



Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020-2025

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Foreword

Meeting local people's housing requirements is a core objective of Breckland Council. We recognise that people's needs and situations are diverse and there are many challenges, and this document outlines how we will support people and deliver the best possible housing and homelessness service.

Breckland is a thriving district and we are seeing increasing demand for more and more homes to help meet the needs of the next generation. We know that not everybody wants or is able to become a homeowner themselves and we have identified that the cost of private rented housing in Breckland is rising. As a result, we will work with landlords to encourage a competitive market and a good mix of housing options to ensure access to a quality home is not out of the reach of anybody. We will also support landlords to meet latest legislation, make positive returns on their investments, and offer quality housing to local people.

Homelessness is on the rise in Breckland and so prevention of this issue will remain a key priority going forward. We will work hard to make services easy to access and focus on early intervention to help people avoid becoming homeless. We are committed to providing effective housing and homelessness services which meet the needs of local people.

Chapter 1 – Introduction and Key Priorities

1.1 Introduction

This Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy covers the period 2020-2025. The document sets out the high-level strategic issues affecting homelessness and rough sleeping in Breckland and the council's plans to work in partnership with others to meet housing need in the district.

Homelessness is a key priority for Breckland Council and preventing homelessness and working with others to support homeless people and mitigate the effects of homelessness is a focus for the workplan. We also recognise that homelessness is a result of many inter-related issues including the failure in our local market to meet the housing needs of local people, the disparity between house prices and incomes, the cost of the private rented sector compared to local housing allowance rates, the impact of welfare reform and the availability of services to support people in sustaining their tenancies, and the general lack of affordable housing.

1.2 Key Priorities

Our four key priorities are:

- To improve access to early housing advice and homelessness prevention services;
- To reduce the number of people sleeping rough in Breckland;
- To reduce the numbers in temporary accommodation and reduce the reliance of bed and breakfast within two years;
- To develop new services and partnerships to improve housing options.

Chapter 2 – Achievements since the Housing & Homelessness Strategy 2017

2.1 Achievements

The council developed a Housing and Homelessness Strategy in 2017 which focussed on a number of actions across the three priorities: preventing homelessness; improving health outcomes by improving our housing; and supporting housing growth. The Strategy is still current, not expiring until 2021, however the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act and the publication of a National Rough Sleeping Strategy in 2018 have created a need to refresh the homelessness and rough sleeping elements.

In the two years since the strategy was developed the council has developed much stronger partnerships including:

- With private landlords, including the employment of a Tenancy Relations Officer and the introduction of a quarterly Private Landlord Forum to encourage early prevention for tenancies at risk;
- With Norfolk County Council, developed an Early Intervention Multi Agency Hub which is delivering joined-up and cohesive services that enable those with complex needs to be more effectively supported with multiple, often interrelated issues;
- With partners and through the council's 'digitalisation' programme, we have introduced initiatives that support digital access amongst vulnerable households and help prepare them for the digital aspects of the Universal Credit application process;
- With DWP, schools, job clubs, key local businesses, we have employed dedicated Skills Development Officers and developed a number of programmes aimed at supporting people into work, including supporting young people in obtaining apprenticeships through to assisting those who are affected by the loss of jobs at key employers within the district.
- Investing in a Lodgings Scheme with Solo Housing to maximise the use of existing housing stock by better use of empty bedrooms across all tenures.

Chapter 3 - National Strategic Context

At the point of writing there has been a general election and a new Government has been elected which will bring new policies from the Conservative manifesto. In addition, the national context is unclear on the Brexit issue. The following legislation and policies are current, but it is noted that the situation may change with the upcoming changes to the Government.

3.1 Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 (“HRA 2017”).

The HRA 2017¹ introduced new duties around preventing and relieving homelessness which includes extending the period within which an applicant is considered to be threatened with homelessness, and new requirements around provision of advice. The Government has been making more funding available for dealing with homelessness and has committed to halve rough sleeping by 2022 and to eliminate it by 2027.

3.2 The Homelessness Code of Guidance.²

The Code of Guidance explains how the Act should be implemented. In practice it is a guide that tells the Council how to review the effectiveness of its homelessness provisions and to produce a new strategy every five years. It states the requirements that all organisations, within all sectors, whose work can help to prevent homelessness and/or meet the needs of homeless people in their district, must be involved in the development of the strategy.

3.3 No Second Night Out (2011)³.

This was aimed at tackling the problem of rough sleepers by ensuring that any new homeless person should have a chance to find accommodation and not to fall into a rough sleeping lifestyle. It was also recommended that partners work together to tackle the underlying causes of rough sleeping and improve support services to help people access healthcare and employment.

3.4 Welfare Reform Act (2012)⁴.

The implementation of a major national programme of welfare reforms aimed mainly at working age people is well under way with implementation of Universal Credit at the Dereham DWP in June 2018 and at the Thetford DWP in September 2018⁵. A key driver of the welfare changes is to make it financially worthwhile for people to take on paid employment rather than claim benefits. This combined with advice and support around seeking employment, education and/or training is intended to lead to improved opportunities for some people who would previously have been caught in the ‘benefit trap’. However, with cuts to the national welfare budget happening at the same time, many claimants are finding their benefits reduced, including those who are already in work. Local Housing Allowance rates⁶ are insufficient to cover even the cheapest rents in parts of Breckland, making it difficult for some people to access or remain in private rented housing.

3.5 The Deregulation Act (2015)⁷.

This introduced protection for private rented tenants against so called retaliatory evictions which occur when a tenant makes a legitimate complaint to their landlord about the condition

¹ <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2017/13/contents/enacted>

² <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/homelessness-code-of-guidance-for-local-authorities>

³ <http://www.nosecondnightout.org.uk/about-nsno/no-second-night-out-nationwide/>

⁴ <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2012/5/contents/enacted>

⁵ <https://www.breckland.gov.uk/universalcredit>

⁶ <https://lhadirect.voa.gov.uk/SearchResults.aspx?LocalAuthorityId=312&LHACategory=999&Month=11&Year=2019&SearchPageParameters=true>

⁷ <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2015/20/contents/enacted>

of their property and instead of carrying-out the repair the landlord serves them with an eviction notice. All new Assured Shorthold tenants starting on or after 1st October 2015 are covered by the provisions of the Act.

3.6. Care Act 2014 and Better Care Fund.

The Care Act 2014⁸ requires local upper tier social services authorities to carry out a needs assessment in order to determine whether an adult has needs for care and support, it also supports closer working between health, housing and social care services. From 2015/16 onwards the Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) allocation has been included within the Better Care Fund (BCF)⁹. The BCF created a pooled budget in each upper tier local authority area to encourage health, social care and other related services to work more closely together. The inclusion of the DFG allocation is intended to recognise the vital role that the home plays in helping people to remain healthy and independent. Government has increased the amount given to local authorities significantly over the last few years with the expectation that local areas will be more flexible in how the money is spent.

3.7. National Rough Sleeping Strategy 2018¹⁰.

The Government is committed to halving rough sleeping by 2022 and ending it by 2027. The Rough Sleeping Strategy published in August 2018 sets out the Government's 2027 vision to support every person who sleeps rough off the streets and into a home. This is backed up by £100 million of funding in the next two years (2020-2021) and marks the beginning of plans to meet the 2027 ambition. A Rough Sleeping Strategy Delivery Plan¹¹ was published in December 2018 which sets out more information on the 61 commitments made in the strategy. It also includes examples of projects which are underway, people who have been helped by this work, and new approaches to partnership working in local areas.

3.8 Brexit.

The economic and social effects of the UK leaving the EU is not clear at the time of writing and it is yet to be determined what the effects maybe for at the local level. The eligibility of people approaching the council as homeless may change if they are not granted settled status, however as the position is yet to be defined this will require careful monitoring.

3.9 Other Changes.

Other recent changes in the sector include a Tenant Fees Act 2019 which came into force in June 2019 and which stamps out letting agents' fees and capped deposits. Further changes include the extension of mandatory HMO licensing including minimum room sizes and a specification of the maximum number of people the HMO should house, which came into force in October 2018.

3.10 Summary.

Many of these policies present real challenges for Breckland. House prices have risen steadily faster than earnings during the past five years. Building activity from the housing association sector slowed down due to concerns around a number of issues such as reduced rental income, the impact of welfare reform and the availability of support services. Meanwhile, homelessness and rough sleeping remain major concerns.

⁸ <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2014/23/contents/enacted>

⁹ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/821676/Better_Care_Fund_2019-20_Policy_Framework.pdf

¹⁰ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/733421/Rough-Sleeping-Strategy_WEB.pdf

¹¹ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/762854/RSS_delivery_plan.pdf

Chapter 4 - Local Strategic Context

The following section provides a summary of the key local strategies and policies which impact and influence Breckland Council.

4.1 Breckland Corporate Plan 2019 – 2023

The Breckland Corporate Plan sets out the council's vision and ambitions for the district over the period between 2019 and 2023. The plan sets out the overarching vision, that is "Breckland – a place where people and business can thrive," along with identifying four corporate priorities which are:

- **Your Place** – supporting growth, preventing homelessness, increase housing options,
- **Your Health and Wellbeing** – early intervention activities to support vulnerable people, ensure all homes of a high quality, provide high quality financial advice, enable vulnerable residents to remain living independently through adaptations,
- **Your Opportunity** – work with partners to identify funding to deliver growth along with housing and employment opportunities in the major growth areas,
- **Our Council** – effective partnership working and ensuring our policies are fit for purpose and maximise opportunity.

4.2 Housing and Homelessness Strategy 2017-2021

The current Housing and Homelessness Strategy¹² sets out the Council's strategic approach to the broader housing elements across the district including the three priorities of:

- Priority 1 - Preventing homelessness
- Priority 2 - Improving Health outcomes by improving our housing
- Priority 3 - Supporting housing Growth.

The Strategy has a further two years to run and in terms of priorities 2 and 3 is still fit for purpose. However, in terms of homelessness and rough sleeping the strategy does not take into account the far fetching changes brought in by the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 and the National Rough Sleeping Strategy 2018.

The Housing Strategy will be refreshed to take into account the new Government's political direction on growth.

4.3 Housing Allocation Scheme

The Housing Allocation scheme has been developed and updated in accordance with the Housing Act 1996 Part VI as amended by the Localism Act 2011. A review of the policy was undertaken in 2019 as part of the comprehensive review of the homelessness service and a new policy adopted with minor changes to ensure it complements and supports the aims of this strategy to support homelessness prevention and is an effective tool to meet housing need and reduce reliance on temporary accommodation.

4.4 Breckland Key Select & Housing Register

The Allocation Scheme sits alongside Breckland Key Select which is a choice-based lettings system. Key Select works in partnership with all Registered Social Landlords within the district. This enables transparent allocation of all properties advertised through the housing register with strong partnership working. The partners meet on a regular basis to review the scheme and discuss particular issues facing the district.

¹² https://www.breckland.gov.uk/media/14869/Housing-Strategy-2017/pdf/housing_and_homelessness_strategy_version_2.pdf?m=637108836232030000

4.5 Partnerships

The Council has some strong partnership structures¹³ in place with Registered Providers and other local authorities providing early warnings of homelessness and the ability to plan individual pathways and develop additional services to meet unmet need. Partnership arrangements exist with Flagship Housing, CAB, Social Services, Leaving Care teams, private landlords, domestic abuse services, supported housing providers, local churches, support providers and other local authorities.

Partnerships in place include:

- Norfolk Homelessness Project
- Norfolk Housing Reference Group
- Norfolk Housing Alliance
- Housing Advice and Allocations Lead Officers Group (HAALO)
- Joint protocol meetings – Young People’s Housing Protocol, Mental Health Hospital Discharge Protocol, Greater Norwich and Breckland Criminal Justice and Homelessness Prevention Protocol
- Early Help Hub Meetings

4.6 Engaging with Private Landlords

The council has developed effective arrangements promoting closer working with private landlords and letting agencies with the aim of building strong working relationships across the housing, health and homelessness sectors.

The council employs a full-time Tenancy Relation Officer who provides advice and assistance to private landlords and tenants on their rights and responsibilities encouraging good practice within the private rented sector through training and other initiatives as shown below:

- **Landlord Forum.**
The council holds regular quarterly landlord forums with landlords, agents and tenants. The forums have guest speakers from different agencies and the aim is to encourage landlords to engage with the local authority, understand procedures and legislation and the consequences of non-compliance. Landlords can connect with other local businesses, internal departments and agencies.
- **Advice and Assistance.**
The council offers support to ensure clarity on how legislation protects landlords and their assets. With the introduction of the Tenant Fees Ban many landlords felt it was not beneficial to rent out their properties due to increased costs. However, with support and information provided and grants available they are encouraged not only to take nominations from our Housing Team but to also to improve their existing properties and increase their portfolios by investing in the local area. The information available online has also increased.
- **Landlord Portfolio.**
There is a landlord portfolio database of privately rented properties to help discharge the council’s housing obligations for temporary or permanent accommodation. Officers work closely with landlords to ensure that such properties are free from serious hazards and let to good standards.
- **Lodgings Scheme**
Landlords providing accommodation under the lodgings scheme receive support to take in lodgers for example by completing suitability checks for them and matching residents with landlords. Ongoing support is also available for both parties.

¹³ These are detailed further in the EELGA Homelessness Review Report 2019

- **Tenancy Awareness Course.**

A tenancy awareness course tailored to residents who need further support and guidance in managing and sustaining a tenancy is being rolled out in 2020. It provides residents with clear access to their rights and responsibilities as well as building confidence and practical knowledge of how to maintain a tenancy. Landlords will also benefit from prospective tenants taking this course as subjects covered include budgeting, paying bills, maintaining their home and reporting repairs.

Chapter 5 - Statistical Profile of Breckland

5.1 Geography

Spanning over 500 square miles, Breckland is a geographically inland large rural district located in the heart of Norfolk. The district is characterised by a dispersed settlement pattern of market towns, villages and hamlets. There are five market towns, a network of local service centres which are larger villages with more facilities, and numerous small villages and hamlets. Approximately half the current population live in one of the five market towns of Attleborough, Dereham, Swaffham, Thetford and Watton with the remaining population dispersed across the district. The area is represented through 112 town and parish councils.

5.2 Population and Forecasts

The data from the Strategic Housing Market Assessment 2017 (“SHMA”) shows that there has been steady growth in the population in Breckland over time (from 1981 to 2011). The population in 2011 was estimated to be 130,500¹⁴. Breckland, along with Norwich and South Norfolk are projected to be the fastest growing districts in the county. The mid-estimate 2018¹⁵ based on the 2011 Census suggests that:

- There are 139,400 people living in Breckland;
- That the population is due to increase to 153,678 by 2036 representing a 10 percent increase from 2018 and due to increase to 159,400 by 2041.

Between 2018 and 2041:

- The number of young people aged 0-15 is estimated to increase by 2.2%;
- The number of people aged 16-64 is estimated to increase by 2.3%;
- The number of people aged over 65 is estimated to increase by 51%.

5.3 Deprivation

There is some variation across the district with some areas especially the smaller villages with no or little services, with higher rates of deprivation based on the Index of Deprivation 2019¹⁶. According to the Index, Breckland is 127th most deprived area nationally out of 317 districts in the country. When compared to the local authorities in Norfolk, Breckland is the 5th most deprived out of the 7 local authorities.

5.4 Economy and employment

Communities in Breckland look primarily towards the Norwich urban area for employment, retail, transport and service provision, such as hospitals for employment opportunities. In Breckland agriculture, advanced engineering and manufacturing logistics along with forestry are the dominant business sectors with professional, scientific and technical and food processing not far behind.¹⁷

Wages are relatively low in comparison with the national and regional averages. This reflects the low level of qualifications of people in the district and the low level of skills required by many of the available jobs. Although there is a high proportion of people living and working

¹⁴<https://www.southnorfolk.gov.uk/sites/default/files/Strategic%20Housing%20Market%20Assessment%20%282017%29.pdf>. Page 16, para 2.17

¹⁵<https://www.norfolkinsight.org.uk/population/report/view/b15822d80ec54439bb12134b7c857bb9/E07000143>

¹⁶https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/833970/File_1_-_IMD2019_Index_of_Multiple_Deprivation.xlsx

¹⁷https://www.breckland.gov.uk/media/1960/Employment-Growth-Study-and-Land-Review-2013/pdf/13559_Breckland_EGS_Final_Report_29_11_13.pdf?m=635955577069670000

in the district, many higher qualified workers are travelling out of the area to access higher paid and higher skilled work. 78% of the working age population are in employment, which is comparable across the East of England and the UK average.¹⁸

The level of full-time employment is below the national average (75.4%) but higher than the regional (71.9%). The level of self-employed residents is below the national average (10.9%) and the regional (10%). The average median pay for all workers in district is £21,762 which is 11.7% lower than the national average but on equal levels regionally.¹⁹

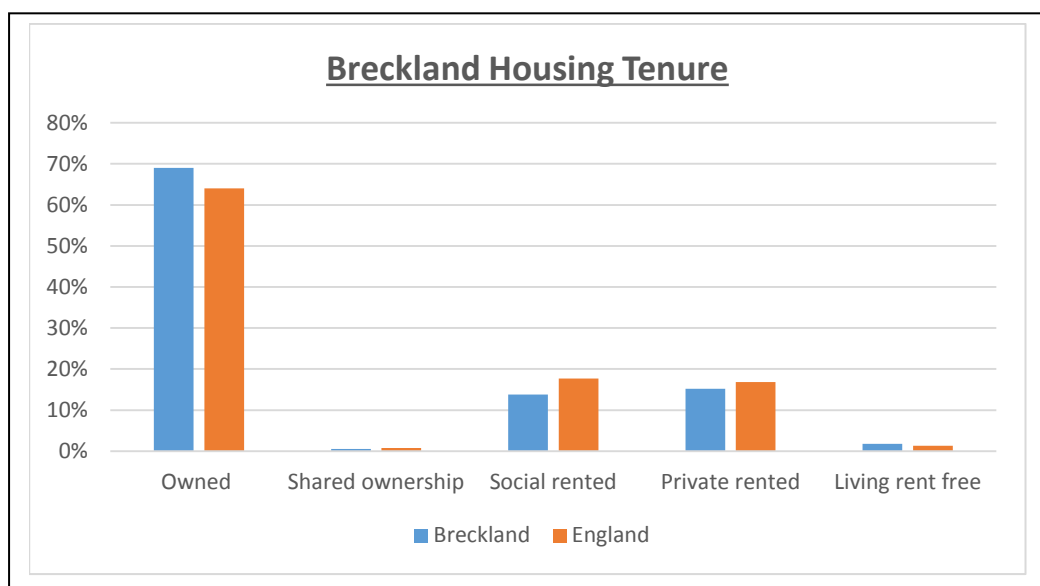
Unemployment in the district is very low and has been consistently below both the national and county figures with 2.9% of the population out of work, compared to 3.4% regionally and 4.1% nationally. The number of retired residents (20.6%) is greater than regionally (19.7%) and nationally (12.5%).²⁰

5.5 Breckland Housing Market

The ONS 2011²¹ confirms that in the district:

- 68.7% of all properties are owned outright or with a mortgage
- 13.8% of all properties are social rented properties (affordable rented properties from registered provider), which is below the UK average of 18%
- 15.2% are available for private rent, which is below the UK average of 17%
- Shared ownership only makes up 0.6% of the housing market

Figure 1 – Breckland Housing Tenure



- There is a high proportion of bungalows (26.1%) in the district. This level is higher than Norfolk and significantly higher than England at 9.5%.
- Breckland has a high proportion of detached houses (25%) higher than Norfolk and significantly higher than the rate in England at 15.5%.
- On the opposite scale, there are considerably less flats/maisonettes in the district (6.6%), compared to 12.6% for Norfolk and 22.8% for England.²²

¹⁸ <https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/query/construct/submit.asp?menuopt=201&subcomp=>

¹⁹ <https://www.norfolkinsight.org.uk/economy-and-employment/report/view/d8f217281336410481a896033ba81e66/E07000143>

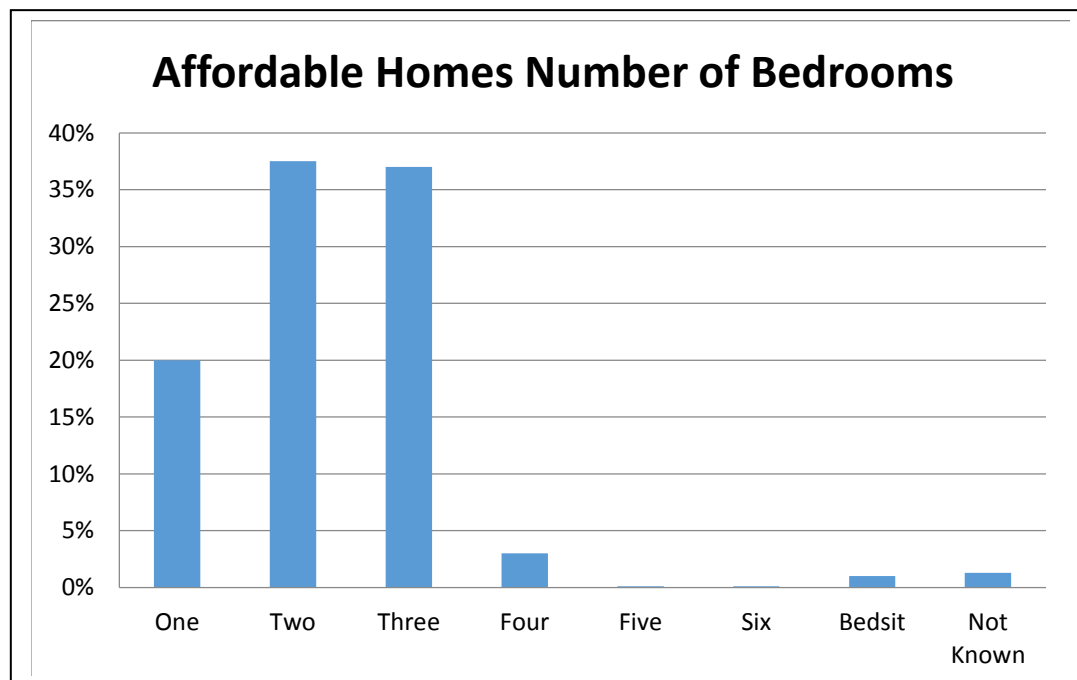
²⁰ <https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/query/construct/submit.asp?menuopt=201&subcomp=>

²¹ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/census/2011census>

²² <https://www.ons.gov.uk/census/2011census>

- Breckland has a high proportion of two and three-bedroom properties; 27% and 44% respectively.
- Breckland has a low number of one-bedroom properties (7%), compared to 12% for England.²³
- There is a large number of supported housing places for single people (120 units) which is unusual for a rural district.

Figure 2 – Number of bedrooms in affordable homes in Breckland



From the stock list of all affordable homes in Breckland it can be seen that there is a large dominance of two and three bedroom properties (74.5% in total). 20% of the stock is made up of one bedroom properties. There are very few larger properties available for affordable rent in Breckland (3.2%) and very few bedsits (1%). The lack of bedsits creates a challenge for those under 35 yrs who are subject to the shared room LHA rate.

5.6 Housing costs and affordability

House prices in Breckland are lower than the East region²⁴ which creates challenges for viability for market developers where build and land costs are similar in other areas. This in turn impacts on the ability to build affordable homes in the district, especially for social and affordable. Median house prices in 2019 are 9:1 times median incomes.²⁵

²³ Census 2011 QS411EW

²⁴ Hometrack 2019

²⁵ Hometrack 2019

Figure 3 – Sales prices of properties 2019

Sales 2019	Breckland	East
1 bed flat	£86,895	£166,164
2 bed flat	£117,881	£219,913
2 bed house	£176,853	£252,170
3 bed house	£227,162	£319,086
4 bed house	£324,110	£489,055

Private sector rent levels across the district are lower than the average rent in the East.²⁶

Figure 4 – Rent Prices in Breckland and East of England 2019

Weekly Rent 2019	Breckland	East	LHA rates²⁷
1 bed	£118.00	£160.00	£95.77
2 bed	£150.00	£196.00	£120.02
3 bed	£178.00	£214.00	£139.42
4 bed	£276.00	£334.00	£184.11

There is a gap between weekly private rent costs and Local Housing Allowance rates (“LHA”). A one-bedroom private rental costs on average £118 per week whereas LHA rates allows for £95.77 leaving a gap of £22.23 per week. There is a weekly gap of £29.98 for a two-bedroom private rent and a gap of £38.58 for a three-bedroom rental. For a four-bedroom private rental the gap is considerable at £91.89 per week.²⁸

5.7 New Housing Supply

New housing is an identified local and national priority. In Breckland there is a growing need for new housing to meet the needs of the residents and the increase in the population. The SHMA recommended that the need for housing in Breckland over a 21-year period (2011-2036) is a total of 15,298 new homes. This equates to an annual target of 612 new homes per annum.

The SHMA takes existing unmet affordable housing need and projected future affordable housing need together and it concludes that there is a need to provide additional affordable housing across the housing market area over the period 2012 -2036. The study identifies an individual district target of 35.7% for Breckland, this is equivalent to 220 dwellings per year (2011 – 2036). The council seeks affordable homes on development sites through planning obligations secured via s106 agreements. The Local Plan set a target that on a site of 10 or more units (or 0.5 hectares or more) there is a requirement for the provision of 25% affordable homes.

²⁶ Hometrack 2019

²⁷ LHA rates for Central Norwich, which covers the majority of district

²⁸ <https://lha-direct.voa.gov.uk/>

Figure 5 - Delivery of Affordable Housing

	Affordable rented	Shared Ownership	Shared Equity	Total
2016/2017	116	12	15	143
2017/2018	65	16	5	86
2018/2019	144	16	6	168
2019/2020 (6 months)	57	0	1	58

Chapter 6 – Homelessness and Rough-Sleeping

The most acute form of housing need is as a result of homelessness and rough sleeping. In order to inform the strategic direction of the homelessness service a comprehensive service review was undertaken between September and November 2019 by the East of England Local Government Association. The review included extensive consultation with officers and engagement with partners and key stakeholders focussing primarily on the homelessness service provided by Breckland Council and the links to other support services.

The Homelessness Review highlighted a number of areas where significant progress has been made including working in partnership with others to develop new services. However, the implementation of the HRA 2017 has not brought with it the shift in culture that is required and therefore the positive impact of these new measures is not being felt by potentially homeless people in Breckland.

6.1 Homelessness in Breckland

In 2018/19 500 households approached the Council and were assessed under the legislation. Of those, 186 were owed a prevention duty (where threatened with homelessness within 56 days), and 279 owed a relief duty (actually homeless and owed a duty to help secure accommodation).

The main causes of homelessness are eviction by family or friends, loss of private tenancy and relationship breakdown, causes that are reflected nationally. High numbers of single people are approaching the service and being accommodated in temporary accommodation when compared with other local authorities and increasing numbers of single people are sleeping rough. Well over half of people approaching the council for assistance are aged between 16 and 35 years of age reflecting the difficulties residents have in accessing affordable accommodation in the private sector either renting or home ownership

The majority of residents approaching the council are owed a prevention or relief duty and are literally roofless and in housing crisis. Mental health is the most significant support need. While protocols and partnerships are in place to identify risks of homelessness at an early stage officers haven't been able to prioritise early advice to prevent homelessness focussing on people who are in housing crisis and 'homeless tonight'. A service re-structure is in progress to ensure the service is customer and homeless prevention focussed.

6.2 Access to homeless prevention services

The website and housing information and advice are available which, although accessible for many, can be a barrier for people who do not have a good internet connection or can only access services through a mobile phone. The district is geographically large, and interviewing facilities are based predominantly in Dereham at the council's main office. People living in other towns and villages, especially Thetford where there is most need, have limited access to local housing advice and homelessness prevention services although housing officers do visit the Thetford Office.

Links with private sector landlords are good and a tenancy training course has been developed. There is a rental deposit scheme to help people access the private rental market and a new lodgings scheme has already had some success in matching landlords with suitable lodgers. Landlords are increasingly approaching the council when they have issues with their tenants and housing advice can be provided to both parties. Effective links with Anglia Revenues Partnership and the timely use of Discretionary Housing Payments also help to prevent homelessness.

The housing register provides an opportunity to prioritise residents in housing need and to be used as an effective prevention tool. IT challenges have caused issues for people trying to access the register since its introduction in 2018 but are being addressed with a new system being procured. A revised Allocations Policy will ensure the policy fits the prevention agenda in terms of ensuring a flow through supported housing in the district.

Partnerships and joint working are key to ensuring that early advice is provided with a view to preventing homelessness. The homelessness networking event held as part of the strategy consultation will meet regularly to develop and build on the current partnerships.

6.3 The needs of vulnerable groups

Protocols have been developed recently to ensure co-ordinated and effective pathways for mental health clients and offenders. Provision of supported housing and services for single homeless people is good but it can be difficult for people to move on, and current provision risks silting up. While supported housing units have continued to be supported by County Council commissioners this has led to a lack of provision of flexible floating support. There is also a gap in services for people with mental health issues who do not meet statutory thresholds and who may also have additional and complex needs. The council will be working closely with commissioners to consider what options are available to address these gaps in provision and what low level support could be available from the housing team directly.

Partnership working to support domestic abuse victims is well developed but a sanctuary scheme could be introduced as an additional preventative measure. Developing champion roles in the team to focus on homeless prevention for a number of vulnerable groups including young people, mental health, rough sleepers etc will be of benefit.

Young people and care leavers have several support options although the main one is the supported housing at Walmington Court in Thetford provided by the Benjamin Foundation. This is dedicated for young people aged 16-25 and has specialist on site support. The council works closely with the Leaving Care Team to address homelessness and will carry out joint assessments with social care when a young person aged 16 or 17 approaches as homeless.

6.4 Review of Temporary Accommodation

The number of households that the council has a duty towards that are living in temporary accommodation at any one time has remained around 50 in 2018/19 with between 17 and 35 placed in bed and breakfast at any one time between January and September 2019.

The council recognises that the continued regular use of bed and breakfast is unacceptable and a project has been initiated where the council has purchased a site to be refurbished to provide a number of rooms and flats for temporary accommodation in the short to medium term, along with associated use by community-based support services in Thetford. The project could be operational by March 2021.

The use of 16 units of self-contained temporary accommodation managed by Flagship Housing provide the best value for money and use of other social rented properties could be explored. The council also owns and leases out another property which could provide additional spaces for single homeless residents and this should be explored.

6.5 Rough Sleeping

One of the main indicators of acute housing need is the number of people who are sleeping rough in an area. Historically numbers have been low between 1 and 5 but this has grown in the past year to the current November official estimate figure of 16 with an increasing number identified as sleeping in areas behind shops or in tents in wooded areas especially in the Thetford area.

Figure 6 – Rough Sleepers

Number of rough sleepers in Breckland 2016-2019				
	2016	2017	2018	13/11/2019
Number of rough sleepers	3	1	5	16

The council has along with other local authorities in Norfolk received government funding to tackle rough sleeping. Two new full-time workers have been recruited on temporary contracts and both started in October 2019. The Rough Sleeper Coordinator and Rough Sleeper Engagement Officer's roles are to link in with other agencies with the aim of tackling rough sleeping by developing alternative solutions including accessing supported housing and planning the Severe Weather Emergency Provision (SWEP).

The council has a good relationship with local faith groups including the Salvation Army and other churches in Thetford who the council has worked with in previous years to deliver the SWEP provision and will again this year. Officers monitor the conditions and temperature daily and will advise officers when the trigger of three consecutive nights of actual or 'feels like' temperatures of Zero degrees or below has been met. The focus is currently on SWEP provision in Thetford, and while this is the area with most rough sleepers, if a rough sleeper is identified in Dereham this can cause issues in terms of lack of provision. Funding has been made available by the Council to ensure that anyone in need of SWEP outside of the main areas of provision can be provided with transport to access emergency provision.

The council is working with registered providers to provide emergency direct access beds in Thetford. These beds will provide accommodation for up to 14 nights during which time individuals will receive intensive support to access housing solutions and address other areas of need, signposting where appropriate.

The Government is currently trialling the provision of additional Cold Weather funding to support rough sleepers who have previously not engaged with services. The new officers will be engaging and working closely with partners to contact anyone at risk of sleeping rough and will carry out the annual rough sleeper estimates.

Chapter 7 Our Key priorities

The review of homelessness highlighted several areas where significant progress has been made including working in partnership with others to develop new services. However, the implementation of the HRA 2017 has increased the number of people approaching the service and the team is not yet in a position to capitalise on these schemes.

This strategy provides a vehicle for re-ordering service priorities and focussing on the changes that will deliver the greatest improvements for customers as well as reducing the costs of providing shelter for those who find themselves roofless.

The following four key priorities have been identified:

Priority One:

To improve access to early housing advice and homelessness prevention services.

In order to continue to improve access for people in housing need and ensure that residents can access the service at an early stage in line with the aims and aspirations of the Homelessness Prevention Act the council will:

- Carry out a service redesign and re-structure of the service in order to create a customer focussed approach and easy access points
- Develop frontline information and advice, including website enhancements making online, and face to face, services easier to access.
- Develop Champion roles within the housing team in order to provide internal expertise in a number of areas i.e. mental health, immigration, mediation.
- Introduce home visits for parental evictions and use mediation
- Implementing a new IT system across the Housing Service.
- Implement the revised Allocations Policy and ensure all applications are reviewed and up to date on the new IT system.
- Launch the Tenancy Awareness Course and identify residents suitable to attend.
- Review pre-eviction protocols with housing association partners and ensure joint housing visits are made prior to court action.
- Review Duty to Refer mechanisms with statutory bodies to ensure these are effective
- Make best use of the mediation available through the Lodgings Scheme as a prevention measure

Priority Two:

To reduce the number of people sleeping rough in Breckland

The Government is committed to halving rough sleeping by 2022 and ending it by 2027. This will require partners across the statutory and voluntary sectors to work together to seek solutions. Breckland will work to reduce the incidences of rough sleeping across the district by:

- Establish regular multi-agency meetings to share information about rough sleepers.
- Engage directly with those sleeping rough and keep in touch even if they do not engage
- Formalise and enhance Severe Weather Emergency Provision and ensure it is easily accessible.
- Work with local churches and faith groups to develop new services
- Monitor numbers of rough sleepers and actively work to reduce them
- Consider alternative 'innovative' housing and crash bed solutions.

- Work with prisons to implement the prison discharge protocol effectively to ensure accommodation is identified and available on release.
- Consider whether a Housing First approach could be adopted locally

Priority Three:

To reduce the numbers in temporary accommodation and reduce the reliance on bed and breakfast within two years

There are a number of people being placed in temporary accommodation and in unsuitable bed and breakfast, but the council is committed to actively develop more suitable temporary accommodation and reduce reliance on bed and breakfast. In order to do this, we will:

- Develop the temporary accommodation project in Thetford.
- Work with Flagship Housing to identify hard to let properties that could be used as temporary accommodation
- Review the management contract for council owned properties to explore use for temporary accommodation.
- Consider opportunities to furnish self-contained temporary accommodation to make it more accessible i.e. white goods, flooring
- Ensure occupants of temporary accommodation are managed effectively and robustly and that recharging mechanisms for occupation charges are in place and adhered to.
- Prioritise the delivery of 1 and 2 bedroom homes on all appropriate new developments to meet the need of homeless households.

Priority Four:

To develop new services and partnerships to improve housing options

In order to build on the current partnerships and relationships the ongoing homelessness prevention services will continue to be developed.

- Explore establishing a Sanctuary Scheme for victims of domestic abuse who wish to remain living in their home as an additional prevention measure
- Develop a Homelessness Prevention Policy promoting innovative use of prevention funds.
- Continue to host quarterly Private Landlord Liaison and Networking events.
- Develop a Houses in Multiple Occupation intelligence partnership alongside the Police and Fire and Rescue Service to inspect and regulate high risk HMOs.
- Hold regular multi-agency strategic Homelessness Network meetings
- Consider how people with mental health and complex needs can best be supported in liaison with commissioners.
- Work with housing association partners to further develop the tenancy awareness course

Appendix 1 – Action Plan**Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020-25 – Action Plan**

NB: Action plan covers first year of Strategy. To be reviewed and updated in 2020/21

What we will do	How we will do it	Measures of success	When will we do it by?
Priority One: To improve access to early housing advice and homelessness prevention services.			
Improve access to early housing advice and homelessness prevention services	Carry out a service redesign and re-structure of the service in order to create a customer focussed approach and easy access points	Re-structure and service re-design achieved	June 2020
	Develop Champion roles within the housing team in order to provide internal expertise in a number of areas i.e. mental health, immigration, mediation.	Champions and training needs identified	June 2020
	Implementing a new IT system across the Housing Service.	New IT system in place	June 2020
	Introduce home visits for parental evictions and use mediation	Visits taking place regularly	September 2020
	Develop frontline information and advice, including website enhancements making online, and face to face, services easier to access	All improvements complete	September 2020
	Implement the revised Allocations Policy and ensure all applications are reviewed and up to date on the new IT system.	Full review carried out. (links with IT system)	September 2020
	Launch the Tenancy Awareness Course and identify residents suitable to attend.	3 Courses held in year 1	By March 2021
	Review pre-eviction protocols with housing association partners and ensure joint housing visits	Protocols reviewed	March 2021

What we will do	How we will do it	Measures of success	When will we do it by?
	are made prior to court action.		
	Review Duty to Refer mechanisms with statutory bodies to ensure these are effective	Review completed	March 2021
	Make best use of the mediation available through the Lodgings Scheme as a prevention measure	Referrals made for mediation	March 2021
Priority Two: To reduce the number of people sleeping rough in Breckland			
Reduce the number of people sleeping rough in Breckland	Engage directly with those sleeping rough and keep in touch even if they do not engage	Caseload of rough sleepers maintained	June 2020
	Work with local churches and faith groups to develop new services	Exploratory meeting held	June 2020
	Formalise and enhance Severe Weather Emergency Provision and ensure it is easily accessible.	New arrangements in place	September 2020
	Work with prisons to implement the prison discharge protocol effectively to ensure accommodation is identified and available on release.	Training and procedures in place and officers aware of pathways.	September 2020
	Consider alternative 'innovative' housing and crash bed solutions.	Review of opportunities considered, and recommendations made	December 2020
	Establish regular multi-agency meetings to share information about rough sleepers.	Three meetings in year 1	March 2021
	Monitor numbers of rough sleepers and actively work to reduce them	Quarterly reviews of numbers	March 2021

What we will do	How we will do it	Measures of success	When will we do it by?
	Consider whether a Housing First approach could be adopted locally	Review of Housing First approach and potential for adoption carried out.	March 2021
Priority Three: To reduce the numbers in temporary accommodation and reduce the reliance on bed and breakfast within two years			
Reduce numbers in temporary accommodation and reduce reliance on bed and breakfast within 2 years.	Develop the temporary accommodation project in Thetford.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning consent granted and start on site • Management provider in place • Project complete and ready to occupy 	<p>July 2020</p> <p>December 2020 March 2021</p>
	Ensure occupants of temporary accommodation are managed effectively and robustly and that recharging mechanisms for occupation charges are in place and adhered to.	Officer identified in new structure and procedures in place	June 2020
	Work with Flagship Housing to identify hard to let properties that could be used as temporary accommodation	Meeting held to discuss potential properties and options explored	September 2020
	Review the management contract for council owned properties to explore use for temporary accommodation.	Review carried out, meeting held, and decision made.	September 2020
	Consider opportunities to furnish self-contained temporary accommodation to make it more accessible i.e. white goods, flooring	Explore options for furnishing self-contained temporary accommodation	December 2020
	Prioritise the delivery of 1 and 2 bedroom homes in all appropriate new developments to meet the need of homeless households.	Both 1 and 2 bed units in each new development completed	March 2021

What we will do	How we will do it	Measures of success	When will we do it by?
Priority Four: To develop new services and partnerships to improve housing options			
To develop new services and partnerships to improve housing options	Explore establishing a Sanctuary Scheme for victims of domestic abuse who wish to remain living in their home as an additional prevention measure	Meetings held with potential providers and resources identified	September 2020
	Develop a Homelessness Prevention Policy promoting innovative use of prevention funds.	Policy in place and adopted	September 2020
	Develop a Houses in Multiple Occupation intelligence partnership alongside the Police and Fire and Rescue Service to inspect and regulate high risk HMOs.	Meetings held and properties identified	December 2020
	Continue to host Private Landlord Liaison and Networking events.	3 meetings in year 1	By March 2021
	Hold regular multi-agency strategic Homelessness Network meetings	At least two meeting a year	December 2020
	Consider how people with mental health and complex needs can best be supported in liaison with commissioners.	Support service meeting with MH commissioner and partners to identify options	March 2021
	Work with housing association partners to further develop the tenancy awareness course	Course available for prospective social as well as private tenants	March 2021

Review and Monitoring

The Action plan will be a live document which is subject to review on an annual basis to monitor progress in achieving actions and to add any additional actions required.