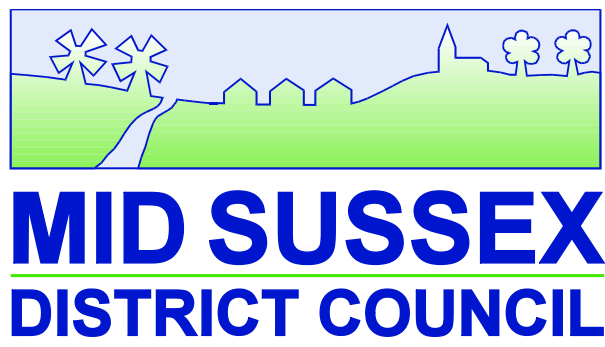


MID SUSSEX DISTRICT COUNCIL

HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY

2016 – 2021



Mid Sussex District Council

Homelessness Strategy 2016–2021

1. INTRODUCTION

This Homelessness Strategy sets out the Council's priorities for addressing homelessness in the District over the next 5 years. We want fewer people in Mid Sussex to experience the trauma of homelessness and ensure that those who do can find a settled home as quickly as possible. Tackling homelessness involves strong partnerships with other local authorities, housing associations and other agencies in both the statutory and voluntary sectors. There is much to build upon, and in particular we want to build on our successful proactive housing options approach which has helped to prevent homelessness and limit the use of temporary accommodation in the past.

The Council has a duty under the Homelessness Act 2002 to conduct a review of the nature and extent of homelessness in its District every 5 years and use this review to develop a strategy setting out how services will be delivered in the future to tackle homelessness.

The Council's latest review is set out at [Appendix 1](#) to this Strategy and the key issues identified in this review have been used to inform and develop the strategic objectives set out below.

2. CORE PRINCIPLES

The following core principles form the basis of the Council's approach to those in housing need in the District and act as a guide to the way clients are assisted:

- **Prevention** – Promoting change through early intervention and preventative action
- **Sustainability** – Providing innovative, sustainable and affordable solutions
- **Integration** – Working with others to provide a holistic approach to an individual's issues
- **Empowerment** – Actively encouraging people to take responsibility for their housing
- **Equality** – Treating everyone fairly and responding to their individual needs

3. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY

The Council's Housing Needs service, in the main, deals with people on low to modest incomes and those who are vulnerable. This means that the principles of equality and diversity are particularly important in the provision of homelessness services and the Council is committed to them.

Equality means that everyone is treated fairly and in accordance with their needs. Diversity means valuing and embracing people in terms of their background, skills, abilities and experiences that they may bring with them.

An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed for this Homelessness Strategy. This identifies homelessness related issues for those with protected characteristics under the Equality Act and how these will be addressed through the Strategy.

Impact assessments are published on the Council's website and can be found at <http://www.midsussex.gov.uk/my-council/about-the-council/equality-and-diversity/equality-impact-assessment/>

4. STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES AND ACTION PLAN

Taking into account the conclusions from the recent review of homelessness in the District, which is set out at Appendix 1, the following Strategic Objectives set out how the Council intends to address homelessness in the District over the next 5 years.

- Prevent homelessness wherever possible
- Tackle homelessness amongst specific vulnerable groups
- Engage with landlords to maximise access to private rented sector accommodation
- Minimise the use of temporary accommodation where possible

Strategic Objective 1	Prevent homelessness wherever possible
Aim: To limit homelessness through positive homelessness prevention measures	
Actions:	
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. <i>Provide timely and accurate information, advice and assistance to enable people to resolve their housing difficulties without becoming homeless.</i>2. <i>Ensure that appropriate and useful advice is available on the Housing Pages of the Council's website and this is kept up to date and that individual and tailored housing advice service continues to be available through a dedicated email address.</i>3. <i>Continue to offer an accessible face-to face-housing advice service, including regular surgeries at the Help Points in Burgess Hill, East Grinstead and at the Council Offices in Haywards Heath. Home visits will be made available where this is considered to be appropriate.</i>4. <i>Be proactive in identifying those affected by welfare changes, so as to provide timely and accurate information to prevent homelessness.</i>5. <i>Work in partnership with other agencies that offer advice and guidance to those in danger of losing their home or are already homeless.</i>6. <i>Work closely with the Council's Housing Benefit Service to reduce the number of people becoming homeless through rent arrears as a result of a failed Benefit claim and to maximise access to Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) to prevent homelessness.</i>7. <i>Liaise with the West Sussex County Council Local Assistance Network to ensure access to help in a crisis such as that from the three Food Banks that operate in the District.</i>8. <i>Keep our housing allocation scheme under regular review to ensure that it supports the prevention of homelessness.</i>	

Outcomes:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Prevention of homelessness wherever possible so as to limit the number of households who become homeless.• Early interaction with those affected by welfare reform so that households take the necessary action to avoid homelessness.• Best use is made of Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) to prevent those affected by welfare reform from becoming homeless.• A housing allocation scheme that continues to support homelessness prevention.
Partnership agencies:
Citizens Advice Bureau, Shelter, Housing Benefit Service, West Sussex County Council, housing associations.

Strategic Objective 2	Tackle homelessness amongst specific vulnerable groups
Aim: To limit homelessness through targeted prevention measures.	
Actions:	
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. <i>Input into the West Sussex Strategic Youth Homelessness Group to address youth homelessness, working in partnership with the West Sussex Youth Homelessness Prevention Team in respect of 16 & 17 year olds and with the West Sussex Children's Service in respect of Care Leavers.</i>2. <i>Refer families with multiple problems to the West Sussex Family Intervention Project which is managed by the Mid Sussex Community Safety Partnership.</i>3. <i>Input into the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARAC), which considers how individual domestic violence cases can be best managed, referring victims of domestic abuse to the relevant support services such as WORTH for immediate support and Stonham Outreach services which supplies longer term floating support.</i>4. <i>Work in partnership with mental health services and Community Mental Health Teams (CMHTs) and with WSCC's Housing Coordinator through the multi-agency Mental Health & Housing Liaison Group.</i>5. <i>Use judicious allocation of specific supported housing units and/or floating support to assist with the prevention of homelessness amongst vulnerable groups, including those leaving the armed forces.</i>6. <i>Work closely with drug and alcohol services to prevent homelessness among users.</i>7. <i>Input into the Sussex Homeless Outreach Reconnection and Engagement (SHORE) partnership with other East & West Sussex authorities working closely with the Sussex Outreach Service (SOS) to assist those who are, or at risk of, sleeping rough.</i>8. <i>Input into the Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) to assist with the management of those who are a serious risk to the public.</i>9. <i>Input into the Sussex Integrated Offender Management (IOM) scheme to assist with the management of prolific offenders.</i>	

Outcomes:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Homelessness prevented amongst young people.• Families with complex needs supported in the community.• Victims of domestic abuse supported to avoid homelessness.• Better outcomes for those suffering from mental health or experiencing drug and alcohol issues.• Targeted support for those who are sleeping rough or are in danger of doing so.• Engagement with services managing offenders to prevent homelessness.
Partnership agencies:
West Sussex County Council, Family Mosaic, Southdown HA, Sussex Oakleaf, WORTH, Stonham HA, SHORE, Sussex Police, Probation Service

Strategic Objective 3	<i>Engage with landlords to maximise access to private rented sector accommodation</i>
Aim: to increase the supply of affordable private rented accommodation available to those in danger of becoming homeless.	
Actions:	
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. <i>Continue to employ dedicated staff resources to engage and encourage private landlords to make lettings available to clients being assisted by the Council's Housing Needs Team.</i>2. <i>Continue to make full use of the Council's Rent in Advance and Deposit Guarantee Schemes to enable those without sufficient upfront funds to rent privately.</i>3. <i>Encourage those who are threatened with homelessness to consider renting privately as an alternative option to waiting for social housing.</i>4. <i>Consider, on a strictly individual case-by-case basis, using powers under the Localism Act to discharge the Council's homelessness duty into the private sector when this is appropriate and suitable for a particular homeless household.</i>	
Outcomes:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Continued numbers of private sector rented properties made available to prevent homelessness.• Sustained numbers of clients assisted to rent privately as an alternative to social housing.	
Partnership agencies:	
Private landlords, Letting agents, Housing Benefit Team, Housing Standards Team	

Strategic Objective 4	Minimise the use of temporary accommodation where possible
Aim: To contain the use of temporary accommodation, and expensive guest house accommodation in particular.	
Actions:	
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. <i>Ensure that the range of temporary accommodation available to the Council remains flexible and diverse so as to meet changing needs.</i>2. <i>Minimise the use of expensive B&B and guest house type accommodation where better alternatives exist.</i>3. <i>Ensure that those households placed in temporary accommodation are receiving appropriate support and assistance with payment of charges and their efforts to secure longer term housing, so as to minimise the time they spend in such accommodation.</i>4. <i>Ensure that unnecessary delays are avoided when clients are placed into and moved out of temporary accommodation provided by Affinity Sutton, so as to make best use of the stock of designated temporary accommodation available and minimise the time clients spend in expensive private guest house accommodation.</i>	
Outcomes:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Households in temporary accommodation supported to access rented accommodation in the social or private sector.• Use of expensive private B&B and guest house type accommodation kept to a minimum.• Placement of households in temporary accommodation outside the District kept to a minimum.• Numbers of households in temporary accommodation kept as low as possible.• Temporary accommodation costs to the Council are contained.	
Partnership agencies:	
Affinity Sutton, support providers.	

Review of homelessness in Mid Sussex - May 2016

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 Key Issues

The housing and homelessness issues facing Mid Sussex are significant and mirror those across the South East region as a whole. High property prices, increasingly higher rents in the private rented sector, coupled with a shortage of affordable rented social housing continues to result in high levels of approaches for housing advice from households who are left unable to access independent accommodation without assistance.

Recent welfare reform, with more in the pipeline, make it more and more difficult to resolve the housing related problems of people who approach the Council for help. There is a mismatch between local private rents and Local Housing Allowance (LHA) in the District which the freezing of the levels of Local Housing Allowance until 2020 will only exacerbate, adding to the difficulty of finding privately rented housing for those on low or modest incomes and those entirely dependent on benefits. From 2018 it will be difficult for single people under 35 to access even social housing as from that date their benefit will be limited to the shared accommodation rate (SAR) which is lower than the rent currently charged by most social housing providers for one bedroom accommodation.

Access to social housing in Mid Sussex has become more limited since the main provider in the District, Affinity Sutton, decided to withdraw from the Council's Common Housing Register Partnership and take over control of all transfers within its stock, while at the same time limiting the number of vacancies to which the Council is entitled to nominate from its housing register.

The change in emphasis nationally from supporting the provision of new rented affordable housing in favour of home ownership options such as Help to Buy and Starter Homes, and the extension of the Right to Buy to tenants of housing associations, is likely to reduce the number of homes available to rent for those who are homeless or on the Council's housing register. A reduction in the number of lettings in social housing is likely to contribute not only to increased housing pressure and therefore an increased incidence of homelessness, but will also make it harder to move those households placed in temporary accommodation into longer term housing.

1.2 Key findings from the review of homelessness in Mid Sussex

Homelessness

- The number of households approaching the Council for housing advice has decreased year on year over the last 5 years, although the complexity of the problems they face has increased.
- The number of households accepted as homeless by the Council under the homelessness legislation has remained stable, although it is thought unlikely this will continue.

- Over 43% of those seeking face-to-face advice from the Council about their housing in 2015/16 were experiencing difficulties with their rented accommodation, including 16% with difficulties paying their rent.
- The most common reason for being accepted as homeless in 2015/16 was loss of private rented accommodation (41%), followed by homelessness as a result of a violent or non-violent relationship breakdown with partner (31%).
- Only 2 cases where homelessness resulted from mortgage difficulties have been accepted in the last 5 years, and none since 2012/13. Consistently low mortgage interest rates since the crash in 2008 have assisted with this.
- Households with dependent children accounted for 62% of households accepted as homeless by the Council in 2015/16 and households containing a vulnerable person accounted for 36%. Households containing a pregnant woman with no other children accounted for just 1 household accepted as homeless in 2015/16.

Temporary accommodation

- The number of homeless households in temporary accommodation is on the increase, reaching 43 at the end of March 2016, and the reasons for this are complex. The Council has use of a stock of designated self-contained temporary accommodation owned and managed by Affinity Sutton, with additional capacity on an ad-hoc basis if the need arises.

Rough sleeping

- In line with the rest of England the number of rough sleepers across East and West Sussex has doubled over the last 5 years, with numbers in Mid Sussex increasing too. There is uncertainty over future government funding of a Sussex Outreach Service (SOS) commissioned by the East & West Sussex SHORE project across both Counties to target those new to rough sleeping as well as those who are entrenched in this way of life.

Youth homelessness and care leavers

- Homelessness amongst 16/17 year olds is successfully being addressed by a countywide Youth Homelessness Prevention Team through a joint protocol with West Sussex County Council.
- The housing needs of Care Leavers is now being coordinated with West Sussex County Council through a countywide joint protocol that was agreed in late 2015.

Allocation of social housing

- The number of lettings in social rented housing allocated to those on the Council's housing register is significantly down on previous years, particularly of 1 and 2 bedroom homes and if continued will have implications for those in housing need.

Private rented sector

- It is becoming increasingly difficult to assist households to access the private rented sector in Mid Sussex. This is due to a shortage of landlords who are willing to take tenants who are in receipt of benefits or at rents that are affordable with the help of housing benefit.
- Lower quartile rents in the private sector are now above the level of Local Housing Allowance (LHA) affordable by those in receipt of help with their rent for all sizes of accommodation except studio accommodation. The situation is likely to get more difficult because the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) has been frozen until March 2020 at the rate set in April 2015.

Social Housing Reform & Welfare Reform

- A raft of Social Housing Reforms and Welfare Reforms that have occurred since 2010 combined with further reforms in the pipeline promise a more difficult housing environment for those on low or modest incomes and are likely to feed through to increased levels of homelessness.
- Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) and other schemes are being constructively targeted to prevent homelessness through close liaison with the Council's Housing Needs Team and go some way to mitigate the effect of Welfare Reform for those in most need who are struggling to afford their housing costs.

The future of the homelessness legislation

- Proposals to make fundamental changes to the homelessness legislation from an independent review commissioned by Crisis, published in May 2016, will have significant implications in terms of resources for local authorities such as Mid Sussex, if enacted.

2. EXTENT OF HOMELESSNESS IN MID SUSSEX

Table 1 Key Homelessness Statistics for Mid Sussex 2011-16

	11/12	12/13	13/14	14/15	15/16
Households seeking face-to-face housing advice from the Council	1,145	1,109	1,056	1,008	885
Households assisted to access the private rented sector by the Council	103	104	117	97	90
Households accepted as statutorily homeless under the homelessness legislation	38	49	45	38	39
Households in temporary accommodation at end of year	27	39	26	30	43

The figures above show a gradual reduction in the numbers of people approaching the Council for housing advice in the last 5 years. This probably reflects more contact by telephone, e-mail, or use of information made available on the Council's website. However, the complexity of problems presented by those people who do come to see us has undoubtedly increased, as has the difficulty in finding ways to help them.

The numbers that we have been able to assist to access the private rented sector has reduced over the last two years, which is a reflection of the competitiveness of the market, coupled with welfare benefit changes that effectively exclude many of our clients from this sector.

The number of households accepted under the full duty of the homelessness legislation has remained remarkably stable, reflecting the preventative work undertaken by the Council's Housing Needs Team. However, it is likely that acceptances may increase in the forthcoming years due to a number of factors discussed elsewhere in this review.

The number of households in temporary accommodation has increased over the last year, despite the numbers accepted as homeless remaining low. This is largely due to fewer lettings becoming available in affordable housing than in previous years and diminishing access to the private sector for those on low incomes as an alternative to social housing.

3. REASONS FOR HOMELESSNESS

Table 2 - Reasons for people seeking face-to-face housing advice from the Council

	11/12	12/13	13/14	14/15	15/16
Unable to remain with parent, relative or friend	287	250	197	196	183
Non-violent relationship breakdown with partner	97	114	99	85	73
Violent breakdown of relationship with partner	50	65	67	59	63
Other violence or harassment	26	18	19	8	10
Mortgage arrears	140	92	79	48	34
Rent arrears	82	185	230	217	141
Other reasons for loss of rented/tied housing	308	257	221	255	242
Discharged from institution	25	23	15	18	24
Other	130	105	129	117	115
Total number seeking housing advice	1,145	1,109	1,056	1,003	885

Although the numbers of people experiencing difficulty remaining with parents, relatives, friends or partners have shown a steady reduction over the past 5 years, they still represented 29% of all approaches for advice. Those experiencing violence have, however, remained fairly constant and accounted for some 8% of approaches in 2015/16.

Over 43% of those seeking face-to-face advice from the Council about their housing in 2015/16 were experiencing difficulties with their rented accommodation, including 16% with difficulties paying their rent.

In contrast, the numbers experiencing mortgage problems has shown a steady decline over the last 5 years, following the national trend, and now accounts for less than 4% of enquiries to the Council.

Table 3 - Reasons for homelessness where full housing duty accepted by the Council

	11/12	12/13	13/14	14/15	15/16
Unable to remain with parent, relative or friend	12	14	7	9	6
Non-violent relationship breakdown with partner	4	10	9	4	4
Violent breakdown of relationship with partner	3	6	12	11	8
Other violence or harassment	2	-	-	-	-
Mortgage arrears	1	1	-	-	-
Rent arrears	1	2	1	-	2
Other reasons for loss of rented/tied housing	14	13	13	12	14
Discharged from institution	1	3	1	-	3
Other	-	1	2	2	2
Total number accepted as homeless	38	50	45	38	39

Over 41% of those accepted as homeless by the council under the homelessness legislation in 2015/16 became homeless from rented accommodation, reflecting the insecurity for many in this sector. In contrast, no households experiencing difficulty in homeownership were accepted as homeless in the same year.

Homelessness resulting from violent and non-violent relationship breakdown with partner continues to be a significant cause, accounting for some 31% of acceptances in 2015/16.

4. CLIENT GROUPS

Table 4 - Ethnicity of those seeking housing advice from the Council and those accepted as homeless in 2015/16

Ethnic Description	Seeking housing advice	%	Of whom accepted as homeless	%	Census 2011 Mid Sussex population
White- British, Irish, other	707	79.9%	36	92%	95.0%
Mixed	9	1.0%	-	0%	1.5%
Asian (British, Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, other)	23	2.6%	2	5%	1.7%
Black (British, African, Caribbean)	22	2.5%	1	3%	0.5%
Other	9	1.0%	-	0%	0.8%
Not stated	115	13.0%	-	0%	0.5%
Total	885	100%	39	100%	100%

The above figures suggest that the ethnicity of those approaching the Council for housing advice, and who are then accepted as homeless, are fairly consistent with the background population in Mid Sussex.

Table 5 - Priority Need category of those households accepted as homeless

	11/12	12/13	13/14	14/15	15/16
Household with dependent children	26	34	29	22	24
Household with pregnant member only	1	2	1	2	1
Applicant aged 16 or 17	-	-	-	-	-
Applicant aged 18, 19, 20, previously in care	-	1	-	1	-
Homeless in emergency (fire, flood, disaster)	-	-	-	-	-
Vulnerable due to old age	1	-	2	2	2
Vulnerable due to physical disability	4	3	7	1	4
Vulnerable due to mental illness or learning disability	6	8	4	8	6
Vulnerable for other reason	-	2	2	3	2
Total number accepted as homeless	38	50	45	38	39

Households with dependent children continue to account for the majority of households accepted as homeless, accounting for 62% of households accepted as homeless by the Council in 2015/16. Households containing a vulnerable person accounted for 36% of households accepted as homeless, and those who were vulnerable because of a mental illness or learning disability accounted for 15%. Those households containing a pregnant woman with no other children remain very low, and accounted for just one household in 2015/16.

5. TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION

Table 5 - Number of homeless households resident in temporary accommodation at the year end at 30 March

	11/12	12/13	13/14	14/15	15/16
Bed and Breakfast (shared facilities)	16	9	3	4	12
Private guest house (self-contained)	3	9	2	3	10
Women's refuges	0	1	1	1	0
Temporary units owned by housing associations	8	20	20	22	21
Total households in temporary accommodation	27	39	26	30	43

The Council has access to a limited supply of specially designated self-contained temporary accommodation in the District owned by Affinity Sutton Housing Association who provide an intensive housing management service. Access to a further limited supply of temporary accommodation on an ad-hoc basis has been agreed with Affinity Sutton should the need for it arise.

A limited supply of designated temporary housing is also provided in the District by Sussex Oakleaf Housing Association, who provide an intensive housing management service for vulnerable single people who may be suffering from mental health issues.

We also make use of privately owned self-contained guest house units for families with children and pregnant women with no sharing of bathing, cooking or toilet facilities. In addition, we use some privately owned bed and breakfast type accommodation with shared use of bathing, cooking or toilet facilities for single people or for a strictly limited period for families where no alternative can be found.

The use of privately run guest houses or B&B type accommodation is expensive and is kept to a minimum. However, there will always be a need for a flexible range of temporary accommodation to meet fluctuations in demand and this will inevitably include this type of accommodation which can be purchased on a nightly basis. Any increase in the use of privately run accommodation increases pressure on the Council's budget and in turn on local Council Tax payers and so all efforts are made to contain its use.

The numbers of households residing in temporary accommodation at any one time is affected by a number of factors:

- the number entering temporary accommodation
- the number leaving temporary accommodation
- the time spent by a household in temporary accommodation

The time spent by a household in temporary accommodation is affected by the following:

- the time taken to investigate their homeless application and the decision on any housing duty that may or may not arise
- any rent arrears delaying the household's further rehousing
- the availability of further housing to move on to, be that social housing or a tenancy in the private rented sector.

The numbers in temporary accommodation fluctuate but it is becoming clear that numbers are on the increase. Currently, this not primarily due to an increase in homelessness, as numbers accepted as homeless have remained stable, although this may change. The current increase is therefore more likely to be related to a decrease in the supply of further accommodation, be that in social or private rented tenancies. This is discussed later in the review.

6. ROUGH SLEEPING

Table 6 - Rough Sleeper numbers across East and West Sussex 2010-2015

<i>Authority</i>	<i>2010</i>	<i>2011</i>	<i>2012</i>	<i>2013</i>	<i>2014</i>	<i>2015</i>
Adur	-	-	-	1	2	-
Arun	25	10	26	18	13	15
Brighton & Hove	14	37	43	50	41	78
Chichester	15	15	26	19	14	17
Crawley	16	11	17	17	21	33
Eastbourne	6	3	11	6	11	10
Hastings	3	5	3	15	12	16

Horsham	6	2	2	5	2	3
Lewes	4	3	-	-	-	9
Mid Sussex	3	5	6	6	11	6
Rother	6	5	5	5	-	5
Wealden	-	-	-	-	1	-
Worthing	5	7	8	17	17	19
Total in Sussex	103	103	147	159	155	211

Source DCLG rough sleeper count statistics.

The number of people recorded as rough sleeping on a typical night across the whole of East and West Sussex has doubled since 2010, although the increase across East Sussex is steeper than in West Sussex. A single night in November is usually chosen across the two counties to avoid double counting. Most authorities carry out an estimate rather than a count, based on collating evidence from partner agencies, as this has been found to be more reliable than an actual count on the night.

Apart from in 2014, when numbers almost doubled, the number of rough sleepers known about in Mid Sussex has remained fairly stable, although higher than those seen in neighbouring Horsham and Wealden.

People sleeping rough typically tend to be single men, although an increasing number of women and couples are being recorded.

Rough sleeping represents the sharp end of homelessness and is likely to increase in the future for a number of reasons. These include the effects of reductions in mental health and drug and alcohol services as a result of funding cuts and a raising of thresholds for access to various support services including supported housing. In addition, welfare reforms such as the extension of the Shared Accommodation Rate (SAR), which limits the amount of benefit that covers accommodation costs to single people under 35, and the extension of these rates to tenants in social housing from 2018 can only add to the difficulties facing vulnerable single people in accessing housing.

A lack of shared accommodation in Mid Sussex that might be suitable for single people caught by welfare reform can only add to the difficulties facing single people.

A countywide Sussex Outreach Service (SOS) commissioned by the SHORE partnership across East & West Sussex and Brighton & Hove provides outreach worker support to entrenched rough sleepers to move off the streets and to engage with those who are new to rough sleeping under a 'no second night out' approach. The current future funding of SHORE, and the outreach service, however, remains uncertain.

The public can alert the Sussex Outreach workers to the presence of a rough sleeper through the www.streetlink.org.uk/ website which is highlighted on the Council's own website. An outreach worker will aim to meet with the rough sleeper by the end of the next working day.

7. YOUTH HOMELESSNESS

7.1 West Sussex Youth Homelessness Prevention Service

Young people are at particular risk of homelessness for a range of complex reasons that can often require specialist intervention by trained staff.

Following the landmark House of Lords decision in Southwark in 2009, a Joint Protocol for the Assessment of Homeless 16 & 17 year olds was agreed between West Sussex County Council (WSCC) and the seven District and Borough Council housing departments in West Sussex.

Since 2011 all homeless or potentially homeless 16 & 17 year olds have been referred to a countywide Youth Homelessness Prevention Team, employed by WSCC, who have taken over responsibility for all assessment of the housing and support needs of 16/17 year olds. The Team may, where appropriate, involve parents and extended family members in efforts to enable young people to remain in their family home with appropriate support.

Table 7 - Number of young people referred to the WSCC Youth Homelessness Prevention Team across West Sussex 2011-2016

	11/12	12/13	13/14	14/15	15/16
Arun	53	53	49	49	35
Chichester	46	33	23	31	22
Crawley	111	79	42	85	40
Horsham	51	28	25	44	37
Mid Sussex	42	25	23	34	16
Worthing & Adur	63	97	103	76	74
	366	315	265	319	224

The work of this team is widely regarded as being successful and, as the table above shows, the numbers of young people referred into the service has declined over the 5 years it has been in operation.

Of the cases closed by the WSCC Youth Homelessness Prevention Team in 2015/16, 8 young people across West Sussex were accepted into Social Services care under s.20 of the Children Act. All others were either helped to remain in their family or extended family home with or without support, moved into supported housing or other housing, or disengaged from the team working with them.

7.2 Care Leavers

In October 2015, a Joint Working Protocol for Care Leavers was further agreed between WSCC and the 7 District & Borough housing departments to ensure closer liaison between those working with Care Leavers and staff within Housing Needs Teams. The protocol aims to ensure that the accommodation needs and associated support in the community for young people leaving care are identified and procedures put in place to ensure that agencies work in partnership to achieve this.

It is probably too early to say how successful the new protocol has been in practice, but the view in Mid Sussex is that better liaison between the WSCC Young Peoples Service (YPS) and our Housing Needs Team has resulted.

The numbers leaving care in Mid Sussex are relatively small compared with those leaving care in other West Sussex District and Borough authorities as the two tables below show. Only 4.5% of Care Leavers in the County are currently accommodated in Mid Sussex.

It is wrong to assume that young people leaving care will automatically require social housing. The majority, instead, move on into other forms of independent accommodation and some go on to further education. There should be no need for a young person leaving care to make an application as homeless if the pathway planning has been successful. Over the last 5 years, only 2 young people leaving care have been accepted as homeless in Mid Sussex.

Table 8 – Young people currently open to the WSCC Leaving Care Service and due to join in 2016/17 by where they are currently accommodated as at April 2016

District of Borough	Young people aged 18-21 open to the Leaving Care Service at April 2016	Young people aged 17 who are due to join the Leaving Care Service during 2016/17
Adur	13	7
Arun	44	17
Chichester	11	10
Crawley	30	7
Horsham	20	4
Mid Sussex	10	3
Worthing	67	12
Accommodated outside West Sussex	25	1
TOTAL open to the West Sussex Leaving Care Service, or due to join it in 2016/17	220	61

7.3 Family Intervention Project

The Council's Housing needs Team works closely with the Family Intervention Project, which is managed by the Mid Sussex Community Safety Partnership and is part of the Government's Troubled Families Initiative.

The project provides intensive support to families with multiple problems who meet agreed criteria to address their complex needs with the aim of preventing homelessness and reducing the impact they have on their local community.

8. DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Table 9 – Approaches from those experiencing domestic violence

	11/12	12/13	13/14	14/15	15/16
Households approaching the Council for housing advice who are experiencing domestic violence	50	65	67	59	63
Homeless applications made by those experiencing domestic violence	11	18	17	16	11
Households where full housing duty accepted	3	6	12	11	8

The number of approaches from those suffering domestic abuse has remained fairly stable over the past 5 years. Anecdotally, there has been a noticeable increase in cases involving same sex couples, which probably reflects a greater openness and acceptance generally.

Whilst the majority of cases seen are resolved without the need for emergency accommodation under the homelessness legislation, homelessness resulting from violent relationship breakdown with a partner continues to be a significant cause, accounting for over 20% of acceptances in 2015/16.

Households who are subject to domestic abuse are routinely referred to the relevant support service for specialist assistance. This includes WORTH, which provides immediate support for high risk cases and the Stonham Outreach Service which supplies longer term floating support. We encourage housing associations to provide "Safe at Home" schemes, which enable those suffering domestic violence to stay in their own homes through additional security measures. We will also continue to be actively involved in the countywide Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARAC), which consider how individual domestic violence cases can be best managed.

9. MENTAL ILLNESS AND LEARNING DISABILITY

There is a high incidence of mental health needs amongst those approaching the Council who are threatened with homelessness. It is recognised that affordable and secure housing is crucial to good mental health and that services to support those who have a mental illness or learning disability are vital in efforts to prevent homelessness. Any cut in support services, or reduction in the supply of supported housing, is likely to lead to increased insecurity and in time to more homelessness amongst such households.

Table 10 – Homelessness duty to those with a mental illness or learning disability

	11/12	12/13	13/14	14/15	15/16
Households without children who contain a person with a mental illness or learning disability who have been accepted by the Council under the full homelessness duty	6	8	4	8	6

The number of households without children who have been accepted as homeless and contain a person who is considered to be vulnerable due to having a mental illness or learning disability has remained fairly constant over the last 5 years, although in 2015/16 such households accounted for 15% of those accepted.

The Council's Housing Services has a long record of working in partnership with other agencies supporting those with a mental illness and is represented on the multi-agency Mid Sussex Mental Health and Housing Liaison Group which it initiated in the 1990s and which meets quarterly. This is a practitioners meeting providing a forum for information exchange and discussion of operational issues relating to systems policy and practice, particularly matters relating to housing need at the point of hospital discharge. The group is able to identify specific gaps or obstacles that are causing difficulties and will take these up with the appropriate agency with the aim of resolving them.

10. ARMED FORCES PERSONNEL

It is recognised that armed forces personnel face particular difficulties when re-establishing themselves into the community after they leave the services, and accessing suitable housing is no exception. This is reflected in members of the armed forces being over-represented nationally among rough sleepers.

Along with most local authorities, the Council has signed up to an Armed Forces Community Covenant to reflect its commitment to the particular needs of such people. In line with this, the Council's Housing Allocation Scheme sets out how applications for social housing from former armed forces personnel are dealt with. Such people are exempted, for example, from the need to meet the local connection qualifying criteria that apply to all other applicants. Additional priority is also given to bids from armed forces personnel who are in housing need.

However, the numbers in Mid Sussex are low. There are currently only 8 applicants on the Council's housing register who are recorded as having been in the armed forces. Occasionally there is an approach from someone who is homeless, but again the numbers are very low.

11. THE HOUSING REGISTER

The Council's housing register is currently managed under contract by the Homemove Team at Affinity Sutton who assess the housing need of applicants and allocate social rented housing according to the Council's published Housing Allocation Scheme that has been approved by elected Members.

From May 2014 the Council introduced 2 year local connection criteria that applicants must meet before they may join the housing register following guidance from the Government and using powers contained in the Localism Act 2011.

Between 1999 and 2015 the Council operated a 'Common Housing Register' which enabled access to the stock of most social housing providers operating in the district and which allowed tenants of those providers to transfer to another provider through the Council's allocations and nominations process.

From April 2015 Affinity Sutton decided to withdraw from this partnership and to take control of its own transfers within its own national stock of housing, moving its tenants off the Council's housing register and on to its own national waiting list. At the same time, it decided to reduce the Council's nominations to its Mid Sussex stock to 75% of true voids.

10.1 Housing need

In April 2016 there were 1420 housing applicants on the Council's housing register and they were placed in the following broad bands A-D of housing need and identified as requiring the following sized accommodation.

Table 10 – Numbers of applicants on the Council's housing register as at April 2016

	1 bed	2 bed	3 bed	4 bed	Sheltered	Total
Band A - emergency/urgent	8	8	2	-	5	23
Band B - high priority	4	11	6	6	6	33
Band C – medium priority	110	144	36	11	34	335
Band D – low priority	519	363	60	9	78	1029
Totals	641	526	104	26	123	1420

Single people and couples requiring 1 bedroom accommodation account for 45% of those on the housing register, and families requiring 2 bedrooms make up 37%. As seen by the table in the next section, the number of lettings of both these sized homes have seen a significant fall in 2015/16 and this is likely to increase pressure on such households which may well affect future levels of homelessness.

10.2 Housing allocation

The Council operates a choice-based lettings (CBL) system where vacant properties are advertised in a two weekly cycle on a website and registered applicants can 'bid' or show an interest in those that are suitable for their housing need. From a shortlist of those who have indicated an interest, the applicant in greatest assessed housing need is then nominated to the housing provider as a prospective tenant.

The Council currently shares a choice-based lettings (CBL) software system in partnership with 9 other local authorities across East & West Sussex. Apart from a very few hard to let homes which are made available for bidding by applicants across the partnership, the vast majority of Mid Sussex homes are only accessible to those on the Council's housing register.

The following table shows the number of lettings in Mid Sussex, by bedroom number, over the past 5 years:

Table 11 – Allocation of social rented housing from the Council's housing register

	1 bed	2 bed	3 bed	4 bed	Sheltered	Total
2011/12	122	88	53	9	82	354
2012/13	153	145	109	18	74	499
2013/14	149	173	98	8	58	486
2014/15	131	148	92	2	88	461
*2015/16	*88	*95	*78	*5	*56	*322

* from April 2015 the above figures do not include lettings to Affinity Sutton tenants who transferred to a new tenancy within Affinity Sutton's own stock.

It is clear from the table above that the number of lettings in 2015/16 was significantly down on previous years, particularly of 1 and 2 bedroom homes. As mentioned earlier, such homes are in particular demand by those on the housing register, and so the effect of a fall is likely to impact most on them.

The reduction in lettings is likely to reflect a number of factors that have come together to reduce the levels of vacancies that arise and, correspondingly, to which lettings can be made. This in turn impacts on the time homeless households may stay in temporary accommodation waiting for further housing and therefore the number in temporary accommodation at any one time.

One of the factors contributing to the reduction in lettings in 2015/16 is that transfers within Affinity Sutton's housing stock are no longer included in the figures above, following a decision by Affinity Sutton to take control of transfers within its own stock from April 2015 and allow its tenants to apply directly for a transfer to a new home through its own choice-based lettings system called 'Home Choice'.

At the same time as deciding to manage its transfers within its own stock, Affinity Sutton decided to significantly reduce the number of vacancies it allowed the Council to nominate prospective tenants to. As a result of the reduction in vacancies available to people on the Council's housing register, it was agreed with Affinity Sutton that their tenants should no longer remain on the Council's register, as alternative arrangements were available for them to apply for a move through their own landlord.

Affinity Sutton are the largest social rented housing provider in the District and own 67% of the stock in Mid Sussex, and so its tenants retain a reasonable opportunity to transfer to another home should they need to and may also carry out a mutual exchange with any social tenant from another social housing provider should they wish to with their landlord's permission.

12. SOCIAL HOUSING SUPPLY

11.1 Affordability of Social Housing

The new funding regime introduced in 2011 for affordable housing moved away from Government grants to registered providers to fund development of new housing at 'social rents' (typically 50% of open market rent), to new development financed through future rental streams using the new 'affordable' rent tenure set at a maximum of 80% of local market rent.

As a result, the main developing registered providers in Mid Sussex have been converting a high proportion of their relets from 'social' to 'affordable' rents as they become vacant and

the vast majority of new builds are at 'affordable' rent. According to the Strategic Housing Market Assessment Update 2014, 30% of Mid Sussex households are unable to afford 'social' rents and 44.2% unable to afford 'affordable' rents without assistance from housing benefit.

11.2 Supply of new affordable housing

Table 12 - New affordable housing delivery over the past 5 years in Mid Sussex

	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	Total
Rented	131	75	114	161	84	565
Shared Ownership	71	33	12	60	29	205
Total affordable housing	202	108	126	221	113	770

Our target to deliver 128 new affordable homes in 2016/17 is expected to be exceeded because a number of units that were delayed in 2015/16 will be delivered this year. However, in future years we anticipate a reduction in the supply of new affordable units to rent due to a range of factors that will influence this. The Council's affordable housing policy is currently under review.

The Government has indicated that there will be no grant available from the Homes and Communities Agency for new affordable rented properties, with resources in future to be concentrated on the promotion of Help to Buy, shared ownership and Starter Homes.

Registered providers have also had to revisit their development programmes, following the Government's requirement that they reduce their rents by 1% a year for the next 4 years, compared to a previous agreement with the Government (on which RP's business plans were based) that they could raise rents by CPI + 1% p.a. to 2022.

A combination of the above factors suggests a diminishing amount of new affordable rented properties in Mid Sussex to meet Housing Need identified in the District.

The Government's move away from supporting affordable rented housing in favour of home ownership options will reduce the number of homes available for those who are homeless or on the housing register. However the main impact of this will not be felt until sites developed under the new regime begin to complete in 2017-18.

11.3 Affordability of Starter Homes

Starter Homes will be made available to first-time buyers under 40 at a discount of at least 20% off the open market price and below a price cap of £250,000 in Mid Sussex. An analysis of our Strategic Housing Market assessment of housing need indicates that these homes will not be affordable for the majority of households in housing need in the district.

13. THE PRIVATE HOUSING MARKET

12.1 Housing tenure in Mid Sussex

Census data shows that there has been a large increase in the size of the private rented sector over the last 10 years, increasing from 4,002 properties in 2001 to 7,322 in 2011. There are now more private rented properties in the District than social rent and at the last census the private rented sector represented nearly 13% of housing provision. There has also been a notable decline in the proportion of households that are owner-occupied.

Table 13 – Housing tenure in Mid Sussex

Tenure	2001 Census	2011 Census	% change
Owner occupied	41,314 (79.5%)	42,658 (74.3%)	+3.3%
Shared ownership	386 (0.5%)	561 (0.7%)	+45.3%
Social rent	5,279 (10.2%)	6,092 (10.6%)	+15.4%
Private rented	4,002 (7.7%)	7,322 (12.8%)	+83.0%
Living rent free	988 (1.9%)	776 (1.4%)	-21.5%
Total number of households	51,969	57,409	+10.5%

The demand for social housing outweighs supply and those approaching the Council for help are increasingly reliant on accessing accommodation to rent in the private sector. However, this has become more difficult due to benefit restrictions imposed by Welfare Reform and the limited supply of suitable private rented sector accommodation in Mid Sussex. Even though the number of properties for rent in the District has gone up, demand for properties is very high and this is reflected in increased levels of rent.

In principle, the private rented sector's inherent flexibility allows people who are not necessarily in acute housing need but nevertheless require alternative accommodation to obtain somewhere to live. It also should provide options for people who wish to move across boundaries and enables sharing and lodging arrangements. However, private rented property is increasingly unaffordable and inaccessible to many of those in housing need in the District.

12.2 Market housing costs and incomes

Information from the Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) Update 2014 identified that 62.7% of households in Mid Sussex were unable to afford to buy and 44.2% unable to rent without some form of assistance. The SHMA Update also shows that for the purchase of entry level housing, the ratio of lower quartile house purchase costs to income was 10.2.

12.3 Levels of private sector rents in Mid Sussex

Table 14 - Mid Sussex private sector rents 1 Apr 2015 to 31 Mar 2016 and LHA Rates

Red denotes unaffordable by those reliant on housing benefit					
	Mean	Lower Quartile	Median	Upper Quartile	LHA Rate April 2015
Room in shared house	£472	£429	£451-	£512	£346
Studio	£566	£550	£575	£595	£658
1 bedroom	£700	£650	£695	£725	£658
2 bedrooms	£907	£825	£895	£975	£807
3 bedrooms	£1,203	£1,095	£1,200	£1,300	£967
4+ bedrooms	£1,804	£1,450	£1,650	£1,950	£1,346

Source: VO website <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/private-rental-market-statistics-may-2016>

The above table illustrates that private sector rents in Mid Sussex are now generally above the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates that are affordable by those people who are dependent on Housing Benefit for all or part of their housing costs. Access to affordable private rented accommodation for families is now limited to the lower quartile of 1 bedroom lettings and to studio units. For single people under the age of 35, whose housing benefit is limited to the Shared Accommodation Rate (SAR), and who would normally be limited to renting a room in a shared house, the private rented sector is now all together generally unaffordable to them.

12.4 Local Housing Allowance (LHA)

Local Housing Allowance (LHA) was introduced in April 2008 to set the maximum housing benefit payable to a tenant, dependant on their income and the number of bedrooms their household needs.

LHA was originally set at a local level to reflect median market rents being charged and allowed those dependent on benefits for all or part of their rent access to 50% of the market. From April 2011, LHA was reduced so as to allow access to the bottom 30% of the market and linked to the increase in CPI rather than increase in rents if the CPI was lower. From April 2016, however, the LHA has been frozen until April 2020.

Research by the Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH) (*'Mind the Gap' published CIH 13th May 2016*) found that before the April 2016 freeze on LHA took effect, in some areas of the UK, people who are dependent on benefits for all or part of their rent are only able to afford the bottom 5-10% of the private rental market. The table above suggests that Mid Sussex is one of those areas.

With a freeze in LHA rates in place until April 2020, the percentage of the private rental market that is available to those on low incomes can only diminish if rents continue on their upward trend. Increasingly limited access to the private rental market is of significant concern in terms of predicting future levels of homelessness. Particularly so, as the private rented sector contributes around 13% of housing for people in Mid Sussex (according to the 2011 Census) and 44.2% of households are unable to rent without some form of assistance, (according to the Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) Update 2014).

12.5 Assistance from the Council with renting in the private sector

The Council's Housing Needs Team has operated a Rent in Advance and Deposit Guarantee Scheme to provide financial assistance with the up-front costs of renting privately since 1991. The Scheme, which has assisted 1800 households since its inception and at very little cost to the Council, has proved very successful in helping people access private rented tenancies and has offered a flexible alternative option to social housing to many people who are experiencing difficulties accessing housing.

To be helped under the Scheme a household must have a local connection with Mid Sussex, be either homeless or threatened with losing their home and be on a low income and unable to afford the upfront costs associated with renting privately. Single people and those found to have become intentionally homeless are equally eligible for assistance under the Scheme.

The Scheme has become a significant tool in the Council's efforts to prevent homelessness and any reduction in its effectiveness is likely to result in increased homelessness and therefore pressure on the Council's temporary accommodation budget.

Table 15 – Households assisted under the Council's rent in advance and deposit guarantee scheme in last 5 years

	11/12	12/13	13/14	14/15	15/16
Households assisted under the Council's rent in advance & deposit guarantee scheme	103	104	117	97	90

The numbers of households who have been helped under the scheme has reduced in the last two years due to the increasingly difficult market that our clients are trying to access. Private landlords and letting agents are easily able to attract tenants who are not dependent on benefits or help from the Council in what is largely a landlord's market. Rents that are

affordable by those on low incomes and who may be dependent on housing benefit are increasingly hard to find as Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates fall well behind the market.

To counter this increasingly difficult situation the Council appointed a part-time Private Sector Tenancy Negotiator from April 2015 to engage with private landlords and increase the supply of lettings available to households under threat of homelessness who are being assisted by the Council's Housing Needs Team. Although the appointment is regarded as a success and should be continued, there is a limit to what can be done in the increasingly difficult market we are seeing other than attempt to halt the decline.

12.6 Discharging the Council's homelessness duty into the private sector

The Localism Act 2011 introduced a new power allowing local authorities to end their full homelessness duty by offering a 12 month tenancy with a private landlord. Whilst the new power has not yet been used by the Council, it remains an option to be considered on a strictly case-by-case basis when officers consider this might be appropriate and suitable for a particular household.

14. WELFARE & HOUSING REFORM - Implications for housing need

In the last 5 years the Government has introduced a range of proposals designed to reform welfare benefits in order to provide work incentives, simplify the benefits system and make it easier to administer.

Further significant reforms are on the way and are likely to erode the role of social housing and increase pressure on already hard hit low and modest income families struggling to find affordable housing solutions. Taken together, the reforms already in place and those in the pipeline will have significant implications on the level of housing need in the District and future levels of homelessness.

Below are set out the reforms that have already been implemented, and are followed by a list of further reforms due to be implemented shortly.

13.1 Recent reforms introduced in the last 5 years affecting housing need and supply

Reforms to Social Housing

- **End of 'Social Rents'** – The Government introduced from April 2012 a new Affordable Homes Programme (AHP) which precluded building for letting at social rents (usually at 50% of market rents).
- **Conversion to 'Affordable Rents'** – The Government allowed from 2011 the conversion of existing social rents to 'Affordable Rents' (usually at 80% of market rents) when properties become vacant and were re-let, where the increased rent was used to fund the housing association's development programme.
- **Ending of lifetime tenancies** – From April 2012 local authorities and housing associations were no longer required to provide lifetime tenancies to new social tenants but instead were allowed to offer fixed term-tenancies ('flexible tenancies') of a minimum of 2 years. However, there has been limited take-up of the new power, particularly by local authorities. In Mid Sussex, however, the take-up of the new power by housing associations, including Affinity Sutton has been high.
- **Right to Buy discount increased** - Increase in discount for tenants taking up the Right to Buy from April 2014 from its previous 60% to 70% (up to a maximum of £75,000 outside London, which increases with inflation every year in April and

currently stands at £77,900). Council starts have been vastly exceeded by sales and the gap will grow as discounts are increased.

Welfare reforms affecting housing

- **LHA reduction** - A reduction in the level of Local Housing Allowance (LHA) from 50th to 30th percentile of local market rents from April 2011 and then linked to increases in CPI rather than actual rents has led to LHA lagging behind actual rents. This has reduced access to private rented homes which are affordable by those on low incomes.
- **Shared Accommodation Rate extended to under 35s** - The Local Housing Allowance (LHA) Shared Accommodation Rate (SAR) for people under 25 was extended to single people under 35 from January 2012. This significantly impacted on access to affordable housing in the private rented sector for those on low incomes, leaving shared accommodation their only affordable option.
- **Removal of the spare room subsidy ('Bedroom Tax')** – From April 2013 restrictions were placed on the Housing Benefit payable for working age households who under-occupy social rented housing. This is designed to encourage them to downsize, releasing larger properties for those who need them. As a result of this measure, pressure has increased on the supply of one and two bedroom homes which are already in high demand, and relieved on larger homes. There is now concern that larger social housing homes may be unaffordable in future to those on modest incomes.
- **Benefit Cap** – From April 2013 a cap of £26,000 pa was introduced on the total amount of welfare benefit a working age family with children could receive. The cap risked making larger properties unaffordable to those in receipt of benefits to help with their rent unless they gained employment. From the Autumn of 2016, the cap is to be reduced to £20,000 making larger social rented properties unaffordable.
- **Abolition of the Social Fund** – From April 2013 the Government abolished the award of Crisis Loans and Community Care Grants to those most in need. These often went to people setting up home for the first time and covered essential white goods and furniture for example. County Council's were subsequently given a reduced fund to spend locally. In West Sussex, this became the Local assistance Network (LAN).
- **Benefit Sanctions** – From October 2012 the Government introduced benefit sanctions on those claiming Job Seekers Allowance JSA who were deemed to have 'failed to do enough to find work'. Repeat 'offenders' can lose benefits for up to 3 years. Although the loss of benefit is restricted to payments of JSA, people's Housing Benefit is automatically suspended until they provide evidence of their new income. There is evidence that many people who are sanctioned fail to provide evidence of their new income and lose Housing Benefit as a result, leading to rent arrears and the potential risk of homelessness.

13.2 Further reforms that are likely to impact on those in housing need and potentially result in increased homelessness

Reforms to Social Housing – in the pipeline

- **Planning gain (s.106 site thresholds for affordable housing)** - Recent changes on reduced thresholds when local planning authority can apply their affordable housing policies allow obligations to be reduced or avoided completely. The Court of Appeal recently upheld a Government ministerial statement on affordable housing to require affordable housing only on sites of more than 10 units and

commuted sum contributions on site of 6 to 10 units in AONB, National Parks and certain designated rural areas. In addition the court upheld the judgement in respect of a Vacant Building Credit to be applied to such sites to offset the affordable housing requirement. MSDC's draft District Plan affordable housing policies have been amended to reflect this judgement. The outcome will be a reduction of sites upon which affordable housing can be required and a consequent reduction in new affordable housing delivery to meet housing needs.

- 1% rent cut – The introduction of compulsory 1% cut in rent per year for 4 years from April 2016 imposed on social housing providers will impact on business plans and reduce their ability to build new homes.
- Right to Buy extension to housing associations – The Right to Buy has been extended to housing associations which may affect their ability to acquire development finance. Homes sold will be replaced by affordable homes but not necessarily on a like for like basis. e.g. what was originally a social rented home could be replaced by a other affordable tenures such as affordable rent, shared ownership or a Starter Home for sale.
- Right to buy funded by sale of council houses – The Right to Buy for housing association tenants is to be funded by councils being forced to sell off their more high-value homes as they fall vacant. This will not affect Mid Sussex as the Council does not own any social housing.
- Pay to stay for social housing tenants – The Government intends to introduce a compulsory Pay To Stay regime for social tenants from April 2017. Tenants outside London with a household income of £31,000 will be expected to an extra 15p in rent per week for every £1 they receive in taxable income above £31,000. Tenants in receipt of housing benefit will, however, be exempted from Pay to Stay.
- Starter Homes – The Housing and Planning Act 2016 allows developers to build Starter Homes for sale to meet their planning obligations to provide a proportion of 'Affordable Housing' in developments. Starter Homes will be exclusively available to first-time buyers under the age of 40 as part of the Government's strategy to increase homeownership. Buyers will benefit from a 20% reduction in market value with properties set to cost no more than £250,000 outside London and £450,000 within. Exact details of how the scheme will operate are due to be contained in regulations that are yet to be published. An analysis of our Strategic Housing Market assessment of housing need indicates that these homes will not be affordable for the majority of households in housing need in the district
- Ending of Lifetime tenancies – The Government intends to introduce compulsory flexible tenancies for local authority tenants from 2017. The maximum term of a fixed-term tenancy will be 10 years, potentially longer for families with children. Existing tenants will be unaffected unless they choose to move to alternative accommodation. Local authorities will have discretion to offer lifetime tenancies for certain categories of applicant according to statutory guidance that is yet to be published.

Welfare reforms affecting housing in the pipeline

- LHA freeze - Local Housing Allowance (LHA) is to be frozen from April 2016 until April 2020, further reducing access to affordable rented homes in the private sector and allowing Affordable Rents, which are set at 80% of market rents, to overtake LHA rates as well.
- LHA extension to social housing - Local Housing Allowance (LHA) to be extended to cover social housing from 2018 for those tenancies starting after April 2016. Whilst, currently, this will have little impact, the impact will build as Affordable Rents increase in line with market rents. The effect on single people under 35 will,

however, be significant as almost no social housing is currently available at rents that are affordable by those receiving the Shared Accommodation Rate (SAR) of housing benefit. This could mean that single people under the age of 35 will have little or no access to self-contained affordable housing, whether private or social rented. It is likely that such people may have no alternative but to share rooms or move to cheaper parts of the country.

- **Supported housing** - The future of supported housing (including housing for older people) is in doubt with the extension of LHA to social housing as rents combined with service charges are considerably higher because of the intensive housing management and support these schemes typically involve. The Government has postponed a decision on whether or how supported housing will be included in the new regime, but the uncertainty has put in doubt the future of current schemes and those in the pipeline on hold. Any loss of supported housing would deny vulnerable people the appropriate housing they need and is likely to put pressure on many other public services including the NHS and the Criminal Justice System.
- **Benefit Cap** – From Autumn 2016 the cap of £26,000 pa that was introduced in 2013 is set to be reduced to £20,000 for working age families living outside London. This will make larger social rented homes unaffordable to those affected.
- **Universal Credit** - The phasing in of Universal Credit, where the housing element is paid direct to social tenants rather than their landlord is causing concern with housing associations and their lenders following analysis of Government pilots which showed an increase in rent arrears. This could impact on future levels of homelessness if replicated in Mid Sussex.
- **End of housing benefit for 18-21 year olds** – The Government intends to withdraw housing benefit entitlement from some 18-21 year olds from April 2017. Although some vulnerable young people will be exempted from this, using criteria that have not yet been defined, it is likely that there will be a significant impact on the housing options for this age group.
- **DHP reduction** - Possibility that Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP), that are used to mitigate the effects of welfare reform, may be reduced or withdrawn in future is of potential concern in terms of preventing homelessness.

15. SCHEMES IN PLACE TO MITIGATE THE EFFECTS OF WELFARE REFORM

14.1 Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP)

Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) are a way that the Council can help households whose Housing Benefit is not enough to pay their rent and are a useful discretionary tool that can be used to prevent homelessness. DHPs are special non-returnable payments made from a cash-limited annual fund provided to each local authority by the Government and their use is covered by regulation and statutory guidance.

Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) are being constructively targeted to prevent homelessness through close liaison with the Council's Housing Needs Team and go some way to mitigate the effect of welfare reform for those who have been hardest hit and would otherwise struggle to manage their housing costs. Any future reduction in the Council's DHP grant would adversely affect those in the greatest need.

Table 16 – Discretionary Housing Payment grant (DHP) in last 5 years

	11/12	12/13	13/14	14/15	15/16	16/17
Government DHP grant to Mid Sussex	£25K	£50K	£128K	£112K	£104K	£126K

14.2 Foodbanks

There are three voluntary sector foodbanks operating in Mid Sussex in Burgess Hill, East Grinstead and Haywards Heath. These supply free food to those considered to be most in need. Vouchers are issued by a number of agencies involved with those in need including the Council's Housing Needs Team. Like Discretionary Housing Payments, Foodbanks help to mitigate the effect of welfare reform for those who have been hardest hit and are largely funded by public donation.

14.3 Local Assistance Network (LAN) funded by WSCC

Since April 2013, West Sussex County Council has funded support through a number of agencies to provide discretionary assistance with a range of basic needs such as food from foodbanks, furniture recycling schemes or vouchers to get personal and household goods such as nappies, cooking equipment, clothes or help with transport and fuel costs. The scheme is aimed at those who have no other way of getting assistance.

The LAN scheme replaces Government Crisis Loans and Community Care Grants which was abolished from April 2013 under the Welfare Reform Act 2012.

14.4 MyKey housing support service funded by WSCC

MyKey is a homelessness prevention service funded by West Sussex County Council (WSCC) across the whole of West Sussex. The service is currently provided by Southdown Housing Association and offers advice, guidance, information and encouragement to help particularly vulnerable people experiencing difficulty with their housing.

The MyKey service provides a member of staff who is co-located with the Council's Housing Needs Team and who plays an integral part in efforts to preventing homelessness.

Table 17 – Referrals to the MyKey service across West Sussex in 2015/16

	Number of referrals to the MyKey service in 2015/16
Adur	145
Arun	319
Chichester	183
Crawley	254
Horsham	245
Mid Sussex	158
Worthing	378
Outside West Sussex	40
Unknown	23
Total referrals	1745

16. PROPOSALS TO CHANGE THE HOMELESSNESS LEGISLATION

An independent review of the legal duties owed to homeless people commissioned by Crisis and published in May 2016 has recommended fundamental changes to the existing homelessness legislation contained in Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996.

The Government is currently considering the recommendations which, if enacted, will have significant implications in terms of resources for local authorities such as Mid Sussex.

The review provides a strong case for reform, while proposing a new legislative model with three key aims, including the introduction of:

- a stronger information and advice duty;
- a homelessness prevention duty for all eligible households, similar to the legislative change recently enacted in Wales; and
- a relief duty for all eligible homeless people who have a local connection.