

**Report to:** Cabinet

**Date:** 24 March 2022

**Title:** Lewes District Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy 2022 - 2027.

**Report of:** Tim Whelan, Director of Service Delivery

**Cabinet member:** Councillor William Meyer, Cabinet member for housing

**Ward(s):** All

**Purpose of report:** To introduce a new homelessness & rough sleeping strategy and ask Cabinet for approval of the strategic goals, objectives, and associated action plan.

**Decision type:** Key

**Officer recommendation(s):** Cabinet is recommended to:

- (1) Consider the final draft of the Lewes District Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy 2022 – 2027, set out in Appendix 1;
- (2) Subject to there being no requirement for significant amendments, to authorise the Director of Service Delivery to adopt the strategy and produce a formatted version for public release.

**Reasons for recommendations:** To secure Cabinet approval for a new homelessness and rough sleeping strategy for the District, which local authorities have a statutory obligation to review and publish every five years.

The new strategy provides a strategic overview of the current challenges and sets out a framework and action plan addressing these.

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## **1. Introduction & background**

1.1 Reducing the incidence of homelessness and ending rough sleeping is a priority for Lewes District Council. This strategy sets out the Council's approach to achieving this goal over the next five years, by setting out new strategic objectives and a framework focused on preventing homelessness, intervening effectively when it occurs, and putting in place sustainable solutions to support

re-housing options. The associated delivery plan sets out the actions needed to implement the strategy and their intended outcomes.

1.2 The strategy has been developed in line with the requirements set out in the Homelessness Act 2002, which places a legal responsibility on local authorities to undertake a two stage process of reviewing homelessness in their district, then use the findings of that review to develop and publish a revised homelessness strategy every five years.

1.3 The review stage of the process, undertaken in autumn 2021, provided an up to date picture of the:

- Current and likely future levels of homelessness across Lewes District.
- Activities carried out and support available to prevent homelessness and those experiencing it.
- Level of resources made available locally to tackle homelessness.

The main sections of the review set out the current operating context, summarised progress made against the previous strategy, and looked at how the service is currently operating. The review of operations assessed the levels of demand for housing needs services, examined the responses made to prevent and relieve homelessness, and looked at how temporary accommodation was being used. How well local partnerships worked to address homelessness was also reviewed as part of the process.

1.4 A summary of the main outcomes of the review is set out in the strategy, and amongst these the headline findings were as follows:

- **Demand** - The number of enquiries received by the Council's housing needs team increased by 23% during 2020/21.
- **Preventative action** - A range of activities undertaken by the team helped secure homes for over half of the 62 households threatened with homelessness when they approached the Council (under the prevention duty<sup>1</sup>).
- **Early action** - A range of activities undertaken within the team helped secure homes for around 40% of the 147 households already homeless when they approached the Council (under the relief duty<sup>2</sup>).
- **Main duties** - As a result of these actions only 36% of those already homeless when they approached the Council went on to be assessed under the main homelessness duty and required temporary accommodation. This

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<sup>1</sup>The *prevention duty*, introduced by the Homelessness Reduction Act (HRA) 2017, requires local authorities to take reasonable steps to prevent homelessness for any eligible applicant likely to become homeless within 56 days of applying for help.

<sup>2</sup> The *relief duty*, introduced by the HRA 2017, requires local authorities to provide more support to those who are homeless when they applied to help, for a minimum of 56 days, including scope to provide emergency accommodation for a widely defined group of households.

reduced the social cost of homelessness on households and the financial costs borne by the Council.

- **Partnership working** - Shaping effective alliances with statutory and voluntary partners has been integral to the local response, helping prevent homelessness and providing support to vulnerable households across the District.
- **Rough sleeping.** The number of rough sleepers in Lewes District has been consistently low compared with other areas, with the Government's annual count registering numbers in single figures for each of the past five years. The Rough Sleeping Initiative (RSI) continues to provide ongoing support, although there are a small number of hard to engage rough sleepers that services struggle to connect with. To address this, the new strategy will bolster the commitment to support local voluntary agencies working with this group.
- **Covid-19** - Analysis indicates that the pandemic had a local impact that reflected national trends, with the policies that sought to restrict evictions and increase the assistance given to the most vulnerable, increasing the number of single households and reducing the number of family households, assisted under homelessness duties.
- **Homelessness Reduction Act (HRA) 2017** - There is evidence that the shift towards assisting more single households was underway before the pandemic, as a result of the new prevention and relief duties introduced by the HRA. This means that the service is managing more single people with complex needs than previously.

1.5 Taking account of the findings, the final section of the review set out a strategic outlook based on three key themes, namely:

- Prevention – reducing the incidence of homelessness.
- Intervention – lessening the impact where homelessness has occurred.
- Sustainable solutions – promoting housing options and support services.

These formed the vision for the new strategy and the framework shaping the objectives it contains.

## 2. Strategy proposals

2.1 This section summarises the contents of the newly developed strategy, a full copy of which can be found in appendix 1. The opening and introductory sections of the document propose a vision for tackling homelessness across the District, outline the definition of homelessness underlying the proposals, and review the current national and local operating context.

2.2 At a national level the operating context focuses on the impact of Covid-19, recent legislation, and policy frameworks, such as the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, and the National Rough Sleeping Strategy. These have had an impact on levels of operational demand and

shaped service delivery by forming the backdrop for joint working, helping to address issues such as domestic abuse and street homelessness.

2.3 Locally, the context focusses on the impact of high house prices and rents, increasing levels of deprivation, and limited housing supply. The review recognised the continuing impact of high house prices, with Lewes now having the highest average of the five districts and boroughs in East Sussex. Prices now average over ten times the average local salary. These inflated prices have a knock on impact on rents, restricting the access that those on low (and increasingly so those on moderate), incomes have to both home ownership and private rented markets. The relatively small size of the private rented market across the District and increasing levels of deprivation compound the issue and increase further, local levels of housing need. At the sharp end this culminates in those households losing their home, or not being able to secure suitable housing in the District, seeking assistance from the housing needs team.

2.4 The key section of the strategy introduces nine objectives based around three key themes set out in the vision, which focus on; **prevention** to reduce the incidence of homelessness, effective **intervention** to reduce the impact of existing homelessness; and **sustainable solutions** to support re-housing options. Together the themes and objectives create a framework that, barring any significant change to the operating context, is intended to remain fixed for the five year duration of the strategy. The nine objectives are set out below:

#### Prevention

- Quality housing needs services - dedicated to effective advice, holistic and informed assessment.
- Preventative casework – working, alongside partners, to stop those seeking help from becoming homeless.
- Targeted preventions for the most vulnerable groups – through the provision of agreed pathways into support.
- Strategic activities - that seek to identify the issues that drive homelessness across the District and apply remedies to reduce it.

#### Intervention

- Tackling rough sleeping - continue with our county-wide approach to reduce harm and address associated multiple, complex needs.
- Partnership working - maximise the effectiveness of joint working and pathways for at risk groups.
- Temporary housing – provide a good quality, safe, secure, value-for-money accommodation portfolio and reduce the use of emergency placements.

## Sustainability

- Re-housing - establish a range of sustainable housing and move-on options for homeless households.
- Support - deliver effective support services to help customers maintain accommodation once housed.

2.5 A series of cross-cutting themes support the delivery of the framework through:

- Promoting collaborations with statutory, agency and voluntary partners.
- Investing to train staff and upskill teams.
- Delivering high quality, value for money services that make the most of available funding.

2.6 This framework forms the basis for the delivery plan, the first iteration of which is incorporated into the strategy set out in appendix 1. The plan contains a series of actions and outcomes tuned-in to deliver the listed objectives, which will be allocated to post holders once the strategy is approved. Unlike the framework, the action plan is designed to be updated across the duration of the strategy, to reflect progress, changes to operating context and new funding opportunities.

2.7 The majority of the actions and outcomes presented in the plan are set to complete within two years of the strategy being deployed. Highlights include:

- Supporting education initiatives for young people & care leavers.
- Creating a dedicated 'prevention hub' to co-ordinate the work of Council teams, local voluntary and agency partners.
- Using data modelling to identify households at a high risk homelessness and engaging them to target support, wellbeing, and employment initiatives.
- Delivering updated processes, IT case management systems, and enhanced reporting to deliver key service improvements.
- Working with neighbouring authorities and key delivery partners to secure the best 3-year RSI funding commitment from DLUHC.
- Aligning multi-agency relationships to agree housing solutions in the most complex of individual cases.
- Reviewing the allocations policy to ensure that it balances the needs of homeless and housing register applicants.
- Reviewing temporary accommodation provision to enhance the supply of a good quality, value for money, portfolio.
- Exploring the development of a county-wide approach to partnership working with private rented sector landlords.

### 3. Outcome expected and performance management.

3.1 The structure of the strategy is designed to remain relevant, adaptable, and responsive. It comprises of a framework setting out the vision and key

objectives, which is designed to guide the implementation of a regularly updated delivery plan across the life of the strategy. The first iteration of the delivery plan is summarised above and set out in full, in appendix 1.

- 3.2 Regular monitoring and reviews will be led by the Senior Leadership Team in Homes First and an annual review of progress will engage key stakeholders. The Head of Homes First will provide a report on progress against this strategy to the Cabinet's Lead Member for Housing each year.

#### **4. Consultation**

- 4.1 In line with the provisions set out in the Homelessness Act 2002 and the Government's published *Homelessness Code of Guidance*<sup>3</sup>, housing authorities must consult public or local authorities, voluntary organisations, or other persons as they consider appropriate before adopting or modifying a homelessness strategy.
- 4.2 As part of the preparation of the draft strategy there have been two periods of consultation, the first in respect of the preceding homelessness review (autumn 2021) and more recently in respect of the draft strategy, a six week consultation which closed in mid-February. Both members of the public and agency partners were invited to comment on the proposals.
- 4.3 Responses received were broadly supportive of the strategy themes and delivery plans, in particular recognising, the importance of addressing high levels of housing need, the value of strong partnerships, and the benefit of preventative measures. The strategy has been updated to reflect the responses, for example by, clarifying areas where the Council will actively seek to work with partners; emphasising the importance of good quality temporary accommodation, and clarifying the steps that will be taken to measure progress of the delivery plan.
- 4.4 Beyond the specific remit of the consultation, the leads responsible for delivering housing policy routinely co-ordinate activities with housing authorities across the County, as part of the East Sussex Housing Strategy Group.

#### **5. Corporate Plan & Council Policies**

- 5.1 This strategy contributes directly to the housing priorities set out in Lewes District Council's Corporate Plan 2020 - 2024, which sets out five clear objectives targeted at increasing the supply of housing, reducing housing need and tackling homelessness. The five set out to:
- Support the provision of social, affordable, sustainable, energy and resource efficient, climate resilient housing, delivering for residents more effectively.
  - Build more rented council homes in the District, including in local villages, and provide homes which support independent living.

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<sup>3</sup> Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities – 22/02/2018 (updated 12/10/2021).

- Use the planning system to support affordable housing delivery.
- Increase housing through innovation, modular housing, and infill sites.
- Reduce the reliance on temporary and emergency accommodation.

## **6. Business case**

- 6.1 The high level business case associated with the strategy is set out in the delivery plan. Specific business cases will be developed to support items the plan contains, such as those relating to the delivery of new IT case management systems, the multi-disciplinary preventative hub, and specific support services.

## **7. Financial appraisal**

- 7.1 It is anticipated that the cost of deploying initiatives contained within the action plan can be met from existing budgets, DLUHC confirmed *Homelessness Prevention Grants* for 2022/23 and other funding acquired under specific initiatives such as the *Rough Sleeper Accommodation Programme*. We are still awaiting confirmation of the three-year funding settlement for the Rough Sleeper Initiative, which is expected to be of an equivalent amount to current funding levels. Action plans may have to be updated to reflect any changes to this funding, or changes to future levels of grant received across the duration of the strategy.

- 7.2 Successful implementation of the strategy is designed to reduce the cost of addressing homelessness by; focussing on preventative measures to reduce demand; putting in place lower cost solutions to meet temporary housing needs; and shaping a more integrated approach to housing, health, and wellbeing to reduce the call on wider public services.

- 7.3 *Deputy Chief Finance Officer consulted on 16/02/2022.*

## **8. Legal implications**

- 8.1 This strategy has been prepared in line with the statutory requirements set out in the Homelessness Act 2002, Section 1(4) of which requires housing authorities to publish a new homelessness strategy, based on the results of a homelessness review, within a period of five years.
- 8.2 The housing authority shall take their homelessness strategy into account in the exercise of their functions in accordance with Section 1(5) of the Act.
- 8.3 In formulating or modifying this strategy the housing authority shall have regard to its current allocation scheme under Section 166A of the Housing Act 1996 and its current tenancy strategy under Section 150 of the Localism Act 2011.

8.4 In line with the Act and the Government's published Homelessness Code of Guidance<sup>4</sup> the:

- Preceding review included an assessment of the:-
  - current levels and likely future levels of homelessness; activities carried out to prevent households from becoming homeless;
  - accommodation available to those who are homeless or who may become homeless;
  - support available to those who are or who may become homeless or who have been homeless and need support to prevent homelessness again; and;
  - level of resources available locally to tackle homelessness.
- Proposed strategy incorporates plans for addressing homelessness and rough sleeping into a single document.
- Statutory and voluntary partners, along with members of the public have been provided with an opportunity to comment and provide feedback on the proposals at both the review and draft proposal stage.
- Strategy and action plan aligns with county wide approaches wherever applicable and sets out actions and outcomes that will build on the key relationships already formed with local partners.
- Strategy contains an action plan setting out to secure effective outcomes in pursuit of the proposed strategic themes and objectives.
- The proposals commit to regular reviews of the delivery plan.

8.5 *Legal Services considered this Report on 21/02/2022. (Legal ref: IKEN 010873-LDC-CH).*

## **9. Risk management implications.**

9.1 Having in place a robust strategy and up to date action plan improves the ability to co-ordinate and deliver the range of services that set out to address homelessness. Through doing so it reduces the incidence of homelessness and deals with it more effectively where it occurs. This:

- Lowers the impact on local individual and family households and the associated risk to their wellbeing.
- Reduces the risk of the Council spending more than budgeted on homelessness services.

9.2 Having in place an up to date strategy that complies with statutory responsibilities, reduces the risk of strategic shortfalls being cited in any legal proceedings seeking review of homelessness decisions, which is commonplace in legal challenges.

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<sup>4</sup> Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities – published 22/02/2018 (last updated 12/10/2021).



## **10. Equality analysis.**

10.1 An equality analysis has been completed, to assess the impact of the proposals on groups of residents with protected characteristics, and those facing financial hardship. The assessment identified no negative impacts on protected groups and neutral or positive impacts for others. The positive impacts of the proposals can be delivered through the successful implementation of enhanced preventative activities, support actions, and case management, particularly those measures setting out to address the issues experienced by groups at higher risk of homelessness. These include; women at risk of domestic abuse and their households; those living with physical disabilities, mental health conditions and experiencing multiple complex needs; and those on lower incomes struggling to afford housing. A copy of the analysis is available from the report author.

## **11. Environmental impact analysis**

11.1 There are no direct environmental impact implications for the Council arising from the recommendations set out in this report.

## **12. Appendices**

12.1

- Appendix 1 – Draft Lewes District Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy 2022-2027.

## **13. Background papers.**

13.1 The following background papers are associated with this report, copies of which are available from the author:

- Lewes District Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy 2022-27 – Equality & Fairness Analysis.
- Lewes District Homelessness Review 2021.



Lewes District Council  
Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy  
(Draft)  
2022-2027

DRAFT

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## 2. Our vision



Prevent – to reduce the incidence of homelessness

Intervene – to reduce the impact where homelessness has occurred



Sustainable solutions – to promote housing options and effective support services

### 3. Foreword

Lewes is a great District in which to live and work, but too many local households still struggle to secure suitable housing at a price they can afford. Lewes District has the highest average property prices in East Sussex, whilst rising rents, restricted availability in the private rented sector and a shortage of affordable housing, have left many local families with limited and costly housing options. As a result, the demand for social housing is high. There are currently 1,050 households waiting for homes on the Council's housing register, each of whom meets one or more category of preferential need.

Rough sleeping is the most visible aspect of homelessness, and though its incidence is relatively low across the District, when it occurs it can have a devastating effect on the health and wellbeing of the individuals concerned. Over the past few years those individuals in need of help have been assisted by the Rough Sleeper Initiative, a programme that now works across East Sussex to provide support and access to a multi-disciplinary team of health and welfare professionals.

Reducing the incidence of homelessness and ending rough sleeping across the District is a priority for Lewes District Council. This strategy sets out the Council's approach to achieving this goal over the next five years, by setting out a framework focused on preventing homelessness, intervening effectively when it occurs, and putting in place sustainable solutions to support re-housing options.

The impact of Covid-19 has brought home the fundamentals that matter the most to households and communities across Lewes, and as we adjust to the new challenges ahead, it is clearer than ever that having access to a good home is central to us all feeling safe and secure. I am confident that delivering the priorities and associated action plans set out here will help all in the District achieve this goal.

**Cllr William Meyer - Lead Member for Housing**

## 4. Introduction

- 4.1. The demand for homelessness services has increased steadily over the past 5 years, and during 2020/21 the number of enquiries received by the Council's housing needs team increased by over 20%. The impact of homelessness has a devastating impact on the individuals and their families directly affected, a social cost that extends into the wider community, and a financial cost that draws agency resources away from other key services.
- 4.2. This strategy introduces a framework that sets out to reduce the impact that homelessness has on local individuals and households, and the priorities the Council will pursue to help do so.

### What is homelessness?

- 4.3. Those who present as homeless do not have to be sleeping on the streets or lack a roof at the time they ask for help. Households can also be considered homeless if they are:
  - Having to stay with friends or family.
  - Staying in a hostel, night shelter or bed and breakfast accommodation.
  - At risk of violence or abuse in their current home.
  - Living in poor or unsafe conditions.
  - Leaving an institution such as a prison or hospital, or the care system, with nowhere to go.
- 4.4. This strategy uses a definition of homelessness that includes both rough sleepers, single people and families that are threatened with, or present as homeless. In short, any household (individual, couple, or a family) that find themselves without a safe or secure place to call home.

### How has this strategy been developed?

- 4.5. The relevant legislation has been adhered to in formulating and modifying this strategy. It has been prepared in line with the statutory requirements set out in the Homelessness Act 2002, Section 1(4) of which requires housing authorities to publish a new homelessness strategy, based on the results of a homelessness review, within the period of five years beginning with the day on which their last homelessness strategy was published. In addition we have had regard to the Council's Allocation Scheme, Tenancy Policy, and the Homelessness Code of Guidance for local housing authorities in England 2018, updated 12th October 2021.
- 4.6. The homelessness review, undertaken earlier this year, provided an up-to-date picture of the:
  - Current and likely future levels of homelessness across Lewes District.
  - Activities carried out & support available to prevent homelessness and those experiencing it.
  - Level of resources made available locally to tackle homelessness.
- 4.7. The wider public, local voluntary and statutory partners, were invited to comment on the findings of the review, and their responses have been used to inform the shape and direction of the resulting strategy, which sets out how the Council will work with others to; put in place plans to prevent homelessness occurring; intervene effectively when it occurs; and deliver sustainable plans to support re-housing options.

## 5. Context

### National context

4.1 The operating environment in which local authorities must deliver services to reduce homelessness continues to provide a number of key challenges. Increasing house prices, rising private sector rents and the reduced income many local households have experienced as a result of the pandemic, continue to have an impact, sustaining the high number of households accessing services and needing to be placed in temporary accommodation. Key issues to highlight include:

- **Covid-19.** Over the past year the pandemic has, not unsurprisingly, had a significant impact on central Government strategy. At a local level, this has resulted in teams re-focusing services by; providing emergency accommodation to rough sleepers as part of the 'Everyone In' initiative; putting in place additional safeguards to help maintain social distancing in temporary accommodation; and delivering remote services as standard. A ban on private rented sector evictions, in place since the first national lockdown, expired at the end of May 2021. Along with the broader economic impacts of the pandemic, this has increased the level of demand on homelessness services and the potential impacts will need to be monitored in the months ahead.
- **Homelessness Reduction Act (HRA) 2017.** The implementation of this Act, whilst putting in place welcome additional protections for those at risk of homelessness, has introduced extra demands on the work of local housing needs teams. The changes it introduced included:
  - A new 'prevention duty', requiring local authorities to take reasonable steps to assist those likely to become homeless earlier, so within 56, rather than 28 days.
  - A new 'relief duty', which applies to those already homeless when they ask the local authority for help. It requires local authorities to provide support for 56 days.
  - A requirement to carry out a holistic assessment of the applicant's housing and support needs, then set out how these will be addressed in a defined 'personal housing plan'.

The combined impact of these changes has been to increase the overall number of applicants seeking help, alter the profile of those qualifying for assistance (in particular more single applicants and more households with complex needs are coming forward under the new duties) and increase the number of applicants placed in temporary accommodation.

- **Domestic Abuse Act 2021.** Under this new Act, domestic abuse is recognised as a direct factor conferring priority need for the first time, so applicants no longer have to prove that the abuse is creating vulnerability, in order to qualify for help. This is a welcome change that will provide re-assurance and certainty for individuals and their families presenting as homeless because of domestic abuse, and simplify the decision-making process for officers. The Act also introduces a new definition of domestic abuse and requires that housing authorities, when rehousing victims, should provide a secure lifetime tenancy.

- **National Rough Sleeping Strategy 2018.** In August 2018, the Government published this strategy which set out their current plans for ending rough sleeping by 2027. It comprises of three parts or ‘pillars’:
  - Prevention: understanding issues that lead to rough sleeping and providing support.
  - Intervention: helping rough sleepers with swift support tailored to their individual needs.
  - Recovery: supporting people in finding a new home and rebuilding their lives.

The three pillars of the strategy, along with the funding received via the Rough Sleeper Initiative, set out to halve rough sleeping by 2022 and eradicate it completely by 2027.

## Local context

4.2 Lewes District has the highest average property prices in East Sussex, with the recent surge in market activity pushing up the average cost of a home to £405,000. High prices set the context for a range of issues locally that restrict access to housing markets. These include:

- **High affordability ratios.** These ratios, which compare the relationship between average property prices and average earnings, showed that by autumn 2020, median property prices were over ten times the local full-time salary. High house prices have a knock on effect on private rents, and in many parts of the District these continue to challenge the ability of local households to secure suitable housing. By March 2020, the average rent (all bed sizes) stood at £960<sup>5</sup> per month, a rise of 13 percent over the past five years.
- **Deprivation.** Indices of Deprivation, last published by the Office for National Statistics in 2019, provide a snapshot of relative deprivation in each locality in England, by looking at a range of factors including income, employment, education, health, and barriers to housing. These are combined into a single index. Overall, Lewes ranks as 194 out of 317 local authorities in England and contains no localities in the 10 percent most deprived. However, it contains two localities (Lewes Castle and Newhaven Valley) in the bottom 20 percent and in 2019, more than half (37 of the 62) of localities in Lewes District were more deprived than when the index was last published in 2015. Meanwhile, by the end of 2019/20, more than 3,000 children were living in low-income families, 13.5 percent of all children in the District.
- **Housing tenure and supply.** The total housing stock of Lewes District numbered 45,858 in 2019, an increase of 2,488 homes (so up by 6%) over the past ten years, driven largely by new private sector provision (2,245 homes) and a small increase in housing associations homes (317 homes). Overall, the growth in social housing stock has been small, amounting to a net increase of only 243 homes in the past ten years, once *Right to Buy* losses are taken into account. However, this picture is changing, with planning showing that 58 affordable homes were expected to complete before the end of March 2022 and that 436 affordable homes have been granted planning permission at sites across the District, including 126 new council homes. The private rented sector is relatively small in Lewes District and at the time of the last census in 2011, it only housed 14% of households, lower than for East Sussex as a whole (18%) and the South-East (17%).

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<sup>5</sup> [Office of National Statistics - Private rental summary statistics July 2020.](#)



- **Housing demand and availability.** Private rents in many parts of the District are higher than the Local Housing Allowance (LHA), the Government cap that limits the amount of housing welfare payments that can be claimed to cover rent. This presents a real barrier to the market for those on lower incomes, who often have to look for cheaper areas to live in beyond the District or use 'living money' to supplement housing rental costs. The relatively small size of the private rented sector compounds the problem, with a shortage of supply contributing to high rents. Meanwhile, the demand for social housing is high and there are currently 1,050 households waiting for homes on the Council's housing register, whilst both new supply and available re-lets are low. During 2019/20 a total of only 115<sup>6</sup> council homes and 70 housing association homes became available. This combination of high house prices and rents, along with restricted housing availability in both the private and social rented housing sectors, create a pressing housing challenge to residents of the District.

## Strategic fit

4.3 This strategy contributes directly to the housing priorities set out in Lewes District Council's Corporate Plan 2020 - 2024, which sets out five clear objectives targeted at increasing the supply of housing, reducing housing need and tackling homelessness. The five set out to:

- Support the provision of social, affordable, sustainable, energy and resource efficient, climate resilient housing, delivering for residents more effectively.
- Build more rented council homes in the District, including in local villages, and provide homes which support independent living.
- Use the planning system to support affordable housing delivery.
- Increase housing through innovation, modular housing and developing infill sites.
- Reduce the reliance on temporary and emergency accommodation.

The Corporate Plan sets out a number of associated goals, including the:

- Provision of 200 new council houses and 300 new affordable homes.
- Opening up of quality housing options for low to middle income residents.
- Delivery of accessible housing for those with physical and additional support needs.

## 6. Summary of Findings from the Homelessness Review

6.1. The review set out to provide an up-to-date picture of the:

- Current and likely future levels of homelessness across Lewes District.
- Activities carried out & support available to prevent homelessness and those experiencing it.
- Level of resources made available locally to tackle homelessness.

A summary of key findings from the review is set out below.

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<sup>6</sup> DLUHC - Local authority statistical housing returns 2019/20.

- **Service demand and operational response.** The review showed that the demand for services is high and likely to remain so into the foreseeable future. During 2020/21, 702 households raised enquiries with the housing needs team, an increase of 23% on the number received the year before. Sixty percent of these enquiries (433) progressed through to a formal homelessness application, and of these around two-thirds (284 households) were found to be owed a prevention or relief duty.
- **Statutory duties and the Council's response.** In 2020/21, the Council helped find homes for over half of the 62 households owed a prevention duty (because they were threatened with homelessness), were helped to stay in their existing home or find a new one. Around a fifth (19%) went on to become homeless. Of the 147 households owed a relief duty (because they were already homeless when they applied for help), around 40% were helped to secure a new home, whilst 36% remained homeless and went on to be assessed under the main homelessness duty. Taking action to address homelessness in this way reduces both the social cost of homelessness on households and the financial costs borne by the Council.
- **Main duty assessments.** The number of main duty assessments conducted (carried out because households could not be helped earlier in the process), fell during 2020/21, as did the percentage of those qualifying for a new home because they were assessed as being homeless and in priority need. This fall is almost certainly because of the increasing numbers of single households coming through the system, as a result of the implementation of the HRA 2017, and more recently, the pandemic. These households are less likely to qualify as a priority than families, as having children is the key driver of priority need set out in the legislation. Most households re-housed under the main duty accepted an offer of a socially rented home (86%), with only 1 in 10 accepting an offer in the private rented sector.
- **Rough sleeping.** The number of rough sleepers in Lewes District has been consistently low when compared with other areas, with the Government's annual count of rough sleepers registering numbers in single figures for each of the past five years. The Rough Sleeping Initiative (RSI) continues to provide ongoing support, carrying out proactive outreach work that identifies those sleeping rough and helps connect them with local services. However, there are a small number of hard to engage rough sleepers that services struggle to connect with at times, and to address this the new strategy will bolster the commitment to support local voluntary agencies working with this group.
- **Partnerships.** Working with statutory and voluntary partners has been integral to mounting an effective local response to homelessness, and a wide range of dedicated partners have joined efforts to help prevent homelessness and provide support to vulnerable households across the District. The new 'duty to refer' pathway, introduced by the HRA is working well, with 1 in 10 (9%) of all enquiries received having been referred by another agency via this route. The probation service, hospitals and prisons were the leading sources of referral.
- **Local trends and Covid-19.** Over the past year, analysis of how the housing needs service has been operating indicates that the pandemic has had a local impact that reflects national trends. As such, the associated policies that have sought to restrict evictions and increase the assistance given to the most vulnerable, have increased the number of single households, and reduced the number of households with children, who have been assisted under homelessness duties.

- **Impact of the HRA 2017.** There is evidence that the shift towards assisting more single households was underway before the pandemic, as a result of the new prevention and relief duties introduced by the HRA. This means that the service is managing higher numbers of single and vulnerable people with complex needs, illustrated by the fact that the percentage of those owed a prevention or relief duty with support needs increased from 33%, to 45%, between 2019 & 2020.
- **Longer term trends.** Whilst in the short term there is likely to be some re-balancing of the profile of those accessing the service, as the impact of Covid-19 eases, services are likely to continue to face a high level of demand from a more marginalised and challenging customer base. In addressing these trends, the emphasis will need to be placed on putting in place high quality services, that seek to reduce demand through preventative activity and intervene effectively to support those households affected by homelessness.

## 7. Strategic Priorities

7.1. The strategic priorities are based around the following key themes:

### 1. PREVENTION

Quality housing needs services - dedicated to effective advice, holistic and informed assessment.

Preventative casework – working alongside partners, to stop those seeking help from becoming homeless.

Targeted preventions for the most vulnerable groups – through the provision of agreed pathways into support.

Strategic activities - that seek to identify issues that drive homelessness across the District and apply remedies to reduce it.

### 2. INTERVENTION

Tackling rough sleeping – continue supporting the county-wide approach to reducing harm and addressing associated multiple, complex needs.

Partnership working - maximise the effectiveness of joint working and pathways for at risk groups.

Temporary housing – provide a good quality, safe, secure, value-for-money accommodation portfolio and reduce the use of emergency placements.

### 3. SUSTAINABLE SOLUTIONS

Re-housing - establish a range of sustainable housing and move-on options for homeless households.

Support - deliver effective support services to help customers maintain accommodation once housed.

7.2. Each of these priorities is underpinned by a series of cross-cutting themes:

- Effective collaborations with statutory, agency and voluntary partners.
- High quality, that treat all applicant with dignity & respect and provide value for money services.
- Skilled and well-trained staff.

7.3. Pursuing an integrated approach that works with partners to assess and prevent the local causes of homelessness, can help deliver best practice, reduce the barriers that restrict people from accessing services, and equip residents with the skills they need to sustain their tenancy in the longer term.

## 8. Priority **1** – PREVENTION

8.1. The Homelessness Reduction Act (2017) introduced an enhanced *prevention duty* for local housing authorities, extending the period that they are required to work with those threatened with homelessness, from 28 to 56 days. Under this duty, the local authority must take reasonable steps to prevent eligible persons from becoming homeless, by helping them stay in their current home, or find a new one. This duty informs the first priority of the strategy, and it will focus on addressing this by delivering an approach that balances strategic activities, preventative casework, and targeted support to the vulnerable. Underpinning this are the processes and resources needed to deliver a quality housing needs service.

8.2. Taking each in turn:

- **Quality housing needs services - dedicated to effective advice, holistic and informed case assessment.** Plans will address this by putting in place processes that provide access to readily available housing advice, backed up by a well-equipped and knowledgeable team. The team will be empowered to deliver tools that intervene early to increase the likelihood of a successful outcome. Keeping the skills of the team up to date, to ensure that they deliver high quality, respectful, casework throughout the customer journey, and developing IT systems in order to automate and support processes, are the other essential elements that will help drive successful service delivery.
- **Preventative casework - avoiding those seeking help from becoming homeless.** The approach here seeks to maximise the proportion of residents supported to stay in their existing home, or where this is not possible, facilitate a planned move to a new one.

Maximising success here reduces the trauma experienced by households undergoing homelessness, as well as the financial costs of funding emergency accommodation. Activities providing financial incentives, debt guarantees, undertaking negotiation with private landlords, family, and friends, will all be key to success. The strategy will seek to find ways of optimising their use. High house prices, high rents, and the limited supply of socially rented homes in the District, means that the private rented sector (PRS) will often be the only option for many households, so opening up access to lower cost PRS housing options is a priority. Promoting the recently launched landlord incentive scheme, dedicating resources to work hand in hand with local agents, and examining innovative ways to boost provision, are all key areas of focus.

- **Offering targeted preventions for the most vulnerable – through the provision of agreed pathways into support.** Providing accommodation alone is not a rounded solution to homelessness, especially for those with additional or complex needs, who will often require extra help to manage in their new home. Without this support vulnerable individuals and households can find themselves in repeat cycles of homelessness and at higher risk of rough sleeping. Fostering collaborations to develop and maintain clear and effective pathways to housing (for example when clients leave hospital, prison, care, or the RSI), delivering holistic services around those with the highest level of need, and increasing access to supported accommodation, are all tools that the strategy will help deliver.
- **Strategic activities - that seek to identify issues that drive homelessness across the District and apply remedies to reduce it.** Here activities will look to address this by focusing on modelling tenure, income, welfare benefit and demographic data to help identify which local households are most at risk of homelessness. Identified groups can then be engaged ‘upstream’, to reduce this risk materialising through co-ordinating locally available funding, staff, and project resources to offer support. Drawing these together to align wellbeing, employment, housing, and treatment plans, are the kinds of activities likely to offer the greatest chance of reducing future demand on services.

## 9. Priority 2 – INTERVENTION

- 9.1. The second strategic priority reflects the *relief duty*, also introduced by the Homelessness Reduction Act, under which local authorities must intervene when an applicant has already lost their accommodation, so is homeless when they apply for help. Under this duty authorities must take reasonable steps to help the applicant secure a new home. Not every applicant can be prevented from losing their accommodation, so it is crucial that plans are in place to help maximise the range of realistic housing options available to households.
- 9.2. Targeted casework and putting in place a robust, well-resourced housing needs service are as important here as they are in helping prevent homelessness. Beyond that, the approach set out in the strategy is based around continuing to focus work through the rough sleeper initiative and working with partners to address the needs of identified at risk groups. A further key goal is to minimise the use of temporary accommodation placements, but where these are necessary the strategy will focus on ensuring that these are clean, safe, and represent value for money for both the applicant and Council.

### 9.3. Taking each in turn:

- **Tackling rough sleeping - continue supporting a county-wide approach to reduce harm and address associated multiple, complex needs.** The Rough Sleeping Initiative (RSI) remains central to recent work supporting rough sleepers, and local partners are keen to build on the success of the work in East Sussex, which has been cited as an example of best practice across the country. Working in partnership to secure ongoing funding, replicating the model used by the RSI to provide support to the wider group of local residents living with mental health challenges and complex needs (not just rough sleepers), and developing a single county-wide pathway approach for the most complex cases, are the key goals that the strategy will set in the years ahead. Moving in this direction will help develop a more holistic approach to assessment, deliver models of support tailored to individual needs, and create flexible pathways into suitable accommodation options.
- **Partnership working - maximise the effectiveness of joint working and pathways for at risk groups.** Addressing this goal will build on a range of projects and programmes already being delivered in partnership with other East Sussex local authorities. Recent examples of these include; a new service working with rough sleepers, those living with mental health challenges and other complex needs, to offer wellbeing support and employment advice; the deployment of independent domestic violence advocates who will help housing needs teams support victims; and the launch of a new multi-agency assessment framework, which meets monthly to discuss high risk multiple complex needs cases and agree action plans. Additional pathways of support are in place for those leaving prisons, hospitals and care. The new strategy will look to build on these initiatives and ensure that the outcomes are aligned to reduce homelessness.
- **Temporary housing – provide a good quality, safe, secure, value-for-money accommodation portfolio and reduce the use of emergency placements.** The overriding goal here is to eliminate the use of emergency accommodation, to reduce the social cost of the disruption to households and financial costs to the Council. However, there are times when its use is unavoidable, so there is a need to ensure that both short-term emergency and medium-term temporary accommodation options, provide clean, safe homes that represent value for money. The strategy will put in place clear procurement goals and work with other partners (in the local *Temporary Accommodation Action Group*) to agree accommodation standards, agree rents with providers, and develop support plans for residents.

## 10. Priority **3** – SUSTAINABLE SOLUTIONS

- 10.1. This third priority acknowledges the importance of having in place a range of options to meet housing demand across the District. It also recognises that having access to accommodation alone does not necessarily address the underlying causes of homelessness, and that housing provision often needs to be supported by services that can help new households sustain their tenancy. Aligning housing and support in this way can help prevent future homelessness and break the cycles that can result in households experiencing long-term instability.

## 10.2. Taking each in turn:

- **Re-housing - establish a range of sustainable housing and move-on options for homeless households.** The housing offered to households will include privately rented accommodation, council, social and supported housing, so the focus of the strategy here will be to help back the expanded provision of each. Carrying out robust housing needs assessments, taking steps to ensure that identified needs are reflected in new developments, and opening up the access to housing availability, particularly the availability of the private rented sector to those on low incomes, are all key. Commissioning a balanced range of supported accommodation and putting in place effective arrangements for allocating it, so housing solutions are in place for every level of need, is also a key strategic goal.
- **Support – deliver effective services to help customers maintain accommodation once housed.** The strategy recognises that those moving into new homes have varying levels of need. These range from lower levels of support providing households with help settling in, through to the intensive support that may be needed to help households sustain tenancies over the longer term. Effectively assessing need and establishing the resources and skills required to meet it is a key goal of the new strategy. These needs will not always be fixed, so some degree of flexibility is required to allow support to be ‘stepped up’ or ‘stepped down’ as demand necessitates. A new pilot to address wellbeing, health and employability is already being delivered in partnership with the County’s public health team. This provides access to a wide range of interventions and the strategy seeks to expand this to develop a county-wide service capable of having a lasting impact on supporting the stability of many more households.

## 11. Governance & monitoring.

- 11.1. The senior leadership team within Homes First will oversee the delivery of this strategy. It will regularly monitor key milestones and the targets that need to be met to maintain progress against the set priorities. It will also assign responsibility for completing tasks to named individuals and post holders within Homes First, or in other teams as appropriate. It will review progress against the plan every year and invite key stakeholders to take part in the process. The Council’s lead member for housing will receive an annual report on progress against this strategy.

## 12. Delivery Plan

The themes and objectives set out above form the framework for this plan. Unlike the framework which is designed to remain fixed for the duration of the strategy, this delivery plan is intended to be reviewed and updated to reflect progress, changes to operating context and new funding and partnership opportunities.

Priority 1 – PREVENTION			
Objective	Action	Outcome(s)	Target Date
Quality housing needs services - dedicated to effective advice, holistic and informed case assessment.	Train and develop a team of confident and experienced Housing Options Officers, to deliver high quality needs assessments and excellent customer service, with dignity & respect.	Staff have up to date knowledge of relevant legislation and case law.	June 2022
		Staff are trained to take a 'trauma-informed' approach to assessment.	June 2022
		Named staff champions in place who have attended additional specialist training in areas such as domestic abuse and mental health awareness.	June 2022
		Reduced levels of complaints about delays or the quality of service.	Oct 2022
	Develop IT systems to maximise efficiency, case management and reporting capabilities and align key customer processes.	Effective case management of homelessness applications & decisions in place.	July 2022
		Updated website content, with better quality information providing residents with opportunities to receive answers via self-service options.	July 2022
		Automated management reports detailing caseload, approaches, throughput, and demographics, to support more effective monitoring of service.	Sept 2022



		Data reports that can be extracted and shared with partners to support the development of new initiatives and funding bids.	Sept 2022
		Key customer processes, including applications for homelessness, housing register, and change of circumstance forms, fully operational online.	Dec 2022
		Automated processes in place that reduce the time spent on administrative tasks & improve customer outcomes.	Dec 2022
	Work closely with statutory and voluntary sector partners, ensuring customers can access advice & practical support which meets their needs and delivers realistic housing solutions.	Regular county-wide forum taking place via Homeless Link.	Dec 2022
		At least one partner agency invited to each monthly team meeting to discuss their service / project.	Established and ongoing.
		Effective referral arrangements in place to deliver preventative outcomes.	Ongoing
Preventative casework – working, alongside partners, to stop those seeking help from becoming homeless.	Work effectively with other colleagues in the Council such as housing benefit, private housing, neighbourhood services, licensing, and income teams, to help resolve issues that may lead to homelessness.	Improved standards in private sector accommodation resulting in fewer approaches due to disrepair.	April 2023
		Revised account management and debtor processes that limit arrears escalation and promote sustainable income recovery.	July 2022

	Work with neighbouring authorities and named public bodies to review and maintain effective 'duty to refer' pathways, to help drive the early identification of homelessness.	Increased volume of timely referrals from agencies and support services, improving prevention outcomes for applicants.	Ongoing
	Create a dedicated 'hub' of local partners, integrating the prevention work of Council teams, voluntary and statutory agencies, to focus on 'upstream' preventative activities' and co-ordinate casework.	Hub established as the focus of preventative work and the lead in deploying early interventions targeted to those at risk of losing their home.	Dec 2022
		Increased volumes of planned moves to alternative PRS homes and other housing options through negotiation and the use of incentives.	Dec 2022
	Target financial support for tenants (DHP, deposits & rent in advance).	Reduced proportion of relief vs prevention outcomes managed through the housing needs team.	August 2022
	Develop an effective, value for money, landlord incentive scheme that encourages more private rented sector landlords to let homes to housing needs referrals.	Scheme published/advertised to private sector landlords.	June 2022
		Key point of contact for private sector landlords established and better working relationships with local landlords, local agents, and the National Residential Landlords Association.	June 2022
		Increased number of private sector properties available and reduced numbers of applicants in emergency / temporary accommodation (EA / TA).	June 2022
Offering targeted preventions for the most vulnerable – through the provision of agreed pathways into support.	Support education & awareness initiatives for young people & care leavers to highlight the reality of becoming homeless.	Continued funding of contributions to the East Sussex Schools Homeless Prevention Project (YMCA).	Ongoing

	Jointly manage and review key 'duty to refer' pathways for those leaving hospital and care teams, to improve interventions for the most vulnerable clients.	Reduced number of 18–25-year-old homeless applicants.	April 2023
		Embedded pathways for care leavers reducing the numbers in EA / TA.	June 2022
	Develop pathways for prison leavers and those in the criminal justice system through the Local Leadership Integration Fund (LLIF) bid.	Jointly funded prison housing officer in post (LLIF bid).	Dec 2022
		Reduced number of prison leavers entering EA / TA.	Dec 2022
	Agree joint working pathways with Children's Services for care leavers or families who may be intentionally homeless, to minimise the impact of homelessness on these households.	Reduced number of intentionally homeless families with children in EA / TA.	Dec 2022
Strategic activities - that seek to identify the issues that drive homelessness across the District and apply remedies to reduce it.	Use reports / data modelling to identify households at risk of future homelessness.	Clearly identified lists of local residents to be targeted by interventions.	July 2022
	Engage identified households and address specific issues by targeting practical, wellbeing and employment initiatives, to improve housing options.	Reduced demand on local homelessness / agency services.	December 2022

## Priority 2 – INTERVENTION

Objective	Action	Outcome(s)	Target date
Tackling rough sleeping - continue supporting the county-wide approach to reducing harm and addressing associated multiple, complex needs.	Work with neighbouring authorities and key delivery partners to establish local funding commitments and longevity for services once DLUHC funding ends	Agreed funding framework for rough sleeping services to sustain funding.	April 2025
	Develop a county-wide support and accommodation approach for customers with the most complex support needs.	Multi Agency Risk Management (MARM) protocols embedded across the county.	April 2022
		An established multi-disciplinary team/ hub where multiple complex needs (MCN) cases across the county are managed in one place.	April 2023
		Reduced number of households with MCN in EA / TA.	April 2023
	Continue to use capital and revenue grants from DLUHC and Homes England, to provide dedicated move-on accommodation for former rough sleepers and work collaboratively with relevant partners to ensure the success of those placements.	Completed property acquisitions within the Rough Sleeper Accommodation Programme (RSAP) - capital grant round 2021/22.	April 2022
		Support services within the RSAP revenue grant agreed and in place – revenue grant round 2021/22.	April 2022
		Full utilise any 2022/23 capital and revenue allocation successfully bid for.	April 2023
		Increased number of units available across LDC specifically for use by former rough sleepers.	April 2023
		Reduced numbers of rough sleepers in LDC.	April 2023

	Engage with the voluntary sector to target and deliver support where it is needed most and make best use of their well-established working relationship with this client group.	Established county-wide homelessness forum for relevant partners via Homeless Link	Ongoing
		Joint plan with voluntary groups for delivering Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEPE) responses and winter night shelters, in place.	Ongoing
Partnership working - maximise the effectiveness of joint working and pathways for at risk groups.	Strategic commitment to partnership working across various multi-agency panels and forums to find solutions in the most complex of individual cases.	Multi Agency Risk Management (MARM) protocols implemented across the county	April 2022
		An established multi-disciplinary team/ hub where multiple complex needs (MCN) cases across the county are managed in one place.	April 2023
		Reduced number of MCN cases in EA / TA.	April 2023
	Strategic commitment to close working with East Sussex districts and boroughs to minimise duplication, pool resources and reduce costs.	Regular attendance at the East Sussex Housing Officers Group (ESHOG) and homelessness sub-group.	Ongoing
	Continue with consortium applications for grant funding wherever possible, to help maximise funding successes.	Successful joint bids with other East Sussex authorities for future funding opportunities.	Ongoing
	Contribute to county-wide efforts to improve services and options for victims of domestic abuse, including the ongoing <i>Respite Rooms</i> project and the deployment of <i>Independent Domestic Violence Advocates</i> .	Enhanced housing options to support for victims of domestic abuse (DA).	Nov 2022
Reduced numbers of DA victims going into EA / TA.		July 2022	

Temporary housing – provide a good quality, safe, secure, value-for-money accommodation portfolio and reduce the use of emergency placements.	Review existing emergency and temporary accommodation provision to ensure value for money across the TA portfolio.	Reduced in average cost per TA unit.	Dec 2022
		Quality portfolio of TA properties including disabled access and staffed accomm. to better meet a wide range of applicants housing needs, in place.	Dec 2022
		Continue to maximise the optimise the use of council stock as TA, over and above emergency short term placements.	Ongoing
	Review the allocations policy and make the best use of existing social housing stock.	Allocations policy updated, consulted, and approved.	March 2023
		Effective processes matching disabled applicants with adapted properties, in place.	Sept 2022
		Reduced void turnaround times.	Ongoing
	Explore opportunities to develop and maintain a County-wide TA policy and approach to procuring units, making placements, and managing the stock.	Shared policy and procedure in place.	April 2023

**Priority 3- SUSTAINABLE SOLUTIONS**

<b>Objective</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>Outcome(s)</b>	<b>Target date</b>
Re-housing - establish a range of sustainable housing and move-on options for homeless households.	Explore developing a cohesive county-wide approach to PRS procurement and lettings of AST and leased properties.	Greater range of sustainable move-on options for homeless households delivered.	April 2023
	Work with partners in ESCC to ensure the commissioning and best use of supported accommodation across the county.	New supported provision jointly commissioned by ESHOG via the agreed Supported Accommodation framework.	Ongoing
		Reduced numbers of applicants in EA awaiting move-on to supported accommodation.	Ongoing
	Accelerate the delivery of new affordable & council general needs and supported housing, in partnership with the Council's development team, developers and registered providers.	Increased development pipeline of new affordable homes across the District.	Ongoing
	Ensure the Allocations policy balances the needs of homeless and housing register applicants & review existing applications	Revision of allocations policy complete & list up to date.	March 2023.
	Make best use of Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) to provide suitable adaptations across the public and private sector.	More residents continuing to live independently and DFG stats. reflected in homelessness prevention outcomes.	Ongoing

	Undertake regular assessments of housing need to inform delivery plans for new homes.	Comprehensive housing needs assessment completed in partnership with the Planning Policy Team.	Dec 2022
Support – deliver effective services to help customers maintain accommodation once housed.	Develop a <i>Wellbeing and Employability Service</i> , to help bridge the gap between health, homelessness and worklessness.	Team and support service in place.	April 2022
	Develop a standalone <i>Tenancy Readiness Platform</i> to provide training for homeless applicants in specific areas of independent living and tenancy sustainment	Tenancy readiness platform design and build complete and fully operational.	Oct 2022
		Tenancy readiness platform embedded into Housing Needs team procedures.	Feb 2023
		Tenancy readiness platform licensed out to other organisations.	March 2023