

Housing and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel – 18 March 2026

Homelessness Update

Purpose	For Information
Classification	Public
Executive Summary	<p>The Panel receives an update on the current position of homelessness within the district twice a year.</p> <p>The report and presentation will cover the key areas to include emergency accommodation use and spend, the levels of Prevention and Relief Duties and the numbers of applicants to the Homesearch Housing Register.</p> <p>It will also outline developments of the service.</p>
Recommendation(s)	To note the updated position of Homelessness within the district.
Reasons for recommendation(s)	The last update to the Panel was in September 2025. This update brings the Panel up to date with the current position detailing pressures, spending and developments within the team.
Ward(s)	All
Portfolio Holder(s)	Cllr Steve Davies – Housing and Homelessness
Strategic Director(s)	Peter Matthew - Interim Strategic Director, Housing and Communities.
Officer Contact	<p>Christopher Pope Service Manager – Housing Options and Tenancy Accounts 023 8028 5511 chris.pope@nfdc.gov.uk</p>

Introduction and background

1. Prevention of Homelessness is a key priority for the Council. This has been recognised with increased government grant for the

current 2025/26 year, in the draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy and in the National Plan for Homelessness.

2. The main reasons for Homelessness in the district remain friends and family evictions (249 cases between April 2025 and January 2026), End of private sector tenancy (131 cases) and domestic abuse (21 cases).
3. There have been 1376 approaches from people seeking homelessness advice and of these 1290 Homelessness cases opened between April 2025 and January 2026. This equates to an average each month of 137 and 129 respectively.
4. The numbers of households prevented from Homelessness within the district have increased from around 45% in 24/25 to an average of 60% plus of cases since April 2025 with the current figure being 78% of cases in January 2026.
5. The majority of households were assisted into the private rented sector with advice, links to agents and landlords, rent deposit and the rent guarantor scheme.
6. Despite this increase in Prevention it remains challenging to prevent Homelessness especially when clients are issued S.21 notices and the landlord is determined to end the tenancy due to exiting the private rented sector market.
7. When homelessness cannot be prevented, the case is passed to the Homelessness Relief Team. To Relieve Homelessness the council must source suitable accommodation to meet the needs of the household. If private rented sector accommodation cannot be found, this pushes pressure on finding nightly paid Emergency Accommodation or Council owned/leased accommodation.
8. The Relieving rates have remained stable with around 28% of cases being successfully relieved with the current figure of 30% in January 2026.
9. When alternative accommodation cannot be found, emergency accommodation (EA) is needed. Currently there are 35 households in emergency accommodation, down from 64 in December 2025. The team are focussed on reducing this number further to ensure better suited accommodation for households and reducing the expenditure on nightly paid accommodation.

10. There were 107 households placed in EA between April 2025 and December 2025, and the average stay for a household in EA was 122 nights over the same period.
11. This position reflects the often-complex needs households present and places pressure on both the household and the EA budget.
12. The EA budget is £1.4 million for 2025/26 and has been under pressure across the current financial year, with a projected annual overspend from budget of approx. £390,000. To reduce this pressure, investment in prevention of Homelessness has increased.
13. Clients have choice and so when offering better longer-term accommodation, the Council must consider their vulnerabilities such as Special Educational Needs, support networks and transport for health needs. All are open to Review of Suitability and are considered when nominating households to Temporary Accommodation however, we recognise that due to the limitations on the number of properties available, location might not always be favoured by the household.
14. When the Council needs to place a household with children in emergency accommodation, we work closely with the family to ensure that they are supported and search for better suited accommodation as soon as practical.
15. The work to continue to identify, verify and support those people sleeping rough continues. There have been real successes in reducing the numbers rough sleeping, especially the entrenched cases who have rough slept for many years.
16. There is a gap between the official number of people recorded as sleeping rough on a single night and the actual number experiencing rough sleeping across the year. For example, on a single night in autumn 2025, 13 individuals were reported or suspected to be sleeping rough. However, when outreach teams visited the identified locations, only 2 people were physically found at that time.
17. This illustrates a limitation in the methodology: single-night counts capture only those visible at the exact moment of the snapshot, not everyone who has slept rough recently or who moves between locations. As a result, the official figure can underestimate the true scale of rough sleeping in the district. It also means that future official numbers may rise or fall simply due to changes in how and when people are counted—not necessarily because the underlying issue has improved or worsened.

18. The Homesearch Housing Register has seen a reduction in the number of applicants since the beginning of 2025 from a high of 2100 when the annual renewal process was put in place to the current 1770.
19. The renewal process means that each applicant is required to renew/update their application annually to ensure that their circumstances remain up to date and they remain eligible to join the register.
20. The largest reduction is in Band 4 which has reduced from 967 in January 2025 to 741 in January 2026 and in Band 3 718 in January 2025 to 588 in January 2026. The main reason for this reduction is the number of applicants not renewing their application or no-longer being eligible.
21. The top reason for being in each band is:
 - Band One – Urgent health or wellbeing
 - Band Two – Accepted Full Housing Duty
 - Band Three – Overcrowded and lack one bedroom
 - Band Four – Financial or unable to purchase

Corporate plan priorities

22. This update contributes to achieving the ambitions of the Council's Corporate Plan 2024-28 including: -

Priority 1: Helping people in the greatest need and creating balanced, resilient, and healthy communities who feel safe and supported with easy access to services.

Priority 2: Empowering our residents to live healthy, connected and fulfilling lives.

Options appraisal

23. Not applicable.

Consultation undertaken

24. The Council continues to work closely with a number of community voluntary organisations including The Crossings, Youth and Families Matter and Citizens Advice who provide valuable advice and support to vulnerable residents.
25. Both Youth and Families Matter and Citizens Advice have either started or about to start Homelessness Advice/Prevention drop-in services to provide more easily accessed, early local advice in the

community. The benefits of this will be monitored however early indications are that they are valuable to residents. These services are targeted to the 249 of people who experience homelessness due to friends and family evictions, are experiencing homelessness or think they may experience homelessness. This is aimed to reduce the need for crisis intervention.

Financial and resource implications

26. The total grant to be provided by the government to assist with Homelessness in the NFDC area is £1.7 million from April 2026. This removes several funding streams that focus on Rough Sleeping including Rough Sleepers Initiative, Accommodation for Ex Offenders, Rough Sleeping Prevention and Recovery Grant and Rough Sleeping Accommodation Programme.
27. The Homelessness Prevention Grant will be changed as from April 2026 with an un-ringfenced grant, meaning that the Council can focus on its priorities of preventing homelessness, working with local statutory and voluntary agencies and reducing the spend on emergency accommodation.
28. This allows the team to be strengthened in areas that the Council see as priorities which is preventing homelessness in the first instance and reduce the need for emergency accommodation.
29. The projected net spend on Emergency Accommodation for 2025/26 is £1.833 million. The spend has increased over the past three years and so a number of interventions are due to be undertaken to strengthen team areas to focus on preventing homelessness and reduce the need for EA to as low as possible.

Legal implications

30. The key legislation covering homelessness and rough sleeping in England includes Part VII of the Housing Act 1996, which sets out the statutory duties toward people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness; the Homelessness Act 2002, which requires councils to conduct regular homelessness reviews and publish homelessness strategies; the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, which introduced prevention and relief duties for all eligible applicants and established the Duty to Refer; and the Localism Act 2011, which allows local authorities to discharge the main homelessness duty through suitable private rented sector offers. All duties must be exercised in accordance with the Statutory Homelessness Code of Guidance, most recently updated in 2025.

31. The Renter's Rights Act 2026 is expected to reduce crisis driven presentations however it will introduce a more regulated and administratively complex environment for applicants. The shift from Section 21 to Section 8 grounds for eviction will likely increase case complexity. A Members briefing will be delivered to provide more information on this act and the preparations being undertaken.

Risk assessment

32. Not applicable.

Environmental / Climate and nature implications

33. Not applicable.

Equalities implications

34. Not applicable.

Crime and disorder implications

35. Homelessness and rough sleeping can contribute to crime and disorder by creating a cyclical relationship between street homelessness and the criminal justice system, where unstable living conditions increase the risk of both victimisation and offending, and contact with the justice system in turn increases the likelihood of further homelessness. People who are homeless or sleep rough are also significantly more exposed to violence, harassment, theft, and anti-social behaviour, and these experiences, combined with unmet mental health and substance use needs, can heighten tensions in public spaces and increase the visible impact of disorder in local communities.
36. By acting efficiently and effectively with households presenting as homeless it contributes to safer public spaces and more harmonious community relations.

Data protection / Information governance / ICT implications

37. Not applicable.

New Forest National Park / Cranborne Chase National Landscape implications

38. The Housing Options team continue to work closely with the National Park Authority.

Appendices:

None

Background Papers:

None