

# Hastings Housing Strategy 2025-2030

A place where everyone lives in a safe, settled and affordable home

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## Foreword

I am proud to introduce this Housing Strategy for Hastings. Housing is the biggest issue facing our town and the top priority in our Corporate Plan. When I became Leader of the Council, I chose to keep direct responsibility for housing and homelessness because I see every day how much good – and bad – housing affects residents’ lives.

Through regular walkabouts with local housing associations meeting tenants, visits to the residents of our newly acquired temporary accommodation homes, and volunteering on the rough sleeping count, I see, and hear, first-hand the challenges our residents face. If we get housing right, everything else – work, health, education, and wellbeing – becomes easier.

This strategy is ambitious but achievable (with a considerable push). It sets out what we can do over the next five years to make a real difference. There are no single answers, but building more truly affordable homes will have the biggest impact, which is why it is our number one priority. However, we also have to support people who do have a home to be able to make it safe and settled, so that it is accessible, affordable and free from hazards.

I want to thank everyone who helped shape this strategy – especially members of the Steering Group, who constantly challenged us to do better, and especially those with lived experience of homelessness or poor housing, whose insights turned this into a genuine plan for action.

As we move towards Local Government Reorganisation, it is vital that Hastings’ unique housing needs and opportunities are clearly set out. Working with our partners across East Sussex on the complimentary Partnership Strategy has helped us understand better both what we must do locally and what we must do together.

We cannot do this alone. Many of the actions in this strategy rely on central government to play its part – through properly fair funding, stronger housing laws, and real investment in truly affordable homes. But we are determined to lead by example and work with our partners to make Hastings a place where everyone lives in a safe, settled, and affordable home.

Cllr Glenn Haffenden, Leader of Hastings Borough Council & lead councillor for Housing

## Supporting Statement – Strategy Steering Group

The opportunity to work with a wide range of committed and knowledgeable local people to develop a strategy to tackle the housing crisis in Hastings has been rewarding and at times, challenging.

The energy that my fellow Steering Group members brought to the process, coupled with the passion and insights from a wide range of local people at both the initial survey stage and when we asked for feedback on the draft strategy , made it abundantly clear that the urgent need to address the poor quality of some housing in the town and dramatically increase the supply of new genuinely affordable and social housing, was keenly understood and experienced by so many.

We wanted a strategy that clearly shows that we understand the housing issues in the town and that we are well placed to take advantage of the increased government funding for new housing and new legislation such as the Renters' Rights Act. The annual reviews will be a key way to track if we are on course and present the opportunity to make any necessary changes.

It has been a particular pleasure to work alongside Chris Hancock the Head of Housing at Hastings Borough Council who has done so much to improve the housing service locally and my Vice Chair Michael Courts who has been so adept at 'joining the dots' with our neighbouring local authorities in anticipation of the forthcoming changes to local government structures.

Frances Mapstone, Strategy Steering Group Chair

## Introduction

### What is a Housing Strategy?

Hastings Borough Council's Housing Strategy is our long-term vision for housing in our town. It sets out our objectives, targets, and policies for how we will manage and deliver our housing responsibilities. The strategy provides the overarching aims and ambitions through which the council and our partners will seek to make Hastings a place where everyone can live in a safe, settled, and affordable home.

The strategy also meets our statutory duty to have a Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy. Homelessness is primarily a housing problem and therefore it is right that we seek to address it as part of our wider housing plans.

## Why is it important?

Our Housing Strategy considers all types of housing in Hastings – from social and affordable homes to private rented and owner-occupied housing. It is a vital tool for addressing the housing needs of our residents, supporting our local economy, and ensuring there are suitable homes in the right places for everyone.

The strategy provides a shared vision and framework for the council, housing providers, (both private and social), developers, support services, and community partners. By working together, we aim to tackle the housing pressures facing Hastings, including our affordability crisis, homelessness, and the condition of rented housing.

Hastings faces acute housing challenges, including relatively high levels of deprivation, low household incomes, and a shortage of truly affordable homes. Our Housing Strategy sets out how we will respond in the short, medium, and long term, including through more council-led housing delivery, better use of existing homes, and reducing our reliance on expensive private temporary accommodation (TA).

The 2025 Indices of Multiple Deprivation were published in October 2025 with Hastings determined to be the 14th most deprived local authority in England. Most relevant for this strategy is that Hastings rated worst for barriers to housing and other services of any other English local authority.

This Housing Strategy sits alongside other key community centred and council authored plans – including the Local Plan and the Climate Change Strategy, both of which are being formulated now. These strategies are being aligned to ensure that our policies complement one another and work collectively to deliver the council's vision for a thriving, inclusive, and resilient Hastings.

As required under Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, the council must consider how its housing functions can reduce crime, anti-social behaviour, and the fear of crime. In line with this duty, we have sought to ensure that the actions from this strategy contribute to reducing crime, anti-social behaviour and the fear of crime. Through partnership work, good design of homes and communities, effective tenancy management and support for residents, we aim to create safe, confident neighbourhoods where people feel secure in their homes.

The Hastings Housing Strategy will also complement the East Sussex Housing Partnership Strategy which is being produced and consulted on at the same time and will set out the vision for housing across East Sussex. The Hastings Housing Strategy sets out how what we need to do in Hastings to make it a place where everyone has a safe and decent home to live in. The East Sussex Housing Partnership Strategy sets out how we will do that together across the county as a partnership (of which Hastings is a key partner), recognising we cannot meet all of our ambitions alone, especially at a time of Local Government Reorganisation (LGR).

It is particularly important we set out our vision for housing now given that through LGR the council will not exist in a few years' time. We will therefore set out our ambitions, aims and asks so they can be clear as we become part of a new organisation.

## The Housing Strategy and the Local Plan

A Housing Strategy sets out a local authority's overall vision and priorities for housing in its area. It focuses on the people and communities — identifying local housing needs, challenges, and opportunities, and setting out how the council and its partners will respond. The Housing Strategy is not a statutory planning document, but it provides a policy framework that guides the council's housing programmes, investment decisions, and partnership work.

In contrast, the Local Plan is a statutory planning document prepared under the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004. It sets out the spatial framework for future development — including where new homes, jobs, and infrastructure should go. The Local Plan identifies housing land supply, sets development policies, and determines how planning applications are decided. It must be supported by evidence (including housing need assessments) and is subject to public examination before it is adopted.

While the two documents are closely linked, they serve different purposes. The Housing Strategy is about how housing need will be met and improved through policy, funding, and partnership, while the Local Plan determines where and what type of development can take place. Together, they ensure that housing delivery meets both local needs and national planning requirements.

With the additional consultation being undertaken on the council's Local Plan in early 2026 there is a great opportunity for the two documents to complement each other.

## Homelessness Review

Given that we have combined our Housing Strategy with a Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy we are required under the Homelessness Code of Guidance to undertake a Homelessness Review, the full review can be found as an appendix to this document.

In summary the review we commissioned highlighted the following:

- a) Initial homelessness approaches to the council: Initial approaches peaked in 2021/22, and have since returned to pre-pandemic levels, with an increasing proportion of households approaching with assessed support needs. Approaches from the private rental sector (PRS) dipped in 2020/21 (the peak of the pandemic and stay on evictions) but are now ~35% higher than pre-pandemic levels, demonstrating a ‘new normal’. This is largely due to an increase in landlords wishing to sell or re-let their properties. Approaches from those living in PRS accommodation at the time of application overtook those living with family or friends in 2023/24 and has remained the main cause of homelessness in the borough. We typically receive around 1,100 homelessness applications a year, and this figure has been remarkably consistent since 2001/02.
- b) Temporary accommodation (TA) placements: The review shows stable initial assessment numbers, and an increase in TA placements. The number of TA placements in the private rented sector has doubled since 2020/21. TA placements have also increased noticeably for single households. At the end of October 2026, we had 535 households in privately procured TA and an additional 124 households in properties the council own or lease.
- c) Prevention and relief duties: Prevention duty applies when someone is threatened with homelessness (within 56 days), while relief duty applies when someone is already homeless. Both duties require a local authority to take “reasonable steps” to help for a 56-day period. The review showed that households presenting at the relief stage peaked in 2021/22 but have since been overtaken by earlier presentations at the prevention stage. There has been a substantial increase in prevention duties successfully ending by securing existing or alternative accommodation. The number of relief duties ending with accommodation successfully secured still remains relatively low at one in five. In 2024/25 we prevented the homelessness of 269 households and relieved the homelessness of 104 households.
- d) Households in temporary accommodation (TA): The average length of stay in TA was 16 months for those that left during 2023/24. Average lengths of stay continue to increase year on year. Households with a higher bedroom entitlement tend to stay longer, and the gap has been growing. This suggests increasing challenges finding settled accommodation for

larger property sizes. Only a handful of households require five+ bedrooms, but they have been in TA for almost twice as long as the average household awaiting one-bed accommodation.

e) Rough sleeping: Over 300 individual people have been recorded having to sleep rough in 2024 and the most recent official street count, undertaken in November 2025, found 29 people forced to sleep rough and we are aware of a further eight people who are regularly rough sleeping but not found on that night.

We will be reviewing and publishing a new Homelessness Review every five years as required by the Homelessness Code of Guidance.

## Who is our Housing Strategy for?

Our Housing Strategy is for:

- Our residents and communities – We want every resident to have access to a safe, secure, and affordable home. We are committed to supporting people who are homeless or at risk of losing their home, helping residents with specific needs to live independently, and ensuring that communities in Hastings are healthy, sustainable, and can thrive in their homes. We want to tackle climate change but by promoting energy efficiency we will also enable residents to have lower bills and warmer (and cooler when needed) homes.
- Our partners – Housing challenges cannot be solved by the council alone. Our strategy provides the framework for working in partnership with tenants, our local Housing Associations, housing co-operatives, Community Land Trusts, health services, the voluntary sector, private landlords, and developers.
- Ourselves as a council – Through this strategy, we will guide future policies and housing delivery, ensure alignment with our Local Plan, and increase the number and quality of homes in Hastings. It will also shape our approach to homelessness prevention, housing standards enforcement, and investment in housing that supports health, wellbeing, and carbon reduction.

## How did we write the strategy?

We ran two 'kick off' events with an open invitation to anyone in the borough interested in housing to hear about the strategy process and to submit their views on what questions the strategy should answer.

We then formed a Steering Group of self-nominated people with different roles and perspectives on housing in Hastings. That Steering Group continued to meet throughout the strategy development, providing vital challenge and feedback.

The Steering Group was a subgroup of our Housing Taskforce, which is comprised of the Leader and Deputy Leader of the four political groups (Conservatives, Greens, Hastings Independents Group and Labour), who make up the Full Council. The taskforce has met regularly throughout the development of the strategy to provide constructive challenge and insight.

We ran an initial survey seeking views of local residents on the main issues impacting them and their ability to find and keep a safe, settled and affordable home. Over 500 residents shared their thoughts.

The first draft of the strategy was then shared publicly for feedback, with nearly 200 detailed responses submitted from individuals and organisations. Consultation events were run in Priory Meadow and in partnership with Hastings Voluntary Action.

What have we changed as a result of the consultation?

- Introduced action to lobby on rent caps and rent limits.
- Better definition of what we mean by affordable housing.
- Strengthened action on tackling short term lets.
- Strengthened links to the refreshing of the emerging new Local Plan.
- Strengthened support for community led housing.
- We have removed the action to create a Good Landlords' charter as there was limited support in the consultation and whilst we await the Renters' Rights Act to be fully implemented, we want to retain capacity and focus on tackling poor property conditions and poor landlord behaviour. We will continue to name and shame landlords where we have taken enforcement action.
- Added more consideration and actions on increasing the supply of accessible homes.

**What did we hear in the consultation?**

- Strong support for the focus on empty homes.
- Conflicting views on the role of the PRS as a housing option.
- Strong support for ending rough sleeping.

- That the first draft of the strategy did not highlight the impact of cuts to supported housing and other support services on people forced to sleep rough.
- Acknowledgement of the challenge of meeting housing need whilst meeting environmental goals.
- Misperceptions on the role immigration is having in causing housing pressures in Hastings.

## Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA)

We have undertaken an Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) on this strategy considering which protected groups are impacted by the proposals in the strategy, both negatively and positively.

This EQIA can be found as a separate supporting document to the strategy and evaluates the implications of the proposals made.

If successfully implemented, the strategy is expected to have a positive impact on individuals with protected characteristics, as well as others identified in this assessment. The EQIA highlights several factors—particularly those related to protected characteristics and their intersections—that influence housing need.

The council has direct influence over some of these factors through its statutory responsibilities and service delivery. However, achieving broader outcomes will require collaborative work with partners across sectors.

Given the scope and strategic nature of the document, it is not possible to assess the equality impact of each individual proposal at this stage. Therefore, in line with council policy, separate EQIAs will be required for all service developments and change initiatives arising from the strategy's implementation.

## Recommendations from the EQIA

The housing service should review and, where necessary, enhance, the collection and analysis of equalities data. This includes evaluating the systems currently in place to ensure they effectively capture and interpret relevant information. To support this, the Year 1 action plan should include a clear and specific commitment to address this priority.

1. In implementing the strategy, and in planning and delivering housing and support services, particular consideration should be given to impacts on:

- older adults.

- children, young people and their families.
- disabled people with additional focus on disabled children and young adults and disabled people 65+.
- people from Black and racially minoritised groups including Gypsies, Roma and Travellers.
- gender reassignment.
- LGBT+ people.
- pregnant people.
- refugees and asylum-seeking children.
- domestic and/or sexual abuse and violence survivors and people in vulnerable situations.

2. A commitment to joint working to address Gypsy, Roma and Traveller household land supply.
3. When future housing needs assessments are commissioned, consideration of ethnicity, 'Race', ethnic heritage and its intersections should be included in the specification.
4. That the needs of people with multiple, compound needs are explicitly considered in the implementation of the strategy.
5. That risk of exploitation and harm is explicitly considered in implementation of the strategy and in the development of services for people at higher risk due to specific or intersecting characteristics.
6. Ensure that the recommendations in this EQIA are reflected in the yearly action plan for the strategy.

## Hastings Data Snapshot 2025

This is a snapshot of population and housing data at the time the strategy was agreed.

40,454 households in Hastings

90,995 total population Hastings

Hastings – highest levels of child poverty in Sussex

28.7% private rented homes - 19.7% in East Sussex and 28.7% in Hastings

20.1% - highest percentage of income-deprived residents in Sussex

16% of households in fuel poverty - (England 13%)

Private rents rose to an average of £994 in Feb 2025, an annual increase of 4.4% Oct 2024

£244,000 Average house price (Sept 2025)

Average rent for flats or maisonettes rose by 6.4% while for detached properties, it increased by 5.6%

Average rent for one bed properties rose by 6.9% while the average for four-or-more bed properties increased by 4.8%

28.8% children living in poverty

OVER 600 households in temporary accommodation

260 households prevented from becoming homeless in 2024

£7,096,200 net cost of temporary and emergency accommodation in 2024/25

96 people moved out of rough sleeping into accommodation in past 12 months

Council committed £10m for purchasing houses 25/26 onwards

222 New Homes per year between 2022 and 2025; 710 New Homes Target set by Govt (yearly)

121 homes purchased by the council since 2023

37 people sleeping rough on official count night Nov 2025

66 homes purchased by the council in 2024/25 121 homes purchased by the council since 2023

Local Housing Allowance is often 40% lower than average rent.

28.7% of homes are privately rented

## Priority 1: Deliver the homes we need

### What is the aim?

For everyone in Hastings to live in a safe and settled home they can afford.

## Why is this a priority?

Hastings is facing a growing housing crisis. There simply aren't enough affordable homes for people—and the situation is being made worse by a combination of pressures.

### Rising house prices and lack of supply

Between 2013 and 2023, house prices in Hastings rose faster than anywhere else in England. This has pushed home ownership out of reach for many and put extra pressure on the PRS. People are renting for longer, rents are going up, and it's harder than ever for low-income households to find somewhere they can afford to live.

More people have relocated from London and other expensive parts of the south east to Hastings in search of a better quality of life in our wonderful town and to find more affordable homes to purchase and rent. While this brings benefits, it also drives up local prices and reduces availability for longer-term residents.

### High reliance on the PRS

Nearly 30% of homes in Hastings are privately rented, compared to just 19% across the south east. Much of this housing is older—especially converted Victorian buildings—which are expensive to maintain. With the forthcoming Renters' Rights Act and additional statutory requirements on property conditions some landlords are raising rents, leaving the market altogether, or converting to the holiday let market, reducing the number of homes available for long-term residents.

### Benefits don't cover housing costs

Housing benefit (Local Housing Allowance) often doesn't cover today's rent levels. Many renters are falling into arrears, being evicted, or struggling to find new homes once they've lost one. This increases homelessness and pushes more people into temporary accommodation as their only housing option.

### More people in TA

The number of local families living in privately procured temporary housing has risen sharply although it has stabilised more recently. This type of accommodation is expensive for the council and despite our efforts to keep households in Hastings and provide better quality temporary accommodation, it will never be as settled and suitable as a permanent home.

## Low wages, high costs

Wages in Hastings are lower than many parts of the south east, but housing costs keep climbing. Even people with full-time jobs—such as carers, retail workers, or teaching assistants—can't always afford a secure, decent home. This makes it hard to keep key workers in the town.

## Holiday lets and second homes

Although there is some sense this has peaked, many homes in Hastings are being used as short-term holiday lets or second homes, particularly in central or seafront areas. These properties are often left empty for much of the year, reducing the housing stock for local people and driving up rents.

## Poor housing conditions affect health

Some of the private rented homes in Hastings are in poor condition—cold, damp, or overcrowded. This has serious impacts on physical and mental health, especially for children, older residents, and those with long-term conditions.

## Limited space to build new homes

Hastings is tightly constrained by the sea to the south and protected landscapes to the north, east, and west, leaving little room for outward expansion. Meeting government housing targets in full is extremely challenging, so the new Local Plan must focus on using land and buildings more efficiently—through higher density development in suitable areas, better use of existing housing and non-residential premises, and supporting mixed-use schemes that balance local needs with the visitor economy. Even with these measures, evidence shows a significant housing shortfall.

The town urgently needs more affordable, secure, and good-quality homes to ensure residents of all ages and incomes can remain, build stable lives, and be part of strong, healthy communities. The shortage is most severe for lower-incomes households reflected in the high levels of temporary accommodation. Addressing this challenge is essential not only for housing but for safeguarding Hastings' future as a place where people can live, work, and thrive.

## Residents told us that:

“Build homes near shops and schools. Trust communities to create housing that suits them and can grow. New developments must be accessible and secure”

“There is no commitment here about what sort of land you will and won’t build on to provide these homes...”

“Secure affordable decent homes is THE priority ... the knock-on benefits for education and improved physical and mental health are well known.”

“BUILD MORE SOCIAL HOUSING.”

“Planning for new developments needs to include a higher percentage of homes affordable to rent for secure long term tenancies.”

“Housing developments must include infrastructure like schools and hospitals. Improve property standards. Focus on bringing empty homes back into use”

“I live with my two children, one with autism who needs his own room... we live with damp and mould.”

“I live in a mould-infested property ... too sick to move... fear of eviction if I complain..”

“The airbnb issue needs to be addressed immediately .”

“Building more homes is essential, but the focus must be on genuinely affordable homes that match local incomes...”

## Holmhurst Gardens

Holmhurst Gardens is an affordable housing scheme in St Leonards. Developed by Southern Housing. 208 homes- combination of affordable rent and shared ownership.

‘A little community , kids socialise with each other, and everyone is looking out for each other’ Holmhurst resident – family, previously in Temporary Accommodation for 4 years.

## What will we do?

- a) Continue to increase the range of housing options directly available to households who are facing homelessness to prevent homelessness and reduce the use of privately procured temporary accommodation.
- b) Implement Phase 3 of the council’ s Acquisitions Programme, maximising use of external funding, such as the Local Authority Housing Fund and the Affordable Homes Programme.

- c) Reopen our Housing Revenue Account so that we can deliver a stable financial framework for the delivery of social homes; that process may be accelerated by LGR given the existing Housing Revenue Accounts in Eastbourne and Lewes and Wealden.
- d) Complete the new build council homes to the rear of Bexhill Road and use this as a basis to identify and develop future sites.
- e) Support the delivery of the Local Plan for Hastings and guide and shape policy development.
- f) Ensure that new homes provide for current and future needs, including addressing the critical need for more accessible homes and promoting rightsizing opportunities for those households primarily under-occupying social homes and better downsizing opportunities for those in private homes to make best use of all housing stock.
- g) Seek to ensure that new homes developed in the borough meet the highest sustainability and environmental standards.
- h) Ensure that new homes meet Nationally Described Space Standards (NDSS) for space and amenity.
- i) Ensure that new homes also meet the Healthy Homes Principles promoted by the Town and Country Planning Association.
- j) Prioritise the delivery of affordable housing on-site as part of any Section 106 requirements rather than accepting a Commuted Sum in place of new affordable homes.
- k) We will review the use of the Choice Based Lettings scheme and contrast it to using a more direct approach to allocating available affordable homes to evaluate which approach would best help us meet housing need.
- l) We will implement the agreed recommendations from the review of the Hastings Housing Company shared and discussed at Cabinet and Full Council in December 2025.
- m) We will look to better manage the impact of holiday lets on housing availability and affordability. To prepare for this we are developing an evidence base examining the extent of holiday lets in the borough and their impact.
- n) We will raise the challenge faced, especially by residents, under 35, who are negatively impacted by the Shared Room Rate of Local Housing Allowance, in finding and securing affordable homes as part of the draft new Local Plan to inform future policy positions on the provision and standard of Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMOs). opportunities for those in private homes to make best use of all housing stock.

## What will we do with others?

- a) Deliver the maximum number of truly affordable homes in the five-year lifetime of this strategy (2025-2030).
- b) We will work with housing associations to deliver a pipeline of new affordable homes, and bring back into use empty homes, prioritising social rent and genuinely affordable tenures that meet our local need.
- c) Actively encourage and support public sector and housing association partners to review their available land and properties to assess the potential for new housing development or conversion.
- d) Commit to a flexible and creative approach to developing smaller sites, using modern methods of construction where they would speed things up, and working with a wide pool of potential developers to include community and Small and Medium Enterprise (SME) builders and developers.
- e) Work with partners to produce an Empty Property Strategy, bring back empty properties (where cost effective and practical to do so), and empty commercial premises (where conversion to homes is possible and those homes would be of the right standard), into use.
- f) Support community led housing developments where they contribute to preventing homelessness and alleviating the pressure on temporary accommodation through the development of a framework for interested groups to register interest in available sites and properties.
- g) Support and enable the development of co-operative housing models.
- h) Development Management, Planning Policy, and Housing teams to work together to identify how to maximise the delivery of affordable housing through the planning process. This includes identifying current capacity challenges and proposing solutions—such as funding additional planning officer posts with support from housing association partners.
- i) Work with partners to explore the establishment of a borough-wide Social Lettings Agency to manage homes in the private rented sector and offer them to households in housing need at rents they can afford.
- j) In partnership with our local housing associations, we will develop a proactive package of support and incentives which enables and supports social housing tenants under-occupying their home to downsize, which would include establishing a new officer role to lead this.

k) Continue to Chair the East Sussex wide traveller accommodation needs group. We will seek to better meet the needs of our traveller communities including Gypsy, Roma, Traveller and travelling show person households. We will ensure that presentations by Traveller households are monitored to better understand local need and will work to support opportunities to provide high quality settled sites in the borough and manage temporary stopping appropriately.

### What will we influence others to do?

- a) We will lobby for sufficient capital funding to come to Hastings to enable the development of sufficient social rented housing to meet our need for homes.
- b) We will present a compelling case to Homes England that Hastings should be a priority area for investment, for both homes on available sites but also for regeneration schemes such as at that in Hastings town centre.
- c) With existing stock holding authorities we will advocate for a new Housing Revenue Account (HRA) settlement, including discounted Public Works Loan Board (PLWB) rates for HRA borrowing, with the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) and a partnership with Homes England to create the foundation for a significant and transformative expansion in council house building.
- d) We will lobby for the Local Housing Allowance to be increased to actually reflect local private rented sector rents.
- e) We will lobby for the proposed additional planning 'use class' for short term holiday lets to be implemented as quickly as possible.

### What are the main way which we will measure progress?

- Number of Affordable Homes delivered
- Number of homes acquired and in management by the council
- Implementation of an Empty Homes Strategy by April 2026 and at least 30 empty properties a year in 2026/27 brought back into use.
- Reduce the number of empty homes across all tenures

"We desperately need to bring disused properties across the whole town back into use, either empty, unused homes or office blocks and derelict, empty shops." – Resident

## Priority 2: Prevent homelessness and end rough sleeping

“We’ve been in temporary accommodation since 2018...it’s awful, not having a secure home to raise your family.”- Resident in Temporary Accommodation

### What is the aim?

- That we halve the use of private TA by 2030.
- That we will continue to improve the standard of privately procured temporary accommodation.
- That we prevent nearly all instances of homelessness but where it does happen it is brief and non-recurrent.
- That nobody is forced to rough sleep in Hastings but anyone that does has an immediate offer of flexible, personalised support.
- That we continue to assist refugees and immigrants, with settled status in the UK, to integrate into the local community and access essential services.

### Why is this a priority?

Homelessness is primarily a housing problem. Everyone should have a safe, secure place to live — but right now, because of the lack of affordable homes, too many people in Hastings are without a settled home of their own.

This is not to say there isn’t, at time, also a need to provide wider support to people to help them out of homelessness and to prevent any return. However, that support can only be effective once someone has the foundation of a home.

Cuts to funding for supported housing, floating services, and statutory provision (especially mental health) have had—and will continue to have—a severe impact on our ability to help people move out of homelessness.

As of June 2025, 637 local households are living in TA, and most of them (526 households) are in privately procured temporary housing.

This kind of housing comes at a huge cost. In the last year alone, it cost the council £7.8million — that’s almost a third of the council’s total yearly budget. That means less money is available for other important local services.

Part of the problem is that the government support for temporary accommodation hasn’t kept up with reality. Councils are still being funded based on rent levels from over a decade

ago (2011), even though today's rents are much higher. If funding matched current rent levels, Hastings would receive £1.4 million more a year to help with these costs.

In October 2024, a single-night count found 36 people sleeping rough on our streets. And in just the first three months of 2025, 109 different people were found rough sleeping in Hastings. In November 2025 the single night found 29 people sleeping out in the open or in cars and caravans.

Rough sleeping is incredibly harmful. It negatively impacts physical and mental health, shortens life expectancy, and makes it harder for people to get back on their feet. And homelessness doesn't just affect the people going through it — it affects our whole community.

However, homelessness and rough sleeping are not inevitable. If we can meet the aims set out under Priority 1 above, we will increase the number of affordable homes which will bring homelessness down. However, while that is happening, we need to act now.

## Rob's Story

Tell us about your previous experiences of housing

"I lived in one property in Hastings, incidents with neighbors- no one could seem to do anything to help the situation, the police and councillors, lawyers/solicitors this led me to drinking more, not being able to get up and go to work, eventually losing my job leaving the property , becoming homeless, experiencing numerous mental breakdowns, near suicidal, this was not me, I felt I was going mad.

I slept in my car to start with for a few months with some possessions I had salvaged from the flat. All I owned was in the car, I ended up going to hospital for a week, came out for a week went back in. When I went back to my car, it was gone, all I owned- I assumed it had been stolen. I had nothing, marched around town until I found a duvet in a skip and that's how I carried on. Initially, I had no intention of asking for help.

Seaview outreach workers were the first to verify but I was not interested, just getting pissed everyday and trying to forget the mess my life had become.

The turning point was when I was so ill, I thought I was going to die. I went to support groups in preparation for the detox, had frequent visits from my housing first support worker. When the time came for housing, I felt in a position mentally where I would be able to engage. There was a lot to lose.

“I knew the detox would be easy; it was the rehabilitation that scared me. If I wasn’t successful, I would probably die. I was fearful of what life after detox would look like because rehabilitation would be the hardest part, and coming back out to a hotel room or the streets filled me with dread as there is a strong drinking culture in Hastings.”

Tell us about your current housing situation

Rob is now living in a supported home as part of the council led Rough Sleeping Accommodation Programme (RSAP) after 4.5 years sleeping rough.

“I feel safe in my home and it supports my recovery. It means more to me than any other home I’ve had before, as it allows me to cook again and sit in the warm. I have never appreciated being in the warm so much after years of rough sleeping. I’ve had support settling in with food parcels when needed, support setting up utilities. These I can manage independently.

Being stable in this home has given me the opportunity to start building bridges with my family, starting with phone calls, plans to visit eventually. I even received a birthday card from my mum and one from my sister. It’s been a while since I’ve received one of them.”

\* Names have been changed for this story \*

### Residents in temporary accommodation told us that:

“Not being placed in ‘temporary’ accommodation for what feels like long term”

“I really struggle getting out on my own with my kids as my youngest is 11 months old and I live up three flights of stairs which are really difficult when going shopping as I have to run the kids up on their own and bring the shopping all up the stairs”

“Positive is we have space for baby, negative is really far away from shop”

“Being allowed my mum to visit, it’s so isolating being in temporary accommodation and when I’m having a bad day and can’t travel to hers it awful.”

“Living in temporary accommodation takes its toll on the adults and the children. Quite frankly it’s awful.”

“Adds to poor mental health... children might not be near school so more expense getting them there, adding to the stress.”

## Homelessness Review

The commissioned Homelessness Review contained the following recommendations:

- Relentless focus on the PRS as the growing source, and necessary solution, to homelessness within the borough. The council's recent successes include increasing the proportion of social lettings to homeless households, and more people approaching the council for help at an earlier stage. But there is limited room for further material improvement in these areas (e.g. 75% social lettings went to statutory homeless households last year). With six times as many households leaving TA into social housing compared to the private rented sector, and approaches from those living in PRS accommodation increasing 35% on pre-pandemic levels, the sector is the key to achieving the better case scenarios outlined in the future projections. There are obvious reasons behind these trends, such as levels of Local Housing Allowance and the forthcoming Renters' Rights Act. This is even more reason to focus on the sector, and this is already a priority within the East Sussex Housing Partnership Strategy.
- Increase the range of accommodation with support options. This is not unique to Hastings, and to a large extent determined by the national funding settlements from 2026/27, but there should be clear intentions to maximise all levers to develop and grow the housing with support pipeline. There is a notable cohort that require medium/ higher level intensities of support, ideally in their own "general needs" tenancies. There is an additional need to explore ways to mitigate the impact of the floating support reductions.
- Build on existing good practice, and work closely with the East Sussex Housing Partnership to deliver on the range of intentions. There are a range of good practice examples and service outcomes to build on within the borough and county, including a robust governance framework. The scarcity of public resources increases the importance and value of working across the county, and with neighbouring authorities. Both the borough council's and Housing Partnership's aims are wide ranging and in line with good practice/ evidence to tackle homelessness. Hastings' Housing Strategy should provide clarity on where there is alignment with the Housing Partnership, who owns what; and plans for how the stated aims will be coordinated and delivered.

## What will we do?

- a) We will continue to expand our Acquisitions programme to reduce our reliance on privately procured TA. We will not use any new privately procured temporary accommodation that was previously let out as a settled home.
- b) We will expand our offer to landlords and lettings agents looking to provide settled homes rather than temporary accommodation. This offer will include expanding our leasing, property management and rental guarantee schemes. We will also promote other

initiatives such as the Rent a Room scheme to highlight the benefits to homeowners of letting out rooms.

- c) We will use the PRS as a means of discharging our homelessness duties, where it is a deemed a suitable offer (as per legislation) for that household.
- d) We will implement the recommendations made in the Justlife 'A Better Vision for Temporary Accommodation' report to inform the development of a published temporary accommodation (TA) charter setting out standards and management which TA residents will be directly involved in creating.
- e) We will use the social housing allocations scheme to support the prevention of homelessness by enabling direct, targeted lets and by providing equal priority to those households at risk of going into temporary accommodation as for those households in temporary accommodation.
- f) We will deliver the Single Homelessness Accommodation Programme (SHAP) resulting in 25 additional homes with support in the borough to prevent the need for rough sleeping.
- g) We will expand our Housing First service and ensure it has fidelity to the model, with the team supporting a low number of residents and giving those residents true flexibility and control.
- h) We will continue to support and celebrate the success of our in-house Resettlement and Employment services for the empowerment of refugees. We will seek to secure a commitment that the project will receive multi-year funding.
- i) We will increase our capacity for outreach services to people sleeping in vehicles in the borough. Firstly, so that we can increase the frequency of contact, and the level of support provided to help people move indoors. Also so that we can report back to the Housing Taskforce on the housing and support needs of the people contacted and the outcomes of any support provided, to inform future decisions on addressing the issue of people sleeping in vehicles.
- j) We will ensure all housing staff have the relevant skills and approach to deliver an effective and inclusive service to residents, including training in anti-discriminatory and trauma informed practice for frontline staff.
- k) We will seek out opportunities through the Local Government Association, the District Councils Network and other links to local authorities for our services to be peer reviewed and constructively challenged.

## What will we do with others?

- a) We will build on the foundations created by this strategy's Homelessness and Rough Sleeping subgroup and instate a Homelessness Forum inviting all interested partners to join and collectively shape future services and monitor the commitments made in this strategy relating to homelessness and rough sleeping. We will ensure that people with lived experience of homelessness will be welcomed and supported to be part of that forum. There are also opportunities to link with and complement the East Sussex Homelessness Forum.
- b) We will work with voluntary, community, and statutory partners to co-design and co-locate services in community settings. This will create more local access points where residents at risk of homelessness can get help and advice. By working together, we will also increase our capacity for outreach and home visits.
- c) Through the reinstated Homelessness Forum, we will collectively agree and publish our approach to assertive, and empathetic outreach to those people forced to sleep rough, including those who are sleeping in vehicles.
- d) We will use a Team Around the Person approach with Lead Professional, taking a trauma informed approach, for all individuals experiencing multiple and compound needs and where homelessness is one of those needs.
- e) We will build on the initial success of the Citadel programme and expand the recruitment and support of volunteers to provide personalised pre and post tenancy support to people moving out of homelessness.
- f) We will become members of the Crisis Employment Alliance both as an employer but also actively promote the alliance to employers in Hastings.
- g) We will strengthen joint working between Housing and Social Services to provide integrated, person-centred support for residents at risk of homelessness or housing instability. Lack of housing should never be a barrier to someone receiving the care and support they need.
- h) We will work across housing and housing benefit services, sharing information appropriately and working more closely to prevent more homelessness and sustain more tenancies.
- i) We will co-produce the new combined crisis fund (which combines Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) and the Household Support Fund (HSF)) with partners to ensure the fund actively prevents and ends homelessness.

## What will we influence others to do?

- a) We will lobby for the temporary accommodation subsidy system to reflect the current costs of securing good quality temporary accommodation. Which will enable us to spend more of our Homelessness Prevention Grant actually preventing homelessness not just paying for the management of it.
- b) We will lobby for a multi-year funding settlement for the Homelessness Prevention Grant and for the Rough Sleeping Accommodation and Prevention
- c) We will lobby locally, and especially as we enter LGR for sufficient funding for support services. We will use the qualitative and quantitative data and insight we have to make both the financial and moral case for better investment.

## What are the main ways which we will measure progress?

- Number of households in private temporary accommodation
- Number of people having to sleep rough
- An increase in homes acquired by the council.
- An increase in homes leased and/or managed by the council or as part of a social lettings agency
- For the proportion of households approaching us before they are homeless to continue to increase, with the proportion of households approaching who are already homeless decreasing.
- Number of staff with the right training and support to deliver an effective and trauma informed approach.

## Jasmine's story

Jasmine has lived in private temporary accommodation for three years, with her sister.

“I was staying in my car as I couldn’t live with my family but couldn’t go anywhere as I needed to stay close for my sister. Due to a relationship breakdown, my sister who is neurodiverse was asked to leave the family home. I couldn’t leave my sister, so we approached HBC as I didn’t know what else to do.

“I was recovering from a broken back, sleeping in my car, although where I am is safe and warm, I know that due to being unable work accessing private rented will be difficult.

Without having this accommodation, I wouldn’t have been able to heal properly, and I have

avoided having extra surgery. I feel that soon I will be able to start looking for work, my mental health has stabilised.”

### **Yashar's story**

Yashar has lived in Private Temporary Accommodation with his six-year-old daughter for 2.5 years.

“I was living alone in a studio flat and had my daughter stay with me sometimes when she was not with her mum. Everything changed when I was granted full custody and all of a sudden my landlord gave me notice to move as he was selling the flat. I was panicked and didn’t know what I was to do, I was very ill myself, I also was now a full-time dad to a young daughter who is non-verbal, the worry was almost too much. For my daughter I stayed strong and approached the council, saw an officer, told them what I was going through and then they said I could have temporary accommodation for myself and my daughter. I couldn’t believe it, then the temporary accommodation team called me to say that they had found me somewhere and that this was this flat, it’s a two-bed flat so we have our own space, own front door and could start to move forward with the new chapter.”

If I had not been helped when I was under so much pressure, I wouldn’t have had my daughter, and I would have been street homeless and the thought of life without my daughter is unbearable.”

## **Priority 3: Create a rented sector which works for tenants and landlords**

“I’ve lived in five properties through private rental in Hastings... very difficult to find something I’d class as decent.”

### **What is the aim?**

- That the PRS provides a viable housing option to residents through the supply of properties which meet required property standards and conditions and provide a safe place to live.
- That the PRS in Hastings can remain a viable option for landlords and tenants by sustaining and attracting landlords who meet their legislative duties and are responsive if issues arise. The aim is then to improve the choice and supply to residents.
- That we take appropriate and proportionate enforcement action, in line with our statutory duties and enforcement policy where non-compliance is identified.

## Why is this a priority?

The PRS in Hastings, faces a number of significant challenges. Many of these issues are reflective of broader trends in the UK but are particularly acute in Hastings due to its specific socioeconomic and housing characteristics.

### Above average PRS share:

A disproportionately high percentage of homes in Hastings are privately rented (over 30% in some wards). This means a high proportion of our residents rely on the PRS to provide them a home.

Therefore, it is vitally important those homes are free from serious hazard, safe to live in and comply with legal requirements.

### A relatively high concentration of Houses of Multiple Occupation:

Hastings has a relatively high proportion of houses of multiple occupation (HMOs), where buildings are sub divided into rooms or flats (some with shared facilities others self-contained). This means occupiers may have less control over their living environment.

However, HMOs provide a much-needed supply of more affordable accommodation, especially for single people, this is why it is important that such buildings meet required standards and are well managed.

### Disrepair and safety:

Hastings has one of the highest rates of non-decent homes in the south east. Many properties suffer from damp, mould, poor insulation, outdated heating systems, and general disrepair. Adverse property conditions have a direct impact on both the physical and mental health of the occupiers. This spans far wider than the exposure to the hazards whilst inside the property. It impacts far more broadly on issues such as social isolation and the ability to thrive at school/work.

### Type of property stock:

The town has a large proportion of older housing stock which brings its own issues in terms of energy efficiency. A lot of properties are poorly insulated and would need significant investment to meet proposed higher Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards (MEES) in the future.

Landlords are often reluctant or are unable to retrofit properties due to cost, despite MEES legislation. Government grant funding initiatives have had limited impact on the private rented sector to various constraints on cost caps and contribution requirements for

landlords. Many older PRS homes are poorly insulated, contributing to fuel poverty—a major concern given rising energy costs.

### Vicki's story

Vicki lives in Temporary Accommodation with her three children.

She initially stayed in her grandfather's privately rented home, where she stayed temporarily before moving into a joint tenancy with a friend. When her friend left, Vicki was left to pay the full rent alone. She moved again—this time with her partner—into a two-bedroom flat. They found that they could not afford to heat this property in the winter so moved again, this time to a privately rented house.

Eventually, Vicki and her family ended up living with her partner's relatives in a housing association property. But when the relationship broke down, she had no choice but to move into her sister's small two-bedroom maisonette above a laundrette. It was overcrowded and unsuitable, and Vicki made a homeless application.

Her first placement in temporary accommodation was a privately owned house with a leaking roof, where she stayed for six months. Vicki has been living in council owned TA for the last ten months with her children.

She continues to bid for permanent housing through the housing association system or hopes to find something affordable in the private rented sector.

“With pressure on landlords to upgrade their EPC rating, and potentially requiring large sums to be spent before getting an exemption for Victorian single skin walled properties is problematic, coupled with rising mortgage interest rates and mortgage arrangements fees.

I will either have to raise my rents significantly or sell up...and I have long term tenants, with way below market rents.” - Landlord

“I always had good references, always paid on time but I couldn't even get to see flats or houses due to the impossible criteria for private rentals as I'm disabled and on benefits.” - Resident

### Rising rental costs:

A large number of tenants in the PRS are on low incomes or benefits and face rising rents. Rent levels are not matched by local wages, contributing to housing insecurity and potential homelessness. The fear of eviction and affording an alternative property is often

one of the reasons tenants are fearful of raising concerns about their property conditions either with their landlord or to the Housing Team.

Letting agents can act as gatekeepers to private rented housing. Practices like high upfront fees, “no DSS” discrimination, and poor communication can block access to homes. The Renters’ Rights Act, which has now received Royal Assent (27 October 2025) will greatly help in tackling these issues.

### **Holiday lets:**

Increased conversion of long-term rental properties into short-term holiday lets has reduced the availability of housing for local residents.

Historically, relatively cheaper housing in Hastings has been used to house tenants made homeless from London boroughs.

However, this practice has now ceased due to the rapidly increasing housing costs in the borough.

“Limit the % of housing that is Airbnb or other holiday rental.” - Resident

### **Use as TA:**

Some private landlords exploited the need for TA by ‘flipping’ settled private rented tenancies into TA to attract a higher rate of income. We have stopped this practice now by refusing to make use of any rented property as TA which was previously rented out. However, this practice is still an impacting factor on property supply as other organisations rely on the PRS to fill a gap in TA needs, so this still makes it an attractive business model to some property providers.

## **The Renters’ Rights Act Background**

The Renters’ Rights Bill was introduced as part of government reform of the private rented sector. It has been working its way through Parliament to obtain Royal Assent and this was achieved on Monday 27 October 2025. The intention is that various sections of the legislation will be implemented in phases.

In summary the key changes introduced are,

- The End of Section 21 “No Fault Evictions”- Section 21 evictions will be abolished, meaning landlords can no longer evict tenants without a specific reason. All tenancies will become periodic (rolling tenancies).

- The introduction of a Private Rented Sector Database – All landlords must register their properties on a new, national Private Rented Sector Database. This is to improve transparency and enforcement.
- Private Landlords will be required to meet the Decent Homes Standard (DHS) – this is in addition to the Housing Health and Safety Rating System under The Housing Act 2004. Currently the DHS only applies to Social Rented Properties. The standard itself is also being reviewed and updated.
- Changes to rent increases – Rent increases will be limited to once per year and landlords must give tenants at least two months' notice of the increase. Tenants can challenge unfair rent increases via a tribunal and once a tenancy agreement signed only one month's rent is payable in advance.
- Tenant dispute resolution – A Private Rented Sector Landlord Ombudsman will be created to handle disputes between tenants and landlords and all landlords must be registered with the scheme. The ombudsman's decisions will be binding.
- New rules on pets in rental accommodation – Tenants will have the right to request a pet and the landlord cannot unreasonably refuse.
- Stronger protections against tenant discrimination – Discrimination against tenants on benefits or those with children will be banned. Tenant selection must be based on financial suitability only.
- Stronger local authority enforcement – Councils will have increased duties and powers to enforce compliance and investigate issues. There will be higher fines and penalties introduced for breaches of the law regarding property rental, as well as the new breaches that have been created.

There are clear opportunities to use these new powers and duties to improve the experience of private rented tenants but given the size and complexity of the private rented sector in the borough we await what potential new funding and resources we will receive to make the most of them.

### **Landlords told us:**

“The laws are currently weighted against landlords hence why they are leaving the market making the problems much worse”

“ ... There must always be provision for landlords to remove unsocial and violent tenants”

“ No more additional licensing costs...the scheme did not work. It did not target the irresponsible landlords, whilst those who comply with housing laws faced additional costs.”

“There should be financial incentives for decent landlords”

“ Advertise the council landlord letting scheme. People I speak to don’t know it exists.”

“ Maintaining good communication for landlords to buy and prepare properties for rental.”

“ A simple licensing arrangement for landlords should protect both landlords and tenants.”

“ It would be really good to have someone knowledgeable at the council that you can advise you on these things. I am a landlord who wants to do the right thing but I don’t have an unlimited budget, or the knowledge to know what is best.”

“ Better, clearer and more concise access for landlords to ensure compliance with any licensing.”

“ Please work with Landlords and don’t treat them like the enemy - its only works when we all work together for a win-win situation.”

### Kerry’s Story

Kerry lives in council-owned Temporary Accommodation with her daughter, she is a full-time carer.

Her first privately rented home was sold, and the second became unaffordable after a rent hike. Kerry moved in with her mother and grandmother, but when her daughter needed her own room, she rented privately. After ten years in the same property , the landlord decided to sell the property, and she was served a Section 21 notice. Unable to find a new home, she made a homeless application.

Kerry then spent over a year in private temporary accommodation, which was damp and mouldy. She has now been placed in council-owned temporary accommodation. She continues to bid for permanent housing through the housing association system or hopes to find something affordable in the private sector.

Residents shared their experiences in the PRS:

“I live in private rented and have had two section 21s served on me previously.”

“Private sector has become so expensive that I faced homelessness due to section 21.”

“Landlords refuse housing benefit and don’t maintain properties.”

“I live in a mould-infested property ... too sick to move... fear of eviction if I complain”

“Housing trauma is real—whether you have to move every three years or live in fear of eviction.”

“Private rents going up and becoming unaffordable to local people on local wages.”

“Affordable rented flats are difficult to find. I spent a year looking.”

“I lost my home after a rent hike, now live with relatives... stress, job loss, poor quality B&B.”

“Make landlords keep rents affordable, maintain properties, and treat tenants well. Improve safety in neighbourhoods. Pressure government to drop two-month evictions.”

## What will we do?

- a) We will utilise the full range of our duties and powers under the legislation we are responsible for enforcing in line with our enforcement policy and as far as resources allow.
- b) Where appropriate we will provide advice and guidance to private landlords about what they need to do to ensure their properties meet the standards required. This will be through a range of mechanisms including responding to landlords’ requests for advice and information, engaging with them when responding to property complaints from their tenants and through our website and landlord newsletter. However, there will be instances where informal engagement is not appropriate, and we will need to take enforcement action when investigating non-compliance.
- c) We will develop a full range of options for both supporting landlords to bring properties into use and up to standard but also enforcing where justified. These options could include in extreme circumstances consideration of Compulsory Purchase Orders (CPOs) and Empty Homes Management Orders but primarily through incentive schemes such as the Kent No Use Empty Loan Scheme.
- d) We will introduce an additional licensing scheme for private rented homes to improve property conditions and/or management standards. The exact scope of that scheme will be determined by an evidence base of what is needed and informed through further consultation to be undertaken in 2026.
- e) We will monitor local letting agency practices and act where agents are breaching legal requirements, including failure to belong to redress schemes or display fees transparently.

We will work to eliminate discrimination against benefit claimants and marginalised groups in the lettings process and will challenge unlawful practices.

f) We will work with the East Sussex Fuel Poverty Coordinator to ensure any funding initiatives and grants available for tenants / landlords are communicated to them or signposted to the Warm Home Check Service where more assistance and advice can be provided.

g) We will present a business case for the use of a capital fund to help retrofit private rented homes in exchange for nomination rights and below market rents. There is an opportunity to develop this as a countywide initiative.

## What will we do with others?

- a) We will work with partner agencies as appropriate to ensure a holistic approach is taken to issues raised with PRS properties. E.g. East Sussex Fire and Rescue Service, tenant advocacy groups and landlord bodies.
- b) We will listen to and engage with organisations representing the interests of both tenants and landlords to deliver our aims.
- c) Work as part of a new county-wide forum on shared priorities to improve access and standards in the PRS.

## What will we influence others to do?

- a) We will lobby for the earliest possible implementation of the Renters' Rights Act 2025 which received Royal Assent on 27 October 2025.
- b) We will lobby for the introduction of local authority powers to implement rent capping or rent limits in the private rented sector.

## What are the main ways which we will measure progress?

- An increase in the level of enquires and engagement with landlords related to advice and information requests to improve their property standards
- An improvement in the property condition because of direct intervention from the Housing Improvement and Compliance Team
- Appropriate enforcement outcomes where non-compliance is found.

## The social rented sector

“Private sector has become so expensive that I faced homelessness due to section 21.”- Resident

### What is the aim?

- That social housing tenants are proud and happy in their homes.
- That we act as a critical friend to our local housing associations recognising the vital role they play in providing housing to current and future tenants.
- That we constructively challenge to continually raise standards of properties and management.

### Why is this a priority?

There are 6,419 affordable homes in the borough, with the original council homes owned and managed by Southern Housing, totalling 4,249. Orbit Homes own and manage 1,138 homes. Affordable homes are allocated through the Homemove Choice Based Lettings system, with a proportion retained by the housing associations for internal transfers which are reported to the council.

Housing associations (and stock holding authorities) are regulated by the Housing Ombudsman and the Social Housing Regulator but tenants with concerns over property conditions can raise their concerns directly with the council if they have notified their concerns to their housing association and they have failed to get a satisfactory response.

The Four Courts, which are 396 Southern Housing homes spread across four high rise blocks in Hollington, are proposed to be regenerated, with the blocks to be demolished and lower rise, more modern, homes to take their place.

This regeneration should present an opportunity to create more and better homes in a part of the borough where they are vitally needed. The council supports the principle of regeneration where it will result in more homes, an improvement in the quality of those homes and the homes remaining affordable.

The new Local Plan will be considering the potential for housing renewal and will look to ensure that where housing renewal takes place, there is a net gain in the numbers of new homes delivered through housing renewal schemes.

The Spending Review does present opportunities, with additional funding being made available for affordable homes. It is essential that Hastings sets out a strong investment case to attract and secure that funding. Especially as with proposed devolution it may be

that capital investment for housing and regeneration will be allocated through the new Sussex wide Mayor.

Housing associations are also measured by consumer standards and required outcomes for social housing providers which were implemented by government on 1 April 2024.

- Safety and Quality Standard (stock quality, decency, health and safety, repairs, maintenance and planned improvements and adaptations).
- Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard (fairness and respect, diverse needs, engagement with tenants, information about landlord services, performance information, complaints).
- Neighbourhood and Community Standard (safety of shared spaces, local co-operation, anti-social behaviour and hate incidents, domestic abuse).
- Tenancy Standard (allocations and lettings, tenancy sustainment and evictions, tenure, mutual exchange).

The consumer standards will be supported by a number of new measures for social housing providers, including an updated decent homes standard for both social and privately rented homes, electrical safety standards and Awaab's Law which deals with timescales for repairs.

It is important that we provide constructive challenge where necessary but having shared goals where they mean more and better homes for Hastings' residents.

### **Nathan's story**

Nathan lives in social housing with his daughter.

"I became homeless in August 2021 with my daughter and was given temporary accommodation in a room in Eastbourne for a few weeks and it was difficult sharing with my teenage daughter.

I was then given temporary accommodation on the seafront in Hastings which was much better.

My daughter lives with me on a permanent basis but I have two other children who live with their mum. Now, that I am in permanent accommodation I am able to have them to stay over. I also help to take them to school so have more contact with them than I did when I was in temporary accommodation. I am currently in social housing tenancy and I am happy to have permanent housing."

## Southern Housing

We've welcomed the opportunity to be part of the process in creating a new Housing Strategy for Hastings, delivering a long-term vision for the town. The new strategy aligns with our own commitments to provide safe, affordable homes and excellent services to residents. This has never been more important, particularly in the face of economic, social and environmental challenges, where partnership working is vital in tackling the housing crisis in Hastings. In our current development programme, we're providing 208 new homes at the Holmhurst St Mary site, 104 for rent and 104 for shared ownership. Our plans to regenerate the Four Courts, providing new modern homes fit for the future, demonstrates our continued commitment to the Hastings area.

Vanessa Biddiss, Head of Region – Sussex, Southern Housing

## Orbit

Orbit manages over 1,300 affordable homes in Hastings and welcomes the opportunity to support the new Hastings Housing Strategy. As a key housing partner to the council, we support the objective, targets and policies set out in the Housing Strategy to ensure Hastings is a place where everyone has a safe, settled and affordable home to live in. We welcome the commitment to work in partnership with all stakeholders to achieve this and particularly with housing associations, such as Orbit.

As Hastings is a location where housing need is particularly acute, it is important that the strategy considers all type of housing in Hastings from social and affordable homes to private rented and owner occupied. Orbit recognise that Hastings faces particular housing challenges that have led to high levels of families in temporary accommodation and a lack of housing supply. Orbit is committed to working with the council to provide genuinely affordable new homes as demonstrated by the delivery of 140 new affordable homes at Harrow Lane.

Orbit supports the priorities in the 'What will we do?' section particularly in ensuring that affordable homes are delivered on-site as part of any Section 106 requirements. It is important that there is some flexibility in the Section 106 affordable tenures to ensure that these homes can viably be delivered. In certain circumstances, it is considered that the delivery of affordable rent tenure, as opposed to social rent, would maximise the number of affordable homes being delivered on financially constrained section 106 sites.

We support the objectives in the 'What will we do with others' section and particularly the commitment to work with Housing Associations to deliver a pipeline of new affordable homes with the social rent being a priority . In the 'social rented sector' objectives, Orbit

welcomes the opportunity to work even closer with the council to provide a high standard of management and property for our customers. Orbit's Everyday Excellence customer focussed transformation supports this objective as it will enhance our customer service and deliver it at a local scale.

Ed Tibbetts, Land & New Business Director, Orbit Homes South

### Residents told us that:

“We are currently housed by a local housing association. We had to wait three years to be moved from a two bed flat to a three bed house”

“I am a housing association tenant and the properties are dumps. I have lived in three in 12 years and they are all money pits”

“I'm lucky to have a housing association house, I was allocated it 27 years ago as I have a disabled daughter.”

“Because of changes in law, The Housing Association is trying to do something about it but not enough.. plus most repairs are bodge and haven't yet helped with the damp and mould which destroys my carpets furniture and clothes.”

“Poor investment in social housing, extremely poor management by Housing Association.”

“My experience has not been a good one....and my flat is riddled with damp and mould and has taken me six years for my Housing Association to even respond to me with some help”

“Housing Association have been very slow in replying to emails.”

“The Housing Association must care and understand people's needs better and difficult circumstances.”

### What will we do?

- a) Informed by the commitments in this strategy we will create a local Housing Association compact, being a critical friend and constructively challenging our local housing associations, agreeing standards of service and property conditions, which will be monitored through the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. We will take inspiration from similar approaches such as this one from the London Borough of Waltham Forest
- b) We will work with housing associations to promote transparency in housing management, complaints handling, and tenant engagement in line with the Social Housing Regulation Act.

- c) We will ensure housing associations are meaningfully engaging with tenants and residents, ensuring they have a strong voice in the way their homes and neighbourhoods are managed.
- d) We will advocate for tenants to be treated fairly, respectfully, and in-line with the expectations of the Social Housing (Regulation) Act, ensuring robust complaints processes and access to support where needed.
- e) We will support tenants in raising concerns about property condition and work with housing associations to respond swiftly and effectively to issues such as disrepair, damp, and mould. We will take enforcement action where serious hazards are not addressed
- f) We will share local housing needs data and work with housing associations to ensure their development and re-letting strategies support those most in need, including people facing homelessness and those who require more accessible homes.

## What will we do with others?

- a) We will work with partner agencies as appropriate to ensure a holistic approach is taken to issues raised with social rented properties. E.g. East Sussex Fire and Rescue Service.
- b) We will listen to and engage with organisations representing the interests of both tenants and landlords to deliver our aims.
- c) We will support and enable tenants of social housing, private rented housing and temporary accommodation to be heard through the establishment of a cross tenure and cross borough Tenants Forum.
- d) We will reinforce our pre-eviction protocol to make sure any tenant at risk of eviction from a housing association home is referred to the Housing Options Team and provided with housing advice and support to prevent their homelessness.

## What will we influence others to do?

- a) Improve data-sharing between the Ministry of, Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), the Regulator, and local authorities to tackle disrepair and poor management more effectively.
- b) Press the social housing regulator to take more robust action against housing associations who fail to meet standards, especially those with homes in Hastings but who do not have an adequate local presence to support their tenants or maintain their homes.

## What are the main ways which we will measure progress?

- Increased tenant satisfaction within housing association homes
- % of housing association homes meeting the Decent Homes Standard
- Number of reported damp/mould/disrepair cases and average time to resolve
- Number of evictions from housing association homes
- Net increase in homes delivered as part of any regeneration and rent levels and tenure kept the same

## Priority 4: Homes that support health, independence, and longer lives.

“We are trapped in the system where we would like to live in a more suitable home, to meet my partner’s disability requirements, but there are none available, let alone any we could afford.” - Resident

### What is the aim?

- That everyone in Hastings is able to live in a home which meets their needs and helps them thrive.
- Where somebody can no longer thrive in their home, they are supported to make adaptations or to find an alternative home which does meet their needs and aspirations.

### Why is this a priority?

Good housing is essential for people to live a healthy life. We know that a shortage of affordable housing is driving health inequalities, but we also need to consider how we can improve the quality of accommodation and the neighbourhoods where people live.

We will work to provide consistency during the local government devolution and reorganisation process, recognising the strength of our existing partnership work to integrate housing, health and care services and continue to expand cross sector collaboration.

Housing is at the heart of almost every form of inequality. Poor or insecure housing often goes hand in hand with other disadvantages — such as low income, unemployment, poor physical or mental health, caring responsibilities, experience of domestic abuse, or discrimination linked to race, disability or other protected characteristics. It also affects

those leaving institutional settings such as care, hospital or prison, and people facing digital exclusion or living in isolated communities.

For many residents, these disadvantages do not occur in isolation but compound one another – poor housing contributes to poor health, which in turn affects the ability to work, study, or maintain stability.

We also heard from residents that play provision is lacking for children across Hastings and especially in areas of social housing. We recognise the important role that high quality and imaginative play spaces particularly doorstep play has in improving children's health and wellbeing. We will identify opportunities through the Pride in Place funding and other potential funding streams to address this need.

Addressing housing need is therefore not only about providing homes; it is about tackling multiple and overlapping forms of disadvantage that hold people and communities back. By improving the quality, affordability and security of housing, we can make a significant difference to residents' life chances, reduce pressure on other public services, and create a fairer, healthier and more resilient Hastings.

This includes, but is not limited to, people and households who often face the most barriers to finding and keeping a settled, safe and affordable home such as care leavers, recent prison leavers, vulnerable parents and children, people with a learning disability, people with autism and those with substance dependence or mental health issues.

## Keith's Story

Keith lives in social housing in accommodation adapted using Disabled Facilities Grant. Keith previously lived in a high-rise flat, which was becoming increasingly difficult due to declining mobility. To address these challenges, Keith was relocated to a one-bedroom bungalow managed by Southern Housing.

The bungalow has recently been modified using a Disabled Facilities Grant, to accommodate wheelchair use throughout the property and garden. Before these adaptations, Keith was confined to just two rooms—his bedroom and living room. He could not access the kitchen or bathroom, nor safely leave his home. This severely impacted his mental health, increased his dependence on emergency services for hospital transport, and prevented him from seeing friends and family.

Following the completion of the housing adaptations, Keith's life changed dramatically. He went from needing carers three times a day to living completely independently. He's now able to cook his own meals again—something he's always enjoyed—and manages his personal care without support. With full access to his home and garden, Keith is back out

in the community, visiting friends and family, and even planning to grow vegetables in pots next spring.

## Health in Hastings.

The life expectancy for men in Hastings is 78 and for women it is 81. This is below the average for East Sussex and the rest of the country. We know that people living in deprived parts of Hastings are more likely to be living with a long-term health condition.

One in four adults are classified as obese and fewer children are a healthy weight, compared to other parts of East Sussex.

One in five adults are physically inactive and one in four adults smoke.

## Homelessness and health

Homelessness and rough sleeping are very harmful to health. There are legal duties for housing, health and care partners to work together to support people who are homeless (Duty to Refer). We want to make sure we are working together better to prevent homelessness whenever we can.

We want our housing services to ensure people have support for their physical and mental wellbeing and links to employment and training, so they feel connected to their community and are less likely to become homeless in the future.

We have been working collaboratively to ensure housing is part of a multi-disciplinary approach to supporting people with multiple compound needs. Multiple compound needs mean people living with a combination of three or more needs, including homelessness, poor mental health, substance dependency, contact with the criminal justice system and domestic abuse. Through our rough sleeper services and the Changing Futures programme, we have started to build teams which make it easier for housing specialists to work collaboratively with health, mental health, social care and substance dependency.

This approach will help us make the best use of the accommodation solutions we are developing through the strategy. Much of our work is reliant on grant funding, a new countywide Multiple Compound Needs Board has been formed to develop a long-term plan to ensure this approach can be continued in the future.

## Adult social care

The adult social care strategy and new prevention strategy includes a priority for a suitable home and collaboration with homelessness prevention services, highlighting that our

homes, and how well they are adapted to meet our needs, help us live independently , and keep us safe.

## Supported housing

We need to ensure there is a range of housing in Hastings. Whenever possible we want people to receive support in their own home, but we also recognise there is a need for more specialist accommodation.

Supported housing can be an enabler to end homelessness and promote independence.

It is becoming almost impossible to deliver supported housing due to principally a lack of revenue support funding but also higher costs of running buildings.

Through the steering group we have highlighted gaps in our current supported housing, including refuge provision for victims of domestic abuse, accommodation for people with substance dependency and mental health support needs, temporary and move on accommodation for people with a history of rough sleeping. We also need to make sure we have the right accommodation to support people to live independently as they get older.

“Provide floating support and supported accommodation for people who cannot maintain a tenancy independently .” - Resident

“Support people to live independently in their own homes as long as possible to prevent them going into care.” - Resident

The following table shows the households on the Housing Register with an assessed need for an accessible home and their banding.

Mobility level	A	B	C	D	Grand total
1	23	1	0	1	25
2	25	6	0	0	31
3	156	154	14	16	340
Grand total	204	161	14	17	396

## Accessible housing – what residents told us:

“Being on disability benefits means that we are unlikely to be able to find another place, should we need to.”

“Many properties won’t allow adaptions as won’t guarantee the tenancy for the length of time required.”

“We have struggled to find affordable housing for our large family to rent in Hastings, this has become worse with needing adaptions for disability and accessibility.”

“Very difficult, me and my son have been in temporary accommodation for nearly a year due to my landlord selling the property we were in and now it’s impossible to get a private rental accommodation as I am disabled and rely on universal credit and pip.”

“More permanent housing for single occupiers and those with physical and mental health needs.”

“I rely on disability benefits, and so there are practically no landlords who are willing to rent me, and my husband, a property.”

- Mobility Level – Where a property is advertised for applicants with restricted mobility i.e. Mobility Level 1, 2 or 3, priority will be given to applicants who require this type of property.
- Mobility Level 1 – Typically suitable for a person who uses a wheelchair full time, indoors and outdoors. The property will provide full wheelchair access throughout.
- Mobility Level 2 – Typically suitable to a person with restricted walking ability and for those that may need to use a wheelchair for some of the time. The property will have internal and external level or ramped access, but some parts of the property may not be fully wheelchair accessible.
- Mobility Level 3 – Typically suitable for a person able to manage two or three steps, but unable to manage steep gradients. The property may have adaptations to assist people with limited mobility.

There is a severe shortage of accessible homes, both for permanent and temporary accommodation.

## Disabled Facilities Grants

A Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) is a capital grant contributing to the cost of home adaptations, to enable eligible disabled people to continue living safely and independently. The DFG is available to disabled people of all ages in all housing tenures, depending on eligibility. DFG applications can be made by occupants of any tenure including those in social housing, the private rented sector and owner occupiers.

In 2024 to 2025 financial year 150 DFGs were approved for a total of 240 adaptations with a total cost of £1,952,409.33.

The most in demand adaptations were the need for level access showers, stairlifts, wash/dry toilets and adaptations to property access. E.g. ramps.

The average age of a DFG applicant was 58 years old in 24/25. 16 of the approvals were for children.

In 24/25 66% of DFGs approved were for occupants of social registered properties, 37 owner occupiers, 12 private landlords and two were for occupiers in temporary accommodation.

A total of 146 DFGs were completed in 24/25 (this is not a direct correlation to above as one financial year rolls into the next so someone could apply at the end of one year, but the works are not completed until the new financial year). The total cost of these adaptations was £2,293,948.58

with the average cost of a DFG being £15,711.98.

In addition to mandatory DFGs which the council delivers, under the Regulatory Reform Order (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002, Hastings Borough Council has developed its own Financial Assistance Policy to widen the situations and uses of the DFG.

Whilst the funding is still required to meet specific criteria and statutory guidance it has enabled to some of the common issues and barriers to adaptations to be reduced/removed. Our financial assistance policy contains the full details but some examples of areas we have included are;

- Means testing policy and discretionary top-ups.
- Fast-track DFG processes for urgent cases.
- Integration with Occupational Therapy pathways.

25 (14.12%) of the completed DFGs in 24/25 used the Discretionary policy for all or some of their application.

## What will we do?

- a) Continue to deliver on DFGs, enabling adaptations to take place using both mandatory and discretionary use (see Hastings Borough Council's Financial Assistance Policy) of the funding to maximise spending and get the grants to people that need them.

- b) Actively promote landlord and owner occupier applications to improve take up of DFGs in these sectors.
- c) Test and learn from different uses for the DFG fund via our Discretionary DFG policy, including adaptations in temporary accommodation and the potential to acquire new accessible homes.
- d) We will involve disabled people to help us develop new and more impactful ways of delivering the fund.
- e) Create a new Housing Solutions Officer role, funded through the DFG, to support households to relocate to more suitable housing where adaptations are not feasible in their current home.
- f) We will review all Band A applicants on the Housing Register with an identified mobility need to identify where we can make use of direct nominations to accessible homes, or where a mutual exchange could enable a move.
- g) Raise and evidence the severe need for accessible homes to be part of new housing developments, including consideration of external access as well as the accessibility internally.

## What will we do with others?

- a) Make sure that housing associations partners and the county council are contributing to the accessibility of homes from the street. Establish a joint programme with East Sussex County Council and housing associations to identify and prioritise homes where lack of step-free access prevents people from living independently, and deliver ramping, and rails, dropped kerbs and other works.
- b) Undertake joint research to better understand the needs of older people in the PRS, working with colleagues in Housing Benefit and Council Tax services, Adult Social Care and the Voluntary Sector to identify the level of need. We will use this better understanding of need to better target tenancy support services, the allocation of older persons accommodation and DFGs.
- c) Make sure housing is a core part of community-based services in health and care, including new Integrated Community Teams and Mental Health Neighbourhood Support Teams.
- d) Co-produce a new hospital discharge protocol for people in housing need in partnership with East Sussex Healthcare Trust (ESHT).

- e) Ensure our homelessness prevention services provide holistic support, including wellbeing and links to training and employment.
- f) Scope, develop and deliver refuge provision for victims of domestic abuse, in partnership with specialist domestic abuse services.
- g) Work through the countywide Multiple Compound Needs Board to develop a multi-disciplinary approach to supporting people with multiple compound needs, including housing. This approach will build on the learning and good practice started through our services for rough sleepers and the Changing Futures programme.
- h) Work through the East Sussex Housing Partnership to continue to strengthen collaborative working with housing, health and care.
- i) Work jointly with health colleagues to develop a specification for primary care hub services in Hastings.
- j) Work jointly with Adult Social Care to deliver shared priorities in the Adult Social Care Strategy and Prevention Strategy.
- k) Prepare for the new Supported Housing Regulations. Work with partners across Sussex to develop a new Supported Housing Strategy, setting out how we will increase the supply of supported housing and address any gaps.

### **What will we influence others to do?**

- a) Deliver the housing workstream within the East Sussex Health and Wellbeing Plan to continue work to reduce health inequalities.
- b) Lobby government to provide a dedicated funding for support, which recreates the best elements of the Supporting People programme and reduces the use of elevated housing benefit rates to make supported accommodation viable.

### **What are the main way which we will measure progress?**

- Annual spend on DFG and its impact
- Number of days bed blocking at the Conquest Hospital due to a lack of suitable accommodation
- Number of referrals from health and care partners under the Duty to Refer
- Number of households in TA engaged in wellbeing support, employment and training.

“The flat I am in is cold, small, and highly unsuitable for my mobility needs, so much so, that I had to give away my wheelchair because there is no space for it, again this leaves me trapped.” - Resident

## Priority 5 – Reduce carbon emissions from housing and future-proof homes for a changing climate.

“We support the council’s aim of training up a local workforce. We often hear reports of loft insulation installers travelling down from up North! There are big opportunities to create decent, well paid jobs in retrofit.” - Resident

### What is the aim?

- For every household in Hastings to live in a home that is well-insulated and set-up to minimise energy consumption, making homes affordable to heat and power, healthier to live in, better for the environment with a reduced carbon footprint and resilient to extreme weather and its effects, both now and in the future

### Why is this a priority?

Housing is a leading source of carbon emissions in Hastings. To tackle this, we want to make it easier to upgrade all types of homes improving their energy efficiency and to transition to low-carbon heating systems.

However, improving energy efficiency in Hastings presents challenges. Much of the housing stock is older, and there’s a mix of ownership and rental agreements. The council does not own housing directly, and a large proportion of homes are privately rented, making coordinated upgrades more difficult.

Poor energy efficiency not only contributes to emissions but also drives up heating and energy costs, increasing the risk of fuel poverty. Properties are rated from A to G in Energy Performance Certificates (EPCs) with A being the most efficient. A minimum rating of C is recommended to reduce the fuel poverty risk – but currently, 55.3% of homes in Hastings are rated between a D and G.

Fuel poverty has a significant impact on the health of low-income households in Hastings. When people cannot afford to heat their homes properly, they often live in cold, damp conditions that increase the risk of respiratory illnesses, heart problems, and poor mental health. Cold homes can make existing conditions like asthma, arthritis, and cardiovascular disease worse, leading to more GP visits and hospital admissions.

Families may also have to choose between heating and other essentials, which adds stress and anxiety and can affect children's wellbeing and development. In Hastings, where many homes are older and less energy-efficient, these issues are even more pronounced, leaving vulnerable residents at greater risk of ill-health and reduced quality of life.

As an area of serious water stress, and with the cost of both water and sewerage adding to household costs significantly in water inefficient buildings, working with partners to support Southern Water's "Target 100" initiative can help make essential functions within our homes, such as hygiene and access to drinking water more affordable. Investment in water harvesting can prevent drinking water being used for activities like watering gardens, and encouraging the use of water recycling in newly built houses can help reduce the amount of drinking water used for activities like flushing toilets -all helping to limit water consumption to 100 litres per person per day.

Housing providers are balancing the need to invest in improving existing stock, with plans to build new homes. Many affordable housing providers also factor energy performance into decisions about developments and the potential disposal of older properties.

## Flood risk, land stability and coastal change

Hastings is a coastal town with a high level of vulnerability to flooding. This is not limited to flooding from rivers and the sea but also includes increased vulnerability to flooding from surface water (rainfall).

Where its effects are not mitigated, or adapted to, flooding can cause damage to properties and possessions and create a health risk for occupiers. It can also increase the overall carbon footprint of a home, requiring replacement materials after flood events.

To making existing and future dwellings capable of being occupied without negative impacts during incidents of flooding, flood risk must be taken into account and planned for. For new development, National and Local Planning Policy will provide guidance. For existing properties, property level solutions that are either permanently in place deployed by the residents during times of flooding may need to be identified and training may need to be given to support their effective use.

Capturing and reusing rainwater not only helps to keep household bills down, but also reduces the amount of water entering the sewer system. This increases the amount of water the sewer can then accommodate, reducing surface water flooding. Keeping household drains clear of leaves, soil and other debris either through traps or regular clearing can also make a difference.

Understanding how to reduce flood risk at property or neighbourhood level and who is responsible for what is a key element of community capacity building that can prevent households from temporarily or permanently losing their homes in the future.

In addition to the risk from rainfall, Hastings has the potential for land instability which could lead to subsidence, collapse, and in some cases permanent loss or damage to homes. While the council has a robust approach to addressing the potential for instability in new development, this can be more challenging with the existing stock.

Two areas to the west of the borough have been identified as being as significant risk of collapse and have been subject to the removal of some permitted development rights as a matter of safety.

Ensuring that residents are supported to remain in their homes where landslides can be avoided or their effects mitigated will make an ongoing contribution to reducing homelessness and ensuring homes provide a safe environment for residents to live.

## East Sussex Retrofit Strategy

Retrofitting is the process of upgrading homes to improve their energy performance.

Hastings Borough Council has been working closely with East Sussex County Council on the development of an East Sussex-wide retrofit strategy due to be published in March 2026. The strategy looks across all tenures of housing and covers key areas of communications, building trust in technologies, practical delivery, skills training, funding, and finance.

## Skills and workforce

To support improvements in housing, we need to expand the local workforce. This presents a valuable opportunity for training and employment opportunities for people in Hastings. In collaboration with employment and skills services, local businesses, and education providers, we have developed a Retrofit Skills Plan. We will continue to work closely with our partners to maximise opportunities for residents.

The council has grant funded East Sussex College to deliver a Green Construction, Energy and Vehicle Training Centre. This is an important regional scale project that will improve skills provision in new green / low carbon technologies across not only Hastings, but the wider East Sussex area.

The project will develop a Green Technology Centre of Excellence on the East Sussex College Ore Campus. It will provide new training and learning programmes, focusing on skills for low-carbon, sustainable and power generation; construction retrofitting for

domestic and commercial properties and the servicing and repairs of electric and hybrid vehicles. The new facilities are planned to be open by early 2027.

## Grant funding

There is a strong track record of partners working together to secure grant funding, particularly for projects to address fuel poverty. Most recently, the six local authorities worked together to secure additional funding from the Warm Homes Local Grant Programme, which will be delivered from this summer over a three-year-period. In Hastings, there is a focus on improving the energy performance of homes in the private rented sector.

As part of the national spending review, the government committed £13.2 billion to the Warm Homes Plan to upgrade homes. However, grant funding alone will not be enough to deliver the improvements needed and will need to be matched by direct investment by housing providers.

## New standards

Currently, private rented homes can be rented out if they meet Energy Performance Certificate Rating E, while social rented homes have no minimum energy efficiency standard at all. The government has consulted on proposals for private and social rented homes to achieve Energy Performance Certificate C or equivalent by 2030 and is analysing the feedback over the summer.

## Target 100

Target 100 is a Southern Water initiative that supports, educates and incentivizes customers to manage their use and reduce waste. Improved water efficiency in existing properties reduces bill payments, making homes more affordable, and increases available sewer capacity to reduce the risk of flooding.

## Supporting local residents to adapt to and mitigate climate change

Our residents need to be supported to deal with the effects of climate change and adapt where necessary. There is currently no national scheme that supports retrofit to mitigate the effects of flooding. Providing advice on how to do so at property level is a key piece of local capacity building.

The council will work with partners to explore access to improved insurance and compensation products for landslides, continue to monitor incidents of landslides to present a strong case for support, and update the landslide toolkit.

## What will we do?

- a) We will work closely with the new Climate Change Officer to deliver the aims of this strategy, but also to identify funding opportunities to support these ambitions.
- b) We will take a fabric first approach in our delivery of council led developments alongside the use of renewable energy sources to maximise the energy efficiency of our homes and reduce our carbon footprint.
- c) Improve the energy efficiency of homes acquired by the council so that they achieve a minimum Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) rating of C.
- d) We will maximise the use of contractors and tradespeople local to East Sussex in our acquisitions and development programmes.
- e) Work with partners to understand best practice in retrofitting older stock which has fallen behind current standards due to viability considerations.
- f) Support access to Warm Home Checks and specialist advice for people at risk of fuel poverty, including links to wider homelessness services.
- g) Continue to host a countywide Fuel Poverty Co-Ordinator.

## What will we do with others?

- a) Support the development and delivery of the East Sussex Retrofit Strategy for completion in March 2026.
- b) Continue to work with Employment and Skills Team, local businesses and training and education providers to build capacity in the local workforce.
- c) Develop some examples of effective retrofitting to older properties to act as examples and inspiration showing what can be done.
- d) Support the mobilisation of the Warm Homes Local Grant Programme.
- e) Work together to maximise future grant funding opportunities through the Warm Homes Plan.
- f) Proactively promote education and advice / outreach via social media, community groups including on good practice in insulating older homes.

## What will we influence others to do?

- a) Lobby government to provide long term funding to enable landlords and homeowners to bring older stock up to decent and energy efficient standards.

- b) Lobby government to prioritise coastal towns and areas with high fuel poverty and poor housing stock (like Hastings).
- c) For government to provide grants or tax incentives for landlords to insulate homes without displacing tenants or raising rents unfairly.

What are the main ways which we will measure progress?

- Proportion of council owned homes at EPC level C or better.
- Number of Warm Home Checks completed.
- Number of properties in Hastings supported through the Warm Homes Local Grant.
- Improving the most fuel poor homes, the number in the bottom 10% EPC rating in the borough.
- Secured funding opportunities.

### Residents told us that:

“Yes my energy bills are high in winter. I go to the library and used to go to hastings commons when it was there in winter a good big space. I sometimes go to His Place for warmth”

“Put solar panels on all homes not on fields”

“Yes keeping bills down for residents. How will you help those already in fuel poverty . You need a fuel stop shop or stall in town. With all the advisors there over the winter time. Start in September”

“We must make sure any new developments are truly affordable and climate resilient.”

“Refurbish existing housing rather than new-build, to save climate costs.”

“Alongside this we need to ensure there are options for active travel, better cycle networks, wider pavements, better bus routes with better quality buses to ease the burden on our roads and reduce our carbon footprint.”

## Conclusion of the strategy

At the end of this strategy’s lifetime, in five years’ time, Hastings can be a place where everyone lives in a safe, settled, and affordable home, where no-one is forced to live on our streets, or in a car, or a caravan or in accommodation that does not allow them to thrive. Our vision is for a town where new, genuinely affordable homes sit alongside well-

maintained older properties; where households no longer fear losing their homes; and where people of all ages can live independently, confidently, and with dignity.

This strategy sets out the foundations to get there—through bold decisions, realistic ambitions, and a challenge to our partners to join us in committing to tackling the challenges we face.

## Supporting Strategy documents

- Action Plan.
- Housing Strategy Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA).
- Reviewing Housing Strategy Consultation.

## Appendix 1 – Glossary of Terms

**Affordable Housing:** Homes that are cheaper than market rates. This includes social rent, affordable rent, and shared ownership. Aimed at people who can't afford typical private rents or to buy a home.

**Allocations Policy:** The rules that decide who gets offered social housing and how people are prioritised.

**Article 4 Direction:** A planning tool that lets councils restrict certain property changes (like turning homes into holiday lets or HMOs) without needing planning permission.

**Awaab's Law:** New legislation that sets strict timescales for landlords to fix health hazards like damp and mould in social housing, following the death of a child caused by unsafe conditions.

**Choice Based Lettings (CBL):** A way people apply for social housing by 'bidding' for available homes that meet their needs, rather than waiting to be offered a property.

**Climate Resilience / Future-Proofing:** Designing homes to cope with future environmental conditions like hotter summers, more storms, or flooding.

**Commuted Sum:** Money paid by developers instead of building affordable homes on-site. The council can use this money to build affordable housing elsewhere.

**Community Led Housing (CLH):** Community led housing is where people and communities play a leading role in addressing the community's own housing needs.

**Decent Homes Standard:** A Government-set standard for housing quality. Homes must be warm, safe, in good repair, and have reasonably modern facilities.

Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG): Money from the council to help pay for adaptations (like stairlifts or accessible bathrooms) so disabled people can stay in their homes.

Duty to Refer: A legal duty requiring public services (like hospitals or prisons) to notify the council if someone is at risk of homelessness.

East Sussex Housing Partnership: A group of local councils and housing organisations working together to improve housing across East Sussex.

Energy Performance Certificate (EPC): A rating that shows how energy-efficient a home is. Rated A (best) to G (worst). EPC C or better is the Government's goal.

Enforcement Action: Legal steps the council can take if landlords don't meet housing standards (e.g., issuing fines or banning unsafe properties).

Equality Impact Assessment (EIA): Assessments carried out on the council's policies and services to assess whether they may have a different or adverse effect on some communities or groups compared to others, and whether the policy or service actively promotes good relations between different groups.

Exceptional Circumstances (Planning): A planning term used when the council makes an exception to normal rules – for example, allowing more shared homes due to urgent housing need.

Fabric First: A building approach that focuses on making homes energy efficient by improving insulation, windows, and walls before adding renewable tech like solar panels.

Fuel Poverty: When a household can't afford to heat their home properly, often due to low income and poor energy efficiency.

Gypsy and Traveller Sites: Specific areas provided or planned for people from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities to live legally and safely.

HMO (House in Multiple Occupation):

HMO (Planning Definition): A property occupied by three or more unrelated people sharing basic facilities, classed as Use Class C4 (or *sui generis* for seven or more occupants). The planning definition controls the use of the property and whether planning permission is needed.

HMO (Housing Enforcement Definition): A property occupied by three or more people forming two or more households who share facilities. The housing definition focuses on management, safety, and living standards, as set out in the Housing Act 2004.

Homelessness Prevention Grant: Government funding given to councils to help stop people becoming homeless (e.g., by paying rent arrears or offering support services).

Homemove: The name of the system used in East Sussex to apply for social housing through Choice Based Lettings.

Housing First: A support model where people who have been sleeping rough are offered permanent housing with personalised support, without conditions.

Housing Ombudsman: An independent service that investigates complaints from social housing tenants if landlords have failed to resolve the issue.

Housing Revenue Account (HRA): A separate pot of council money used to manage and build council homes. Councils with their own housing stock have HRAs.

Integrated Community Teams: Groups of health and care professionals working together to support people in the community, including those at risk of homelessness.

Lettings / Reletting Strategy: The process and rules for allocating vacant social homes to new tenants.

Local Government Reorganisation (LGR): A major change to how councils are structured, possibly combining existing councils into one new organisation.

Local Housing Allowance (LHA): The amount of housing benefit or universal credit a person can receive to cover rent in the private sector.

Local Plan: The council's planning document that sets out where new homes, jobs, and infrastructure can go.

MEES (Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards): Legal minimum standards for energy performance in rental homes.

Modern Methods of Construction (MMC): Innovative building techniques (like modular homes or pre-fab construction) that are quicker and more sustainable than traditional methods.

Mutual Exchange: A process where two social housing tenants swap homes with each other, often to better meet their needs.

Private Rented Sector (PRS): Homes that are rented from private landlords (not the council or housing associations).

Public Works Loan Board (PWLB): A Government body that lends money to councils for big projects like building new homes.

Regeneration Scheme: A plan to improve or redevelop older homes or areas, often involving demolition and rebuilding.

Renters' Rights Act 2025: UK law to improve rights for tenants in private rented homes, including ending 'no-fault' evictions (previously referred to as the Renters' Rights Bill).

Retrofit: Upgrading older homes with insulation, better windows, and modern heating to improve energy efficiency.

Rough Sleeping: When someone is sleeping outside or in a place not meant for living, such as a car, tent, or stairwell.

SHAP (Single Homelessness Accommodation Programme): Government funding to create housing with support for single people at risk of rough sleeping.

Section 106 Agreement: A legal agreement where developers contribute to local services or provide affordable housing when building new homes.

Shared Ownership: A type of affordable housing when a purchaser buys a share of a new or existing property and pays rent for the remaining share.

Social Housing Regulation Act: Recent law giving more power to tenants and stricter rules for social landlords.

Social Lettings Agency: A not-for-profit organisation that helps rent private homes to people in housing need at affordable rates.

Social Rent: Low cost rented homes usually provided by councils and housing associations, with rents set within guidelines by the social housing regulator.

Statutory Duty: A legal obligation the council must follow, such as having a homelessness strategy.

Supported Housing: Homes with extra help for people who need it – for example, older people, people with disabilities, or those recovering from homelessness.

TA (Temporary Accommodation): Housing provided to homeless households while the council finds something more permanent.

Tenure: The conditions under which land or property is held or occupied. Typically, housing is split into three tenures: social rented, private rented and owner occupied.

Trauma-Informed Approach: A way of working that recognises people may have experienced serious stress or trauma and tailors support accordingly.

# Appendix 2 Understanding Affordable Housing in Hastings

## Purpose

This briefing explains what “affordable housing” means, the different types available, and how they are delivered in Hastings.

## What Does “Affordable Housing” Mean?

“Affordable housing” is a national term used in planning and housing policy. It means homes that are provided at a lower cost than normal market housing, for people whose housing needs can’t be met by the open market.

In Hastings, affordable housing is essential because:

- Local house prices and rents are much higher than local incomes.
- Many households rely on benefits or low-paid work.
- The private rented sector is large but often expensive and insecure.
- There is strong demand for genuinely affordable homes, especially for families and older people.

The types of affordable housing are defined nationally in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF): National Planning Policy Framework

## Main Types of Affordable Housing

### a) Social Rent

Usually owned and managed by councils or housing associations. Rents are set using a national formula and are typically around 50–60% of local market rents. These are the lowest cost rented homes.

### b) Affordable Rent

Also provided by councils or housing associations. Rents can be up to 80% of local market rents (including service charges). However, in Hastings we have worked with key partners to cap rents at the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates—the maximum rent level that can be covered by Housing Benefit or Universal Credit. This ensures that people on lower incomes can realistically afford them.

### c) Shared Ownership

People buy a share of a home (usually 25–75%) and pay rent on the remaining share. They can buy more shares later (“staircasing”). Helps households who can't afford full ownership but can manage part-ownership with a mortgage. Shared ownership homes in Hastings are usually new-build flats or houses delivered by housing associations.

### d) First Homes

New homes sold to first-time buyers for at least 30% below market value. Buyers must meet income and local connection criteria.

The discount stays with the property for future buyers. So far, there have been no First Homes developments in Hastings, but national policy requires councils to plan for some provision.

### e) Intermediate Rent / Rent to Buy

Homes rented at around 80% of market rent to help people save for a deposit to buy later. Usually managed by housing associations and aimed at working households. Availability in Hastings is currently limited.

### f) Specialist Affordable Housing

Homes designed for older people, people with disabilities, or those needing support. Can include supported housing, extra care schemes, or adapted homes. Rents are set using the same social or affordable rent frameworks.

## Access to Affordable Housing

The council carried out a large-scale voluntary transfer of its housing stock in 1996. In recent years, it's launched a housing acquisition programme focused on purchasing homes for use as temporary accommodation. These homes are let at either Social Rent or Affordable Rent capped at LHA.

Access to longer term Social Rent and Affordable Rent homes is managed through the council's housing register in accordance with the council's Housing Allocation Scheme.

Newly built shared ownership homes in Hastings are ringfenced for a period for households with a local or work connection or for those who meet exemptions to the local connection criteria. These homes will be advertised by Registered Providers and promoted more widely through mainstream property marketing platforms.

First Homes also carry local connection criteria, and the council will work with providers to ensure that properties are marketed locally. Similarly, we will work with providers to ensure

any opportunities for Rent to Buy or Intermediate Rent are also promoted within the local area.

These tenure options provide different routes into affordable housing, helping meet a range of needs — from those requiring long-term rented homes to households looking to move towards ownership.

## How affordable housing is delivered in Hastings

- Through Planning (Section 106 Agreements): The council requires a proportion of developments with 10 or more homes to provide affordable housing (typically 25–40%).
- By Registered Providers (Housing Associations): Organisations such as Orbit and Southern Housing deliver and manage most affordable homes locally.
- Council-led housing projects: Hastings Borough Council is exploring direct delivery and acquisitions of affordable homes to meet local need.
- Government grants: Homes England provides funding to help build new affordable homes. Current funding processes mean that it is often more viable for housing associations to deliver developments for 100% affordable housing rather than secure homes on a private development through Section 106 agreements or ‘additionality’.

In these instances, they receive no affordable housing grant or a reduced rate respectively.

## Common misunderstandings

- “Affordable” doesn’t always mean “cheap” — it’s a technical definition linked to market levels.
- Not all affordable homes are for rent; some are for part-ownership or discounted sale.
- “Social housing” refers only to social rent and affordable rent homes, not all affordable housing.
- Developers often argue schemes are not viable with affordable housing — councils test this before agreeing to any changes. The legal definition of viable include at least a 20% profit margin for developers.
- Affordable rent homes are not always affordable to everyone locally, which is why the council works with providers to cap rents at LHA rates.

## Hastings' position

We will seek to prioritise social rented homes where we can, however if agreeing to affordable rent homes (capped at LHA) results in more affordable homes being developed on a site we will support this.

By agreeing to a higher rent level, that means more funding for the site once it is developed which means a need for less upfront grant funding.

We will support the delivery of 100% affordable housing schemes.

We support the delivery of shared ownership alongside affordable rent (where capped by LHA) and social rent recognising that this will support scheme viability, reduce housing pressures more broadly across the borough and enable more mixed communities.