

PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT

HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION GRANT ALLOCATIONS AND UPDATE

REPORT OF: Director - Regulatory

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: Cllr Mick Debenham, Executive Member for Regulatory

COUNCIL PRIORITY: ACCESSIBLE SERVICES

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1. Demand for the Council's housing services remains high with the need to secure additional services for those threatened with, or experiencing homelessness.
- 1.2. The Council has received ring-fenced grant funding from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) to help it meet its legal housing duties and this report details proposals for the allocation of this funding for specialist homelessness services for local people.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1. That the Cabinet approves the funding proposals for the allocation of the remainder of the 2025/26 award of homelessness grants as outlined in Table 3 in paragraph 8.2.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1. There is a need to secure additional services for homeless households in the district. Adopting the recommendation at 2.1 secures the provision of high-quality local services to help those in need, which is also consistent with the priorities set out in the Council's Housing Strategy (2024 – 2029).

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 4.1. Cabinet could decide against approving the proposed allocations of government funding, however the services highlighted in this report would not be delivered.

5. CONSULTATION WITH RELEVANT MEMBERS AND EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

- 5.1 The Executive Member for Regulatory, Cllr Mick Debenham has been consulted and is supportive of the proposals contained in this report.

6. FORWARD PLAN

- 6.1 This report contains a recommendation on a key Executive decision that was first notified to the public in the Forward Plan on 19 December 2025.

7. BACKGROUND

- 7.1. As a local housing authority, the Council has legal duties to assist households who are homeless or who are threatened with homelessness, and to provide accommodation for homeless households in 'priority need' – primarily families and vulnerable individuals. The Council no longer owns or manages any housing stock, and it therefore works with housing providers (some with allied support services) to meet local needs.
- 7.2. Last year (2024/25), the Council owed a legal duty to 438 households to help prevent or relieve their homelessness and for the first three quarters of 2025/26, 261 households sought this assistance. The key reasons behind homelessness are consistently: ending of private rented sector tenancies (22% of cases in 2024/25); friends and family being unable or unwilling to accommodate (24%); ending of social rented tenancies (14%); and domestic abuse (11%). Ongoing cost of living challenges and scarcity of affordable housing in the district are underlying pressures as well. There is also increasing complexity of cases - in 24/25, 64% of households owed a prevention or relief duty had a support need and 39% had two or more support needs, including factors such as poor mental health, substance misuse and offending histories.
- 7.3. In addition to these prevention and relief duties, the Council also owed 138 'priority need' homeless households a main housing duty in 2024/25, meaning that we had a legal duty to provide suitable accommodation for these households – typically temporary accommodation until an offer of settled accommodation can be made. Table 1 below summarises these legal duties and Table 2 outlines temporary accommodation (TA) usage.

Table 1. Homelessness duties owed

	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26 Q1-3
Households owed a prevention duty	196	175	204	189	118
Households owed a relief duty	281	241	267	249	143
Households owed a main housing duty	128	123	130	138	90
of which, single households	53	43	43	67	43

Source: MHCLG published [tables on homelessness](#) (2025/26 from NHC in-year analysis)

Table 2. Households in temporary accommodation (snapshot at year end)

	31/3/22	31/3/23	31/3/24	31/3/25	31/12/25
Households in TA	104	97	105	99	89
<i>Of which:</i>					
single households	46	32	26	32	28
hotel placements	15	13	19	12	14

Source: NHC analysis of homelessness case data

- 7.4. In addition, the Council consistently receives over 1,000 approaches for homelessness and housing advice each year, which are resolved without legal duties being owed and therefore do not feature in Table 1.

- 7.5 The Council received £1,090k of funding for 2025/26 from MHCLG homelessness and rough sleeping grant funding programmes, ring-fenced to support delivery of services to prevent and tackle homelessness including amongst those sleeping rough and victims of domestic abuse. The funding comprised; £897k of Homelessness Prevention Grant (HPG) including a recent top-up; £157k of Rough Sleeping Prevention and Recovery Grant; and £36k of Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Grant. Decisions on the allocation of the majority of this funding was made at Cabinet on [11 February 2025](#) and additionally on 19 November 2025. A total of £365k remains unallocated and this report contains proposals for the allocation of the remaining funding for 2025/26.
- 7.6 Homelessness and rough sleeping grants are being combined into a new Homelessness, Rough Sleeping and Domestic Abuse Grant for 2026/27 and going forwards. [Provisional allocations](#) for the next three financial years, 2026/27 to 2028/29, were announced in December 2025 with the Council provisionally allocated total funding of £2.7 million over the three years: £871,088 for 2026/27; £906,392 for 2027/28 and £937,275 for 2028/29. Grant continues to be ring-fenced for the delivery of homelessness and rough sleeping services, as well as for meeting councils' domestic abuse duties. As a condition of funding, this grant cannot be spent on costs directly related to temporary accommodation.
- 7.7 Funding for temporary accommodation has been separated out from the new Homelessness, Rough Sleeping and Domestic Abuse Grant, to end the current tension between councils having to choose between investment in prevention and meeting temporary accommodation costs. As a result, funding for temporary accommodation that was previously part of the Homelessness Prevention Grant is being rolled, un-ringfenced, into the Revenue Support Grant in the Local Government Finance Settlement from 2026/27 onwards and councils will not have a separate named allocation for temporary accommodation.
- 7.8 We will update Cabinet on grant allocations once they have been finalised and bring forward funding proposals.

8. RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS

- 8.1 For 2025/26, a new ringfence has been introduced for the HPG, to maintain prevention activities during this period. At least 49% of HPG funding must be spent on prevention, relief and/or staffing activity and no more than 51% may be spent on temporary accommodation costs. The Rough Sleeping Prevention and Recovery Grant remain ring-fenced to protect funding for rough sleeping services and LAs are being encouraged to prioritise delivery on prevention and targeting interventions depending on need, including focusing on support to long term and repeat rough sleepers.
- 8.2 Table 3, below, outlines proposals for the allocation of the remaining grant received for 2025/26.

Table 3. Proposals for homelessness grant allocations for 2025/26 onwards

Black squirrel credit union	The Black Squirrel credit union offers affordable loans to residents to help prevent and relieve homelessness in the district.	£100,000 for the next three years
Private rented sector officer	Dedicated support and assistance to help clients secure suitable tenancies in the private rented sector	Fixed Term Contract 36 months (including on-costs)

		£159,000
Temporary Accommodation costs – General Fund budget	This annual budget allocation covers the net cost of hotel placements	£60,000
Temporary Accommodation costs – overspend	The current projected overspend is around £11k, due to the volume of households placed into hotels and this is expected to increase further due to many more hotel placements being made over the winter months.	Up to £46,000
Total		Up to £365,000

- 8.3 The Black Squirrel Credit Union (BSCU) and the Council have worked in partnership since 2010, with the BSCU providing a valuable service that contributes to homelessness prevention and relief for Council clients. The BSCU provides affordable loans to those referred by the Council, which are typically used to fund tenancy deposits, rent in advance or to pay back rent arrears. In 2025, 33 loans were provided, totalling just over £40k. The funding proposal seeks to provide for any loans that are not repaid.
- 8.4 Sourcing local affordable accommodation for our clients remains extremely challenging, particularly for those who are unable to access social housing due to histories of debt or criminal behaviour, or for single people who do not have a priority housing need. The private rented sector offers an alternative solution for this cohort and the team's dedicated private rented sector officer has had considerable success in sourcing properties both locally and further afield – during 2025, they have been able to secure over 50 tenancies for Council clients. To build upon this success and continue to expand housing options for our clients, this report proposes that the team seeks to recruit an additional dedicated officer; this will also offer greater resilience to the team.
- 8.5 When temporary accommodation is fully occupied, some households are placed into hotels as a last resort. Hotel usage typically grows in periods of severe weather, especially during winter. Although housing benefit can be claimed for most placements, this only partially covers the cost, leaving the Council with a financial deficit, hence the proposal to allocate grant funding for this.
- 8.6 The Council agreed its latest Housing Strategy (2024-2029) in March 2024, and the proposals outlined in this report are consistent with the priorities highlighted in the Strategy.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1. The Housing Act 1985 Section 1 (1) confirms that the District Council is the Local Housing Authority (LHA).
- 9.2 LHAs' homelessness duties are contained within the Housing Act 1996 Part VII, as amended by the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 which placed significant new duties on English local housing authorities to prevent homelessness.

- 9.3 LHAs have a legal duty to provide interim (also known as emergency) accommodation to homeless applicants, if, at any point during their enquiries, there is a reason to believe that an applicant may be:
- homeless
 - eligible for assistance, and
 - in priority need
- 9.4 The LHA also holds the 'Relief Duty' which applies when a council is satisfied that an applicant is homeless and eligible for assistance; it requires the Council to take reasonable steps to help the applicant secure that suitable accommodation becomes available for the applicant's occupation for at least six months. This therefore requires the Council to work with the applicant to help them find and retain accommodation to meet this legal duty.
- 9.5 The Cabinet's Terms of Reference provides at paragraph 5.7.15; "To oversee the provision of all the Council's services other than those functions reserved to the Council".
- 9.6 In approving the funding proposals the Cabinet would therefore be acting in accordance with its statutory requirements and in accordance with the Council's constitution.
- 9.7 Should the Cabinet agree the proposals in this report, the partnership with the BSCU will be subject to the Council's Contract Procurement Rules.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 The Council has received allocations of homelessness grant for 2025/26 comprising: £897k of Homelessness Prevention Grant (including a recent top-up of £80.5k); £157k of Rough Sleeping Prevention and Recovery Grant; and £36k of Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Grant. Grant is ring-fenced to support delivery of services to prevent and tackle homelessness including amongst those sleeping rough and victims of domestic abuse
- 10.2 The proposals in this report seek to allocate the remaining amount of £365k for 2025/26. As the actual spend may be less than £365k as the position regarding temporary accommodation is not yet known, any unallocated grant for 2025/26 will be used for the housing service staffing costs incurred in 2025/26 and the resultant underspend on the salary budgets will be used to increase the homelessness reserve, so that the various homelessness schemes can be funded in future years. The funding for the private rented sector officer will follow this process and will also be placed in the homelessness reserve as it will not likely be utilised in the current financial year due to the recruitment lag and the partial funding of staff costs for 2025/26 ensures the MHCLG's grant conditions are met.

11. RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 Homeless households approach the Council every day for help and in addition to its core service, the Council commissions specialist organisations such as Citizens Advice Bureau, Herts Young Homeless and Survivors Against Domestic Abuse to support those in need and help reduce the risk of homelessness levels becoming unmanageable; the BSCU and private rented sector officer proposals in this report, will help to mitigate this further.

12. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 12.1. In line with the Public Sector Equality Duty, public bodies must, in the exercise of their functions, give due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- 12.2. An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed and is attached as Appendix 1. The assessment notes the potential positive impacts this decision will have for some of the most vulnerable members of the community in North Hertfordshire.

13. SOCIAL VALUE IMPLICATIONS

- 13.1. The Social Value Act and “go local” requirements do not apply to this report, however, the proposals contribute to social value by providing community benefits that would otherwise not be realised.

14. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 14.1. There are no known Environmental impacts or requirements that apply to the proposals in this report.

15. HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 15.1 Should the proposal in this report be agreed, the Council’s procedures for recruitment would be initiated without delay.

16. APPENDICES

- 16.1 Appendix 1 – Equality Impact Assessment

17. CONTACT OFFICERS

- 17.1 Jo Doggett, Director - Regulatory jo.doggett@north-herts.gov.uk; ext 4470
- 17.2 Martin Lawrence, Strategic Housing Manager martin.lawrence@north-herts.gov.uk; ext 4250
- 17.3 Natasha Jindal, Interim Legal Services Manager natasha.jindal@north-herts.gov.uk
- 17.4 Ellie Hollingsworth, Policy and Strategy Officer, ellie.hollingsworth@north-herts.gov.uk; ext 4220
- 17.5 Luke Franklin, Service Accountant, luke.franklin@north-herts.gov.uk; ext 4163

18. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 18.1 MHCLG’s HPG 2025/26: [Homelessness Prevention Grant allocations: 2025 to 2026 - GOV.UK](#)
- 18.2 MHCLG’s Rough Sleeping Prevention and Recovery Grant allocations: [Rough Sleeping Prevention and Recovery Grant allocations 2025 to 2026 - GOV.UK](#)

Appendix 1 – Equality Impact Assessment

Annex A - Equality Analysis Template

1. Name of activity:	Ongoing provision of specialist homelessness services for North Herts residents (Homelessness Prevention Grant allocations)			
2. Main purpose of activity:	Accommodation and support services for local homeless people; homelessness prevention			
3. List the information, data or evidence used in this assessment:	Pleace, N. (2015) At what cost? An estimation of the financial costs of single homelessness in the UK . London: Crisis. Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government Statutory homelessness live tables 2024-25 Office for National Statistics Census 2021 North Herts Council (2024) Review of Homelessness in North Hertfordshire Stonewall (2024) LGBT In Britain. Home and Communities . London: Stonewall			
4. Assessment				
Characteristics	Neutral (x)	Negative (x)	Positive (x)	Describe the person you are assessing the impact on, including identifying: community member or employee, details of the characteristic if relevant, e.g. mobility problems/particular religion and why and how they might be negatively or positively affected. Negative: What are the risks? Positive: What are the benefits?
Community considerations (i.e. applying across communities or associated with rural living or Human Rights)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	x	Negative
				Positive
				Homelessness has significant negative impacts upon communities as well as more obviously for the individual. Research estimates that the cost of a single person sleeping rough in the UK for 12 months is over £20,000 due in large part to costs to NHS services and the criminal justice system. The proposals contained in this report aim to prevent homelessness from occurring in the first place and provide support and alternative accommodation in times of crisis.
A person living with a disability	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	x	Negative
				Positive
				Almost two-thirds of households owed a homelessness duty by the Council have a support need. These include support needs

				<p>owing to poor mental health (35%), physical ill health and disability (28%) and learning disability (14%).</p> <p>The proposals in this report, especially support for those in temporary accommodation, will therefore likely benefit this group in particular.</p>
A person of a particular race	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	x	Negative
				Positive In common with national data, data for North Herts district shows that a disproportionate number of people from ethnic minority backgrounds require homelessness assistance – making up 18% of those owed a duty whilst comprising 12% of the North Herts population.
A person of a gay, lesbian or bisexual sexual orientation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	x	Negative
				Positive National evidence points to LGBTQ+ people being more at risk of homelessness. District level data suggests a very small number of LGBTQ+ people owed a homeless duty by the Council (3%), although a significant proportion – 20% - of applicants chose not to disclose information about their sexual orientation.
A person of a particular sex, male or female, including issues around pregnancy and maternity	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	x	Negative
				Positive Households with dependent children including pregnancies and victims of domestic abuse (the vast majority of which are women) are two cohorts which automatically receive 'priority need' for homelessness assistance, which will usually involve the provision of emergency (temporary) accommodation. Typically, around 40% of households in temporary accommodation at any one time are single women (with or without children) compared to 20-30% being single men (based on available data for the past year).
A person of a particular religion or belief	x	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Negative
				Positive
A person of a particular age	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	x	Negative

				Positive Young people facing homelessness are particularly vulnerable and early interventions to prevent homelessness or provide appropriate support are incredibly valuable for life outcomes, particularly if a first experience of homelessness or rough sleeping can be prevented. 16% of main applicants owed a homelessness duty in 2024/25 were aged under 25.
				Negative
Transgender	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	x	Positive National evidence points to LGBTQ+ people being more at risk of homelessness however local data suggests a very small number of LGBTQ+ people owed a homeless duty by the Council (3%), although with a significant non-response rate.

5 Results

	Yes	No	
Were positive impacts identified?	x	<input type="checkbox"/>	The proposals contained in this report will provide funding in support of existing prevention, support and accommodation services for local households facing homelessness as well as for extra resourcing for private rented sector assistance. These interventions will positively impact some of the most vulnerable households in the district including those with mental and physical ill health and disabilities, those suffering abuse and marginalised groups. Without assistance, many of these, and particularly those with multiple disadvantage, will continue to face ongoing barriers to positive life outcomes including repeated homelessness, poverty, ill health and lack of opportunity.
Are some people benefiting more than others? If so explain who and why.	x	<input type="checkbox"/>	Interventions targeted at assisting homeless households, or those at risk of homelessness, will by their very nature disproportionately benefit those most likely to be at risk of homelessness ie those with support needs including disabilities, victims of abuse (who are more likely to be women) and minority groups.
Were negative impacts identified (what actions were taken)	<input type="checkbox"/>	x	.

6. Consultation, decisions, and actions

If High or very high range results were identified who was consulted and what recommendations were given?

n/a

Describe the decision on this activity

Continue with policy

List all actions identified to address/mitigate negative impact or promote positively		
Action	Responsible person	Completion due date
Regular monitoring of all service provision (as per contractual requirements where relevant) to ensure key outcomes are met.	Service/contract managers	March 2027, and yearly thereafter.
When, how and by whom will these actions be monitored?		
Monitoring and reporting in line with contractual arrangements and/or MHCLG funding requirements where relevant, otherwise internal monitoring will be undertaken.		
7. Signatures		
Assessor (Report Author)		
Name: Tiranan Straughan	Signature** 	
Validated by (relevant Senior Manager)		
Name: Martin Lawrence	Signature** Martin Lawrence	
Forward to the Policy & Strategy Team		
Signature** E A Hollingsworth		
Assessment date: 03/02/2026	Review date: 03/02/2027, and yearly until 2029.	

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