related to the challenges of getting on to the system, the need for online access and support to check and bid for properties, and the length of waiting times (especially for those who are not statutory homeless).

*'To get on Ideal Choice Homes was real hard work. You need all your ID and proof of where you've been staying, I couldn't really get it 'cos the guy who I stayed with, we've sort of fallen out now... the second time I went I says, "well you've been paying the rent to that place, so why can't you get that information?". They weren't very helpful at the council at all'.*

## 6.5. Links to wider Housing Strategy

The corporate plan: Our Council Plan 2018-22, recognises that there are 3,300 households in the district who are in need of housing now but are unable to afford housing on the open market by buying or renting. Affordable homes are being developed (e.g. 168 were built in 2016/17); however, if these are 'affordable' rather than 'social', they are likely to be beyond the reach of many of those experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

According to the LCC Empty Homes Strategy 2017-2022, there were 1,920 long term empty properties within the council boundary in January 2017. The 257 which have been empty in excess of two years, is the focus of the council's strategy, which makes reference to the former partnership with Methodist Action.

The West End of Morecambe has the highest level of private rented properties in the district at approximately 29-33%, with some areas having as much as 80% PRS, compared with a district average of 13% and a national average of 9%. LCC undertook a public consultation and evaluation of selective licensing of private sector landlords in the West End in late 2017. The response seemed to be broadly positive of the proposal as a way of improving standards in the sector, but this has not been taken further.

## Monitoring

Lancaster City Councils Homelessness Strategy will be reviewed and published updates will be made available annually. This will include statistical updates reflecting homelessness in the district, as well as performance against targets within the Action Plan.

Lancaster City Council's Homelessness Forum will monitor the progress of the Strategy bi-annually; the Forum is comprised of Officers from the Local Authority, a range of partner organisations including the third sector who have responsibilities and accountabilities through the action plan below and we will seek to ensure service user voices are heard. The action plan will be treated as a live document with priorities and resources reviewed in accordance with changes to the local and national context.

## Strategy Action Plan

Strategic Priority 1: Preventing Homelessness					
Since the causes of homelessness are varied, a multi-layered, whole system, strategic response is required to shift intervention 'upstream'.					
Ref No.	What does the evidence tell us?	Proposed action	When	Who else to be involved	Measure of success
1.1	Missed opportunities to prevent homelessness at prison release.	Continue with and review the recently established <b>multi-agency prison pre-release panel</b> .	Ongoing	Shelter National Probation Service/ CRC Prisons	Panel meetings & attendance. Successful homelessness preventions on release.
1.2	Debt, benefits, affordability of housing are key triggers for homelessness	Continue with and review the <b>weekly CAB outreach surgery</b> in Lancaster and Morecambe Town Halls to maximise opportunities for preventative advice	Ongoing	Citizen's Advice DWP Credit Unions	Referrals, contacts and outcomes from the CAB surgery
1.3	A high proportion of those presenting to LCC Housing Options team are already homeless.	Improve <b>Duty to Refer</b> : through promotion, training and feedback to partner agencies: raise awareness that people at risk of homelessness should present at the earliest opportunity.	YR 1	Full range of statutory partners	Increased proportion of prevention v relief duties

1.4	Many of those leaving institutions are not referred to LCC in good time.	Develop or revise specific protocols with all institutions for preventing and reporting homelessness on discharge/ release	YR 1	Prisons, probation, general & psychiatric hospitals, detox units, NAS, etc.	Increase in timely referrals for those leaving institutions, which reduces as cause of homelessness.
1.5	High rates of contact lost amongst those owed a prevention duty	Review homelessness team structure and processes, including an internal audit of a sample of prevention cases and Personal Housing Plans.	YR1	NHS Police Support providers MHCLG	The proportion of prevention cases ending in loss of contact is reduced.
1.6	Loss of a private rented sector tenancy is a key cause of homelessness.	Promote greater awareness of <b>Alternative Payment Applications (APA)</b> . Partnership work with advice agencies and LCC Housing Enforcement to challenge poor/ illegal practice	YR 1	DWP Calico Landlords' groups Public Protection	More applications for APAs/ More successful challenges of illegal landlord practice
1.7	The role of the council in relation to homelessness prevention is not always understood.	Develop a marketing plan to raise awareness about the role of the Housing Options team to citizens and	YR1	Full range of statutory partners. Homelessness Forum	A marketing plan is developed and implemented.



		other professionals,			
1.8	LCC's current IT system will not allow detailed analysis of the homelessness statistics	<b>Upgrade LCC housing management software</b> so it is fully compatible with MHCLG H-CLIC system and start monitoring statutory work in more detail	YR1	Wider colleagues in LCC	Annual review of homelessness performance conducted against strategy: actions adapted if necessary.
1.9	Family and friends no longer willing to accommodate is the largest cause of homelessness	Raise awareness about housing options and the HRA with young people and families in schools, and with colleagues in education, health and children's services. Refresh and extend the pool of <b>accredited mediators</b> recruited under the last strategy and work in partnership to promote and target their offer to people of all ages asked to leave by family / friends.	YR 2	Education Children's Services CCG/ NHS	Increased numbers of mediation preventing eviction/ securing a return to family and friends

1.10	Hospital provides an opportunity to identify and engage those at risk of homelessness	Recruit <b>hospital link worker</b> to further improve joint working with health professionals and improve access to a range of housing options and advice for patients, including those experiencing dv, older people, etc.	YR2	Royal Lancaster Infirmary CCG County	Reduction in hospital discharges delayed due to homelessness or unsuitability of existing housing
1.11	Integrated Care Communities model present opportunities for upstream prevention	Explore opportunities to embed homelessness prevention in <b>Integrated Care Communities</b> roll out, e.g. to raise awareness of homelessness, identify those at risk early on, and develop recovery initiatives in the community	YR2	CCG/ GPs/ pharmacists, Social/ mental health workers, Community groups	Opportunities to maximise homelessness prevention are maximised in Integrated Care Communities

1.12	A low proportion of successful prevention outcomes are secured by securing current accommodation.	Explore options to fund and deliver a <b>flexible floating support service</b> , which can be offered both to prevent tenancy/ family breakdown as well as to support resettlement. This should be able to offer one-off or ongoing support as needed.	By YR 3	County Council Registered Providers Housing-related support providers	More people are supported to remain in their current accommodation (where it is safe and possible to do so).
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Strategic Priority 2: Tackling rough sleeping and supporting people out of homelessness					
A better coordinated response to rough sleeping across the sector, and ensuring the right range of housing and/or support options to help people exit homelessness sustainably.					
Ref No.	What does the evidence tell us?	Proposed action	When	Who else to be involved	Measure of success
2.1	Citizens and professionals find it hard to know which services are available and what they offer.	Map existing directories of support and services which might be relevant to those facing homelessness. Improve the <b>sharing of information about services</b> for professionals and citizens (online, regular homelessness forum meetings)	YR1	Homelessness Forum/ CVS	Regular forum meetings Improved method for sharing information about the local offer
2.2	Some groups lack access to specialist housing-related support	Work in partnership with the County as it reviews the supported housing offer, including for care leavers, veterans and people with autism.	YR1	County council Support providers	The supported housing offer is reviewed and refreshed.
2.3	Some experience a lack of empathy from homelessness services and have past trauma	Commission <b>Psychologically/ Trauma Informed/ Adverse Childhood Experiences training</b> as widely as possible across the local homelessness system, using MHCLG funding	YR1	Housing Support providers/ VCS	Numbers trained More <i>consistent</i> positive feedback from homeless people
2.4	There is a high number of people presenting as a result of domestic violence	Open a new 23 bed refuge for those who have experienced dv, including 6 spaces for people with complex needs	YR1	County Safenet MHCLG	Those fleeing dv are offered the support and housing they need

2.5	Those with complex needs find it hard to access council and other systems. Many owed a relief duty lose contact with HOT.	Continue the re-launched LCC <b>Outreach service</b> and regular <b>drop-in sessions</b> at the YMCA Recruit <b>Navigators and Supported Lettings Officers</b> with MHCLG funding to provide additional support and a more flexible approach for those with more complex needs.	YR1	County/ Reg./ support Providers	Loss of contact with HOT for those owed a relief duty is reduced. Individuals access support via Navigators/ drop-in
2.6	There is a small cohort with complex needs for whom congregate supported housing is not suitable	Explore the <b>feasibility of a high-fidelity Housing First offer</b> (non-time limited support alongside ordinary housing, based on principles of choice, harm minimisation and linking into healthcare and other relevant services) for this cohort. Draw on good practice and learning from MHCLG pilots.	YR1	Reg providers County NHS, CJS, VCS	Ongoing tenancy sustainment for this cohort
2.7	There is some ongoing use of B&B	<b>End all use of B&amp;B</b> , by increasing prevention activity and access to a range of leased, hostel, and supported lodging accommodation.	By YR2	Reg./ support providers, HB	Use of B&B ends

2.8	Those with multiple needs struggle to access support	Continue plans to develop a <b>multi-agency one-stop hub</b> for complex needs/rough sleepers in partnership with CGL/Inspire. (At Feb 2020, capital secured – planning applications submitted)	By YR2	CGL/ Inspire	A multi-agency one stop hub for those with complex needs developed.
2.9	There is insufficient knowledge regarding the health needs of those experiencing homelessness and what is needed to meet them.	Conduct a Homeless Health Needs Assessment, leading to an evidence-based action plan.	YR2	CCG GPs and NHS Trusts VCS	A Health Needs Assessment is conducted and any actions arising from this are embedded in this action plan.
2.10	Rough sleepers value VCS support, but the council sometimes feel this encourages inward migration and maintains people in homeless lifestyles.	Better strategic coordination of the response to rough sleeping between statutory, VCS and business sectors: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish and work to shared goals;</li> <li>• Reduce activities which might duplicate or be counter-productive.</li> <li>• Identify areas where the VCS/ business offer can best supplement current provision, e.g. the social integration of those moving into independent accommodation.</li> </ul>	YR2	Homelessness Forum VCS and statutory partners, e.g. Police	A Homelessness Partnership/ Charter is agreed with clear shared goals. Effective cross-sector collaboration to end rough sleeping

2.11	There is no existing representation of people with lived experience	Work with housing support providers and VCS to support and build a lived experience forum to feed into and advise future strategy and service development.	YR2	Housing support providers VCS	A lived experience advisory forum is established.
2.12	Lack of move-on support (especially outside of Oak Tree)	As in 1.10 above, explore options to fund and deliver a <b>flexible floating support service</b> , which can support resettlement. This should be able to offer one-off or ongoing support as needed.	By YR3		Tenancy sustainment for those resettled. Move-on is enabled.
2.13	People often experience multiple assessments	Set up a multi-agency working group to scope feasibility of/ draft and agree a <b>common assessment form</b> which is GDPR-compliant	YR3	CJS, Ideal Choice, County.	A form is agreed and people experience fewer assessments.
2.14	People are sleeping rough in Lancaster & Morecambe	Provide a rapid response in order to <b>end rough sleeping</b> for those with a local connection, and support those with no local connection to re-connect where possible.	By YR3		No one with a local connection should have to sleep rough.

Strategic Priority 3: Improving access to settled housing					
Ensuring our wider housing policy and practice reduces the barriers which those facing homelessness can face when trying to access settled housing.					
Ref No.	What does the evidence tell us?	Proposed action	When	Who else to be involved	Measure of success
3.1	There is a need for good quality, well-managed PRS accommodation for those on benefits	Continue funding the <b>Calico Accommodation Finder offer</b> , and explore a more <b>robust rent bond offer</b> within this. Explore the feasibility of a <b>new Social Lettings Offer</b> for Lancaster and Morecambe. Explore within this the feasibility of a managed shared offer for under 35s.	Feasibility in YR1 Implement YR2 onwards	Calico, Reg Providers, Social investors	A feasible action plan to improve access to the PRS is developed and implemented.
3.2	There is a shortfall of affordable social housing in LCC area	Ensure the needs of homeless singles, couples and families are considered throughout the <b>forthcoming LCC Housing Strategy</b> , through the <b>forthcoming Allocations Policy review</b> , and through <b>continued work and monitoring within the RP Strategic Partnership Meetings</b> .	YR1	Housing Strategy Reg. Providers	Alignment of the Housing and Homelessness Strategies



3.3	High concentration of affordable PRS accommodation in Morecambe's West End, of varying quality.	Re-consider the introduction of the <b>selective licensing</b> scheme in Morecambe's West End, assessing (and where necessary mitigating) likely impact on supply of affordable housing for those experiencing/ at risk of homelessness.	YR2	Housing Enforcement PRS landlords forum	Quality of accommodation and landlord practice in the West End are improved.
3.4	At Jan 2017, there were over 250 properties which had been empty for more than 2 years.	Review within the new LCC Housing Strategy the potential for a new initiative to bring <b>empty homes</b> back into use for those in need of affordable housing (e.g. using Empty Homes Grants with conditions to rent at LHA rates after work completed).	YR2	Housing Strategy Housing Enforcement	More empty properties return to use for those facing homelessness
3.5	Many properties in Lancaster are used for student housing	Take a more strategic approach to the provision of student housing in Lancaster district, working collaboratively with the two Universities and existing student housing providers, and make use of existing planning	YR3	Housing Strategy Universities Student Housing Providers	Options for better managing the local housing market are identified

		powers to control applications that seek to provide more student housing in residential areas.			
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## Appendix A: Supported Housing Provider Summary (2018/19)

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**Support Provider:** Acorn Recovery  
**Landlord if different:** Calico Homes  
**Project Name:** Walter Lyon House

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Walter Lyon House is a project for both men and women providing 14 bed spaces. It consists of 14 rooms within a shared house with 7 shared bathrooms and 1 shared kitchen.

The target client group is those with a history of substance misuse. Clients are required to be abstinent from alcohol and drugs and must demonstrate motivation towards continuing the journey of abstinence. The average length of stay is 6 months.

The project supports people in developing life skills and does this via a day to day structured programme. The project works with and refers to a wide range of external agencies.

Referrals come from a variety of sources e.g. criminal justice, residential rehabilitation centres, detox centres, Local authorities. Self-referrals are also accepted. Funding is via housing benefit.

Outcomes are monitored via the recovery outcome star.

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**Support Provider:** Acorn Recovery  
**Landlord if different:**  
**Project Name:** Aldcliffe House; Portland Street

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Aldcliffe House and Portland Street provide 12 bed spaces catering for both men and women. Aldcliffe House consists of semi self-contained rooms in a large detached house with some communal areas. Rooms have sinks, fridge freezers but share bathrooms/kitchen/lounge 8:1. Portland St consists of semi self-contained rooms in a terraced house with some communal areas. Rooms have sinks but share bathrooms/kitchen/lounge 4:1.

The target client group is those affected by homelessness within the Lancaster and Morecambe area. To be eligible, clients need to have a local connection. The average length of stay is approximately 3 months.

Residents are given weekly keywork sessions of 1 hour (plus other support as needed) and must attend 3 mandatory groups: living skills, housing options and a weekly residents meeting. Staff signpost to and liaise with other agencies.

All referrals come through LCC and funding is via housing benefit. The projects record and keep client data, notes and outcomes.

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**Support Provider:** Barnardo's  
**Landlord if different:** Salvation Army Housing Association  
**Project Name:** Barnardo's Morecambe Moving On

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This project provides 29 bed spaces catering for both men and women. The project comprises a main building containing five 5-bedroom flats with a communal kitchen and living area. Each bedroom has an en suite shower room. Residents have access to a residents' lounge, IT and phone facilities. Next door to the main building is a semi-independent property of two, 2-bedroom flats with communal kitchen, living room and bathroom.

The target client group is single homeless young people ages 16-24; care leavers, Child in Need, Child Looked after; Low, medium and high priority on the homeless reduction act. The average length of stay is up to one year.

The project provides a wide range of support including weekly support meetings with a project worker, group activities and access to 24-hour support if needed. Referrals to specialist agencies are made and residents are supported to access other relevant services – e.g. food banks, education, mental health and wellbeing etc. Outcomes are monitored via: a database; assessment paperwork; case studies; closure summaries and through Barnardo's Outcome based scoring system.

Referrals are received from Lancaster City Council and Lancashire County councils Access to resources team. Direct referrals are accepted from Social workers and leaving care workers. The project also accepts referrals from different counties if the young person is under the care of social services or leaving care. The project is funded by Lancaster City Council and via housing benefit.

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**Support Provider:** Adactus Housing (Jigsaw Homes)  
**Landlord if different:**  
**Project Name:** Oaktree House

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Oaktree House is a purpose-built property providing 23 bed spaces for both men and women. The accommodation comprises of: 6 crisis units - single bedrooms with communal bathroom and kitchen/lounge facilities; 12 single en suite rooms separated into three areas/flats with 4:1 shared kitchen/lounge facility; and 5 self-contained flats - each comprising of a double bedroom, bathroom and open plan kitchen/diner/lounge. The accommodation also includes a foyer/resident drop in area with staffing quarters and

offices, onsite laundry facilities, a resident accessible computer suite, a training kitchen, a training/multi-purpose room, a contained courtyard and garden areas.

The service is commissioned for individuals experiencing homelessness and/or complex needs, such as addiction, substance misuse and mental health. Clients must be over 18 and be eligible to claim Housing Benefit. The average length of stay is a little under 4 months. The support package uses a combination of systems, including: key working with intensive case management combined with activities and group working, including a bespoke psychotherapy six-week program, 'New Beginnings'. Outcomes are measured via outcome star, combined with Lancashire county council's client records and outcomes data base. Resilience mapping is also undertaken through the 'New Beginnings' program.

Local authority direct referrals come from Lancaster, Fylde and Wyre. They are notified when a bed space is available and all districts can refer (up to a maximum of 2 per district). Where no referrals are received within 48 hours of the room being void, local authorities can choose to pay to reserve the room for exclusivity of their referral. In the case that the room is not reserved direct referrals can also be received from partnership organisations after the initial 48-hour void period has passed.

Funding is via Lancashire City Council and housing benefit. The support package and services are funded through Lancashire Public Health.

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**Support Provider:** Safenet (Calico Group)  
**Landlord if different:**  
**Project Name:** Safenet Lancaster DA Service

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There are 6 Units consisting of 4 family rooms and 2 single rooms with communal bathrooms and kitchens. Accommodation is on 3 floors with 6 rooms in total. On the ground floor is a communal lounge and communal kitchen plus office space. The 1st and 2nd floors consist of 2 bedrooms 2 family rooms and one single room with shared bathroom. All rooms have space for a travel cot. Each floor has shared bathrooms and 1 communal kitchen with a communal laundry room in the basement. There is a dispersed property with 2 rooms, consisting of a single bed and bunk beds in each room with communal bathroom, separate toilet and communal lounge.

The client group is women and children who have experienced domestic abuse. The average length of stay is approximately 2.5 months. All referral routes accepted i.e.: self-referrals and referrals from any other agency. Funding is via housing benefit and LCC funding.

Support provided includes: assessments and reviews; key working sessions; house/suite meetings; safety planning and support action plans; group work; activity nights; Solicitor weekly drop ins; DA health visitor & DA midwife support; Support around children and 1-1's with children; court support; CYP support; RAMP delivery in SafeNet's complex needs refuge; Housing support - Resettlement support; Floating support (in the Rochdale refuge). Outcomes monitored via: Customer Satisfaction Survey; Journey Travelled; Housing Outcomes Report.

## Appendix B: Stakeholders engaged in this review

Organisation/Area/Role	Engagement in research activities:		
	Stakeholder Event	Interview	Data Capture
Acorn Recovery Projects - Housing Support Worker	X		X
Adactus Housing			X
Barnardo's - Team Manager - Senior Project Manager	X		X
Calico - Support Officer		X	
Citizen's Advice North Lancashire - Housing Case Worker	X		
DWP - Partnership Manager	X	X	
Global Link DEC - Refugee Support Worker	X	X	
Jigsaw Homes Group - Team Leader	X	X	
Lancashire Constabulary - PCSO - Police Sergeant	X		
Lancashire Youth Offending Team - Practice Manager	X		
Lancaster and District Homeless Action service - Finance	X		
Lancaster City Council - Customer Services Team Leader - Customer Services Manager - Homelessness Prevention Officers - Principal Management Officer	X	X	

Organisation/Area/Role	Engagement in research activities:		
	Stakeholder Event	Interview	Data Capture
Lancashire County Council <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- County Council Commissioner</li> <li>- Social Worker</li> </ul>	X	X	
Lancashire Fire and Rescue Service <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Community Safety Advisor</li> </ul>	X		
Lived Experience Contributors		X	
Methodist Housing Action <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Chief Executive &amp; Tenancy Support Worker</li> </ul>		X	
National Probation Service <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Probation Service Officer</li> </ul>	X		
Safenet <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Acting DM for DA</li> </ul>	X		X
Shelter <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Advice, Support &amp; Guidance Workers</li> </ul>	X		
UHMBT <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A&amp;E</li> <li>- Adult Mental Health Liaison Team</li> <li>- ICC Development Lead</li> <li>- Specialist midwife for Teenage Pregnancy</li> <li>- Specialist DVA Midwife</li> </ul>	X	X	