



North Warwickshire
Borough Council

Homelessness Strategy

2024 - 2029



Contents

- 3 Foreword
- 4 Introduction and Context
- 9 Homelessness Strategy 2018 - 2023
- 11 Consultation
- 12 The vision for our strategy
- 12 Themes and priorities
- 13 **Objective 1:** Increase the supply of affordable housing
- 15 **Objective 2:** Develop proactive interventions to prevent homelessness
- 17 **Objective 3:** Develop a strategy to leverage the private rented sector capacity
- 18 Evidence base
- 18 Monitoring and review

Foreword

Meeting the housing needs of its residents is an important priority for the Council. Based on sound evidence this strategy meets our statutory duties and provides a clear focus and direction for our work with partners to address the housing needs of our residents. The importance of partnership work runs through our new strategy. We will use it as a platform to re-invigorate our relationships with our partners to ensure a network of providers and services are engaged to prevent homelessness and reduce the need for temporary accommodation.

The evidence and strategy show that good work is being done in the Borough to meet the housing needs of our residents. It also indicates the challenges that some residents are facing to sustain their homes or find alternative accommodation. Our services are designed to help them meet those challenges.

I would like to thank our own staff and our partners for the work they do to prevent homelessness in the Borough. Our expectation is that the key objectives which will be delivered by the strategy will support them in their endeavours.

Chair of Resources Board



Caroline Symonds

Introduction and Context

The North Warwickshire Borough Council (NWBC) Homelessness Strategy sets out our vision and objectives to prevent and tackle homelessness in the Borough from 2024 to 2029.

Our strategy complements and supports the partnership priorities set out in the Warwickshire Homelessness Strategy, which are:

- Health – to reduce the inequalities and improve the health of people at risk of homelessness, homeless or sleeping rough
- Financial inclusion – to ensure that a wide range of appropriate services are available to support those at risk of homelessness due to financial difficulties

- Young people – to enhance and improve services that prevent homelessness among young people
- Domestic abuse – to prevent domestic abuse and the crisis homelessness resulting from it wherever possible
- Offending – to deliver better focussed housing and related support services for those at risk of homelessness when leaving prison

About North Warwickshire

North Warwickshire is a rural Borough with the largest centres of population in the market towns of Atherstone, Coleshill and Polesworth.

The homes the council owns and manages are spread over a rural area with the largest concentration of properties in:-



Demographics

The population of North Warwickshire increased by 4.9% between 2011 and 2021 (from 62,000 to 65,000). The largest age group is those aged between 50 and 64, which accounts for 14,582 people (22.4% of the total). 96.1% of the population have identified their ethnicity as white.

Local economic context

North Warwickshire is ranked the 167th most deprived out of 317 authorities, while one area (to the edge of Mancetter, including the Mancetter Quarry) is in the 10% most deprived neighbourhoods across the country.

North Warwickshire has seen a decrease in the overall employment rate, from 79.4% in December 2022, to 74.5% in December 2023. This is compared to a figure of 75.2% for the West Midlands. 2.6% (1,025) of people were claiming Universal Credit as of May 2024.

Local housing context

North Warwickshire has mainly semi-detached, detached and terraced homes within the borough, with semi-detached making up the largest number at just under 10,000 homes. As of 2023, the lower quartile house price in North Warwickshire was £190,000 which was at the average for other comparator local authority areas, while there has been significant house price inflation over the last five years which has slowed over the last year.

The proportion of social rented homes of the total housing stock in North Warwickshire is just above the average of the comparator group (14%). NWBC has 2,573 homes as of March 2024, with houses making up most of those properties with 1,347 dwellings. Other registered providers (housing associations) have 1,544 homes, with 1,187 of those available as general needs/social rent.

Right to buy sales have significantly decreased the number of larger homes available to let in the borough, with 61 homes of 3+ bedrooms sold under the right to buy since 2018/19. In terms of development of new homes, NWBC and other housing associations have developed 397 new homes between 2016/17 and 2023/24. It is important to note that of the 397 new homes, only 52 were developed for social rent, with 224 for affordable rent, 109 for shared ownership and 12 for low-cost home ownership.

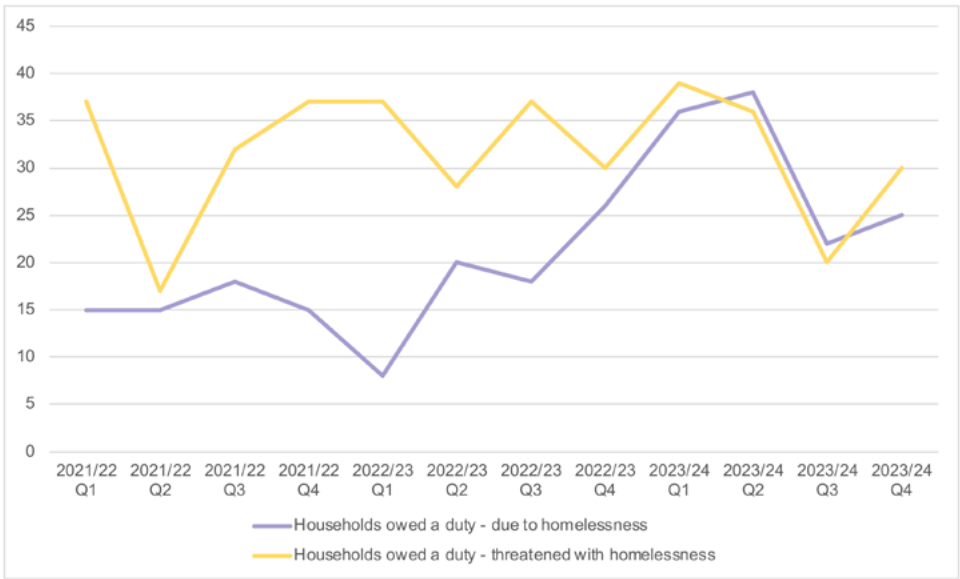
The Council has a vacancy of around 5% annually with 36% of those vacancies being houses. Average re-let time for NWBC homes has increased by nearly 50% between 2019/20 and 2023/24 from 48 days to 69 days. This is a sector wide trend but will also have an impact on available homes and income for NWBC.

There was a total of 821 empty homes across all tenures in North Warwickshire at the end of March 2024.

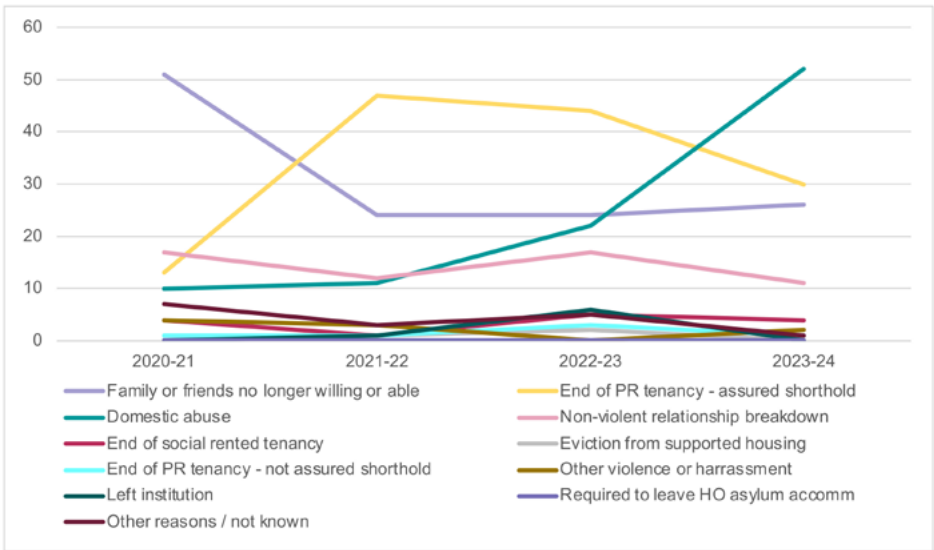
There were 341 applicants on the waiting list at NWBC in March 2023. This number is low by comparison but is down to NWBC only placing households on the waiting list who are intending to move and having a realistic prospect of being let a home. The property size preference of those on the waiting list reinforces the need for more one- and two-bedroom properties in the borough.

Homelessness in North Warwickshire

The graph below shows the increase in the number of households owed a duty, both due to homelessness and those who are threatened with homelessness. It is important to note that those households owed a duty due to homelessness has increased by two thirds over the past two years.



The graph below shows the reasons for homelessness for those households who are owed the prevention duty. The data shows a significant increase in cases relating to Domestic Abuse, while the end of Private Rented Tenancies, and Family/Friends no longer to accommodate make up the two other main reasons.



The main types of households found to be under threat of homeless are single people with or without children. The table below illustrates the large increase in the number of cases of single men and women and single women with children.

Households who are owed the prevention duty

Source: Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities

	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Single parent with dependent children - Male	1	2	4	5
Single parent with dependent children - Female	24	18	51	55
Single parent with dependent children - Other / gender n/k	0	0	0	0
Single adult - Male	40	29	25	16
Single adult - Female	28	29	28	27
Single adult - Other / gender not known	0	0	0	0
Couple with dependent children	11	11	10	10
Couple / two adults without dependent children	3	13	11	10
Three or more adults with dependent children	0	0	1	2
Three or more adults without dependent children	0	2	2	0
Not known	0	0	0	0

Our operating environment

To define the challenges that we face in the delivery of our homelessness service, we have developed a ‘PESTLE’ analysis, which is shown below.

Political	There are significant political changes following the change of Government in the last election, and we can expect new legislation and policy to be forthcoming over the next 12 – 18 months. There is some security for the national picture due to the Fixed Term Parliaments Act which should see no change in government policy until 2029. The new Labour Government has already announced a commitment to the delivery of 1.5 million new homes over the life of this parliament and have regularly mentioned the need for more affordable housing as part of this development.
Economic	The economic environment is difficult, with inflationary pressures and high interest rates. It is predicted that this will ease over the coming years, but it presents a challenge to residents of North Warwickshire who want to buy a property, but also to those who own property with rising mortgage costs. It is essential that we are still able to supplement our homelessness budgets with grant top ups, and we may look to work more closely with our county wide partners to secure additional funding
Social	The population of North Warwickshire has increased marginally over the last 10 years, and the average age of our residents has also increased which has implications for the type of housing needed in the borough. We also know that many of our residents will be affected by the cost-of-living crisis, which has a direct impact on both quality of life but also their ability to sustain their homes. There are no concerns around employment levels.

Technological	There have been significant advances in technology, some of which can aid our approach to housing services in North Warwickshire, mainly around how we let our properties. We need to keep the effectiveness and efficiency of our housing management systems, and the quality of our data under review.
Legislation and Regulation	<p>The Social Housing (Regulation) Act came into force on the 1st April 2024, and we need to ensure compliance with the standards set out in the new Consumer Standards. Existing legislation, such as the Homelessness Act 2022, and the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 have a direct impact on the objectives and delivery of this strategy.</p> <p>We are expecting legislation to be passed around private rented sector security, while the new government have set a mission to halve violence against women and girls within a decade and we would expect to see developments to the 2021 government strategy in the next 12 months.</p> <p>Added to this, we also expect developments around a new Decent Homes Standard, and updates to the National Planning Policy Framework to deliver quality homes and the government target of 1.5 million homes over the life of this parliament.</p>
Environmental	The government has reaffirmed its commitment to achieving EPC 'C' by 2030, and the narrative around green energy supply has become more prominent. This has an impact on our void standard, but also the development of new properties in North Warwickshire.



Homelessness Strategy 2018 – 2023

Our previous Homelessness Strategy was launched in 2018, and contained the following strategic priorities and objectives:

Priority 1 – Ensure people are well informed about their housing options

Objectives

- To raise awareness and promote the homelessness and housing options service with the public and partner agencies
- To ensure there is easy access to high quality information about the services provided and where to get help
- To improve customer service, involvement and satisfaction

Priority 2 – Prevent people from becoming homeless as early as possible

Objectives

- To further develop and improve the prevention tools to assist households in different situations and to meet local need
- To actively support, promote and develop partnership networks to ensure a coordinated and multi-agency approach to homelessness prevention
- To develop strong protocols for multi-agency working to support and appropriately refer individuals and families at risk linking into the work of the Preventing Homelessness, Improving Lives (PHIL) project
- To design and implement early and targeted interventions for groups identified as higher risk of homelessness linking into the work of PHIL

Priority 3 – Assist people as soon as possible if they do become homeless so that homelessness can be relieved by securing sufficient accommodation and support

Objectives

- To review systems and processes to ensure the Homelessness Reduction Act requirements are fully implemented
- Strengthen partnerships with local housing related support providers and other organisations who provide accommodation and support to homeless persons
- Review temporary accommodation provision and ensure it is adequate to meet local need
- Reinforce commitments to minimise the use of bed and breakfast provision particularly for families with children and maintain zero usage for 16–17-year-olds

Priority 4 – Support people to recover from their experience and stay out of homelessness

Objectives

- To review the effectiveness of the tenancy sustainment service provided by the Council and ensure those most at risk of becoming homeless or losing their accommodation are assisted
- To maximise referrals to housing related support providers to assist people to sustain their accommodation and receive the support they require
- To develop financial inclusion services in conjunction with the North Warwickshire Financial Inclusion partnership ensuring a coordinated approach to offering advice on housing benefit, debt and welfare benefit

Priority 5 – Enable people to secure homes they can afford and maintain

Objectives

- To ensure adequate provision of housing to meet housing need in the Borough to include more supported housing
- To increase the supply of affordable housing through existing and new partnerships
- To review and monitor the Council's Lettings Scheme to ensure best use of stock and that social housing properties are let to those most in need
- To develop work with private landlords and initiatives that will improve access to the private rented market locally
- To ensure those ready to move on from supported accommodation can do so in a timely way

Successes from the previous strategy

The previous strategy aimed to provide a clear direction for the service to meet the requirements of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. This provisions of this Act made it clear that Government knew that homelessness prevention would not be achieved without close partnership working. For this reason, local strategy direction in Warwickshire was complimented by a countywide strategy which was published in 2019 and provided a catalyst to stronger partnerships in tackling homelessness.

Locally

- The Council developed 44 new homes to help meet housing need
- We have reviewed our Lettings Scheme & provided an online application form
- We have kept the use of temporary accommodation below the national trend.
- We have improved the type of temporary accommodation available to meet different needs

- Supported, shared accommodation schemes have been developed for Veterans specifically and single men generally
- Our tenancy sustainment service has supported homelessness prevention
- We have introduced a designated resource to support applicants reporting domestic abuse and closely link with other agencies. All front line staff have had training.
- An incentive scheme is in place to encourage transfers from family homes to smaller accommodation
- There is a Street Outreach Service to engage with individuals reported as homeless in the Borough
- A flexible Housing Prevention Fund is in place to help with rent deposit and rent in advance
- Officers are proactive in identifying private lets for individuals seeking re-housing in the Borough

In Partnership

- Duty to refer arrangements have been developed and strengthened over time with particularly success with the Probation Service, Prisons and in the provision of a designated hospital discharge service
- The Protocol for addressing young people's homelessness has been reviewed, refreshed and training provided
- A specific service to provide housing options advice for Guests from Ukraine was developed and successfully implemented
- We proactively contributed to the Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Strategy.

Consultation

To inform the development of this strategy there has been consultation with a full range of stakeholders including:

- NWBC staff – Housing Options, Financial Inclusion Team, Hospital Discharge service
- NWBC residents
- NWBC Councillors
- Key partner agencies (such as DWP, Probation, Support Providers, Warwickshire County Council and Housing Associations)

The key observations and issues that have arisen through the consultation have been grouped below:

Partnerships

- NWBC has a good culture – working together with partners and solution focussed
- Duty to refer works well
- Promote opportunities for stakeholders to co-ordinate efforts to tackle homelessness
- Consider meetings involving support providers
- Reach out to private landlords
- Seek further sharing around our approach to domestic abuse (and other issues)

Housing need

- Single people with and without children
- Sofa surfers
- Domestic abuse
- Complex needs
- Leaving care

Housing supply

- Delivery of new social rented homes
- Voids in NWBC stock
- Nominations work well
- There is a range of temporary accommodation types
- Supported housing (complex needs) is in short supply

Advice and support

- Hospital discharge services very valuable
- Capacity of mental health services
- The high numbers of people experiencing Domestic Abuse
- The limited service available for those with complex needs
- Support services operating out of normal working hours
- Offenders with complex needs
- Many of the support services are time-limited
- The need to map any gaps in service to support those facing eviction from the private rented sector
- The reduction in funding for Housing Related Support services and change of focus for the tendered contracts is a risk area
- The PHIL Warwickshire service is missed by many

The vision for our strategy

“working closely with our partners, we will reduce homelessness in North Warwickshire through the provision of more affordable housing and tackling the root causes of homelessness in the Borough”

Themes and objectives

The consultation and research undertaken for the review has brought the following key themes to the forefront. They are presented to shape our strategic approach for the next five years:

- Our Housing Options Service is currently managing well given the demands placed on the service, however, it has been identified that service is at capacity and demand can cause a stress on the system.
- The key pressures on the service are meeting the housing needs of applicants suffering Domestic Abuse, and family/friends no longer willing to accommodate. All other reasons have for homelessness have remained consistent since 2020/21.
- A key demand is coming from single people, and single females with dependent children, the latter has seen the largest increase in demand.
- Domestic Abuse has become a major factor in demand through the homelessness service, and we need to do more work with our partners to tackle this issue to reduce the need to approach the council due to urgent housing need.
- There has been a marked increase in demand due to evictions from the social rented sector, and we need to work more closely with our housing association partners to drive tenancy sustainment, as well as tackling homelessness and the causes of homelessness as a priority.

- We have seen an increase in the use of temporary accommodation. We need to seek out opportunities to increase the provision of affordable housing options for residents to avoid this escalating further and becoming unmanageable.
- There is a long wait for four-bedroom properties, but the greatest demand is for one- and two-bedroom properties (as highlighted in the third bullet point above)
- Evidence suggests relatively low levels of rough sleeping in North Warwickshire
- The budgets for the homeless service at NWBC are small, and there are limitations to how much more can be achieved within the existing resources.
- There remains potential to do close partnership work at a County level, with neighboring authorities and partners.

Taking this into account, we have developed the following objectives which make up this strategy:

- Increase the supply of affordable housing options in North Warwickshire
- Develop proactive interventions to prevent homelessness in North Warwickshire
- Develop a strategic approach to seeking opportunities to meet housing need with private sector housing.

The following sections detail how we will work to achieve each of these objectives over the life of the strategy.

Objective 1: Increase the supply of affordable housing options

To meet housing needs in the borough, the council has developed 163 new homes since 2010. It has also enabled the development of new homes by Private Registered Providers – who use the Council’s Housing Register to allocate the first lettings. Over the last four years the housing market has changed and costs to rent privately have increased. To continue to successfully tackle homelessness in North Warwickshire, we need to not only sustain the new supply provided to date but to increase the supply of affordable housing options to meet demand. It is equally important that we increase the supply of the right homes to meet demand in terms of property type and size.

Where are we now?

There is a total of 3,775 homes in the social housing rented stock in North Warwickshire. Vacancy rates are limited so we need more supply to meet the increasing demand indicated in this review. It is important that we develop the right homes, in the right places for our residents. There are particular pressures for one and two-bedroom properties, and for supported/ sheltered accommodation.

The Coventry and Warwickshire Housing & Economic Development Needs Assessment (HEDNA) 2022 states that there is a need for 176 additional homes per year between 2022 and 2032. Of this 176, it recommends that 131 are developed for social rent.

We had four empty homes in the Council’s social housing stock at the end of March 2024. The Council’s void turnaround times have increased by significantly which is putting further pressure on the supply of homes.

Where do we want to be?

We want to ensure that we are offering a clear path to develop the right homes in the right places for North Warwickshire to increasing the supply of affordable housing to meet demand. This will help us to provide safe, secure homes for those that need them, whilst reducing our reliance on temporary accommodation, the use of which is costly and has increased in recent years. We will take a holistic approach to increasing supply, which also looks at our voids processes and considers the reasons for empty homes across the residential stock.

How will we get there?

We will work with our Registered Provider partners, and housing developers to enable the supply of good quality, accessible, adaptable, energy efficient homes into North Warwickshire.

We will seek to ensure that 100% of new affordable vacancies are let using the Council’s Lettings Scheme and to maximise the Scheme for future lettings.

The Housing Division will work strategically with the Planning Division to seek out opportunities to bring forward suitable developments for affordable housing.

As funding allows the Council as a landlord will seek to develop social housing to increase its own stock of properties.

The Council will seek to develop a Local Housing Company to ensure it can meet a broad range of housing needs in the Borough.

We will work in partnership with Warwickshire County Council to understand the demand for supported housing in the Borough to inform future developments.

We will carry out a review of our internal voids process to get our properties to a lettable standard more quickly.

How will we measure success?

As part of the Strategy actions metrics will be developed to track the increase in the supply of vacancies. This will include:



We will review and develop incentive schemes for downsizing to free up larger properties which may be underoccupied.

Objective 2: Develop proactive interventions to prevent homelessness

Partner organisations are keen to engage with the Council to tackle homelessness in a co-ordinated and collaborative manner. Developing pro-active approaches in partnership with other specialist organisations will significantly increase the prevention of homelessness, as well as providing effective and efficient solutions for those who are already homeless.

Where are we now?

We have strong partnerships with a range of stakeholders; however, this is managed on a case-by-case basis in the main. Feedback from our partners is positive, and they have commented on strong working relationships with NWBC, which gives us a great platform from which to move forward. We know that there is an increasing demand on the service from families who are experiencing Domestic Abuse, which needs to be a key focus through the life of this strategy. Our partners will be key in developing a solution to this.

Where do we want to be?

We are aware that solutions to homelessness more often require multi-agency solutions. We want to develop firm partnership arrangements with agencies, particularly where there are complex cases requiring multiple solutions and expertise.

How will we get there?

We will agree the most effective ways to bring together partners to co-ordinate our efforts to tackle homelessness.

We will develop stronger working relationships with our key housing associations in North Warwickshire

Work with Social Care and Health Partners where customers have additional care and support needs

We will co-ordinate our partners to collate the evidence and to develop potential solutions to bid for funding to do more to tackle homelessness

We will work with partner agencies to establish clear and effective signposting for key issues, such as Domestic Abuse and family breakdowns

We will identify and develop partnerships with agencies who will be essential in managing households with complex needs to provide a holistic, one stop shop solution

We will develop a tenancy sustainment training package for new NWBC tenants

We will support the County Council's pathways for Care Leavers to ensure they do not face homelessness



Objective 3: Develop a strategic approach to seeking opportunities to meet housing need with private sector housing

Working with private rented sector landlords may offer opportunities for us to reduce the number of people presenting to the council threatened with homelessness and to reduce our reliance on temporary accommodation. With the proposed regulatory changes to the private rented sector, this presents an opportunity for us to strengthen our relationships with private landlords in the borough, and to offer more secure accommodation for households that require it. The development of a Council owned Local Housing Company will proactively enhance our presence in this sector.



How will we measure success?

As part of the strategy, we will use our positive relationships with partners to develop a protocol which establishes how we will engage with them together and individually. We will:

Set up a strategic multi-agency group to understand the reasons for homelessness and to co-ordinate the delivery of this strategy	Organise regular operational meetings to maximise co-operation across partners	Continue to focus on our partnerships that support applicants reporting Domestic Abuse and seek to enhance outreach work and information to enable early intervention
Actively engage with the County Council Commissioners providing the new Housing Related Support services to ensure residents in North Warwickshire are supported		
Seek to provide a resource for tenancy sustainment training for our own tenants and support the endeavours of other Registered Providers to do the same	Engage with the County Council to support pathways out of care for Care Leavers	Work with local services, including Doorway, to understand the needs of young people in housing crisis and act in partnership to address them

Where are we now?

Many homes in North Warwickshire are privately owned, with the social housing sector having a significantly smaller number by comparison. We engage with private landlords on an individual basis and ad hoc around particular households that have contacted us for housing advice. A co-ordinated approach is proposed as part of this Strategy to seek an understanding of the sector as a collective and to seek positive and productive relationships with private landlords and develop our engagement and incentives to develop this relationship further.

Where do we want to be?

We want to create, and foster, a mutually beneficial relationship with private landlords in North Warwickshire. This will help to raise the standards within the sector, whilst maximising the supply of good quality, secure homes for households.

How will we get there?

We will start to proactively plan for the new private rented legislation (previously named the Renters (Reform) Bill). We will look to strengthen our relationships with private landlords in North Warwickshire, and explore the options for open and regular dialogue. We will look at extending our options to provide incentives (such as a rent guarantee scheme, or deposit bonds) to encourage private landlords to work with the council. Having reached out to the sector to promote relationships and understand drivers we will consider developing a Private Sector Housing Strategy to sit alongside the delivery of a Council owned Local Housing Company.

How will we measure success?

We are expecting changes to be delivered by Government that will impact on the private rented sector. Whilst small this sector is critical in meeting housing need in the Borough. We need to have a better understanding of the sector and the drivers for landlords locally. We will:

Improve dialogue, communication and relationships with private landlords in North Warwickshire

Seek to reduce the number of people presenting to the council threatened with homelessness due the end of a private rented property

Seek to increase homes let at market rents – including by our Local Housing Company

Provide incentive schemes to attract private landlords to work with NWBC

Seek a resource to develop a Private Sector Housing Strategy

Evidence base

As part of the development of this strategy, we have carried out extensive research to understand the pressures and demand on the homelessness service at NWBC. The findings from this research are captured in the accompanying ‘Homelessness Strategy – evidence base’ document for review.

Monitoring and review

This strategy will be live between 2024 and 2029, when we will develop a new strategy for North Warwickshire.

In line with best practice, we will review the strategy yearly to ensure that the objectives remain appropriate and relevant. All the actions relating to each objective will become part of our monthly reporting and monitoring on progress.



