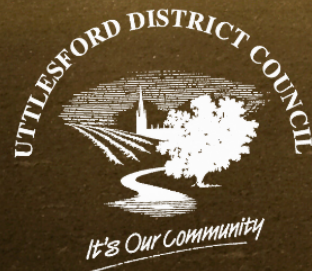


UTTLESFORD DISTRICT COUNCIL

Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy 2026-2031

December 2025



Foreword



Tackling homelessness is a key priority for Uttlesford District Council and I am pleased to endorse this strategy. It builds on our existing success in improving our homelessness service and reflects our determination to meet local housing need provide support to those without a secure place to call home.

Nationally the number of homeless households has risen dramatically and Uttlesford is no exception. We have seen a 73% increase in homeless applications since 2020/21. The numbers of single people approaching the council for assistance has risen more sharply than households with children and we have prioritised this for intervention within this strategy.

We are anticipating Local Government Reorganisation within the next three years which means Uttlesford District Council will become part of a new larger unitary authority. Here we set down the priorities for tackling homelessness in our area, built on our local knowledge and in consultation with our partners. Our three priorities for the next five years of earlier intervention and prevention of homelessness, improved partnership working and developing more accommodation options for single people will remain relevant when we become part of the new unitary council working across a wider area.

Councillor Arthur Coote, Housing Portfolio Holder

Executive Summary

This five-year strategy is written in anticipation of Local Government Reorganisation which is likely to happen within the timeframe. Nevertheless, the analysis and priorities set out are unlikely to change for our area and will remain relevant when we are absorbed into a new unitary authority with wider boundaries. The new authority will still have a legal responsibility, set out in various legislation, to address homelessness.

The numbers of families and single people who approach our homeless services for advice and support each year are significant. 260 households approached us last year and were assessed as needing further work to prevent homelessness or to be placed in emergency accommodation for their needs to be assessed. We are seeing an increasing number of young single men approach the service.

The top three reasons why people face homelessness remain notice to quit from a private landlord, family eviction, and domestic abuse. From the 260 households that approached in 2024/25, 29.62% of those were due to loss of a private sector tenancy, 21.54% were due to a friend or family eviction and 19.23% were due to Domestic Abuse. Many of those to whom we owe a duty have other support needs, the majority relating to mental or physical health. Partner agencies are crucial in providing for this.

We have achieved a measure of stability through a focused approach which has strengthened early intervention to prevent homelessness; improved timely decision making and reducing the time people spend in temporary accommodation; reduced the number of families placed in bed and breakfast accommodation; and engaged with our partners to provide suitable accommodation for households to move on to.

The flow of new affordable homes in the pipeline, and availability of suitable private sector homes at the right rent levels in the area, are both critical to being able to move households for whom we have a duty to rehouse into stable accommodation. But there are no guarantees that either will be available to meet demand now or in the future.

Appendix 1

Rough Sleeping is a key indicator of acute housing need within an area, historically in Uttlesford, numbers have remained low, typically ranging between one and five annually. This trend has continued, with the most recent estimate conducted in November 2025 reporting zero rough sleepers

A pro-active approach is needed to address the causes and solutions to homelessness in our area. In consultation with our partners we have identified three priorities for future action, and an implementation plan to realise our ambitions.

Our three priorities are:

Priority 1 – Early intervention and prevention of homelessness.

Priority 2 – Improved partnership working.

Priority 3 – Develop more accommodation options for single people.



Part 1 Introduction

Uttlesford District, in north-west Essex, is a largely rural area characterised by market towns, villages, and dispersed rural communities. While the district is often associated with relative affluence, it faces increasing pressures in housing affordability and accessibility, particularly for single people and low-income households

People can lose their accommodation and become homeless for a range of reasons. Homelessness is complex. The most visible form of homelessness is rough sleeping where people are sleeping outside, on the streets and in tents, although rough sleeping in Uttlesford is rare. However, many people who become homeless have lived previously in insecure and unstable housing or may have been staying temporarily with family or friends.

Local Authorities are legally required to have a Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy in place, which must be updated every 5 years. The last strategy covered the period 2020 - 2025 and this refreshed strategy ensures that we and our partners are doing everything possible to prevent and respond to homelessness in the district. The pressure on local authorities to find accommodation for homeless families and vulnerable individuals has increased dramatically in recent years, not least in Uttlesford.



Local Government Reorganisation

Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) means that joining with neighbouring authorities to form a new unitary authority is on the horizon. Essex is part of the Government priority programme for LGR, and at the time of writing proposals have been submitted to Government for consideration. A decision is likely in March 2026. This strategy has therefore been written within a timeframe where it is reasonable to assume that the scope of the Council's housing responsibilities will remain constant and continue beyond April 2028 when new unitary councils are expected to be operating across Essex absorbing existing district councils. The new unitary authorities will still need to address and alleviate homelessness. It is crucial that we are clear about what our priorities are as we approach unification across wider boundaries.

Corporate Plan 2023 – 2027

Our vision is to make Uttlesford the best place to live, work and visit.

The Corporate Plan is a key document which sets out our vision and priorities for a 4-year period up to 2027. It also outlines how we will deliver our services, measure our performance, and manage our resources in a challenging and changing environment.

We want to:

- Preserve and enhance the natural beauty and rural character of our district, while supporting sustainable growth and development that meets the needs and aspirations of our communities.
- Provide high quality and accessible services that are responsive to local needs and deliver value for money.
- Work with our partners and residents to tackle the key challenges and opportunities facing our district.



Housing Strategy 2021-2026

At Uttlesford our current Housing Strategy includes a number of strategic housing priorities for the five years up to 2026. While there are plans for this to be reviewed in the coming year, the new strategy will set out the main housing related issues and how we plan to deliver our key priorities and objectives in response to the identified issues over the next five years including:

- Monitor and respond to any adverse homelessness trends having regard to the resources available.
- Identify opportunities to deliver more units of emergency homeless accommodation for specialist groups

In addition to monitoring and responding to adverse homelessness trends and identifying opportunities for emergency homeless accommodation the Housing Strategy promotes healthy, sustainable communities by raising the standard of existing homes and enabling provision of quality new ones; resulting in suitable, affordable housing to meet the needs of our current and future residents and enable them to live healthy lives, supporting everyone to reach their full potential.

Achievements since the last Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy

It is important to recognise the successes that we alongside our partners have achieved since the last Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy was adopted in 2020. At that time many households were placed in hotels or bed and breakfast outside of the district, including families, and the effects of the pandemic were being felt across the country.

In the last five years we have:

- ✓ Developed an SOS Hub with partners to improve customer access to services.
- ✓ Transformed the team structure with new operating procedures to provide effective leadership and deliver high quality services.
- ✓ Developed closer working with customer services, benefits, etc.
- ✓ Maintained a low level of rough sleeping in the district.
- ✓ Updated the Allocations Policy to make it compliant with legislation.
- ✓ Improved information/data sharing with partners.

Appendix 1

The impact of these measures has been recognised by our partners who have seen significant improvements in the service. However, there is still further to go, particularly in relation to provision for single people.

Part 2 - Homelessness Review

Overview of numbers

We have carried out a review of homelessness in the district, considering the national requirements of the Homelessness Act 2002, the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, the Rough Sleeping Strategy 2018 and the Homelessness Code of Guidance.

In 2024/25 260 households approached the Council for housing advice and were assessed under the Homelessness Reduction Act. Of those, 85 were owed a prevention duty, 175 a relief duty. Of these, 56 went on following enquiries, to be owed a full duty to rehouse. The numbers have increased significantly over the last five years with the number of single people noticeably higher.

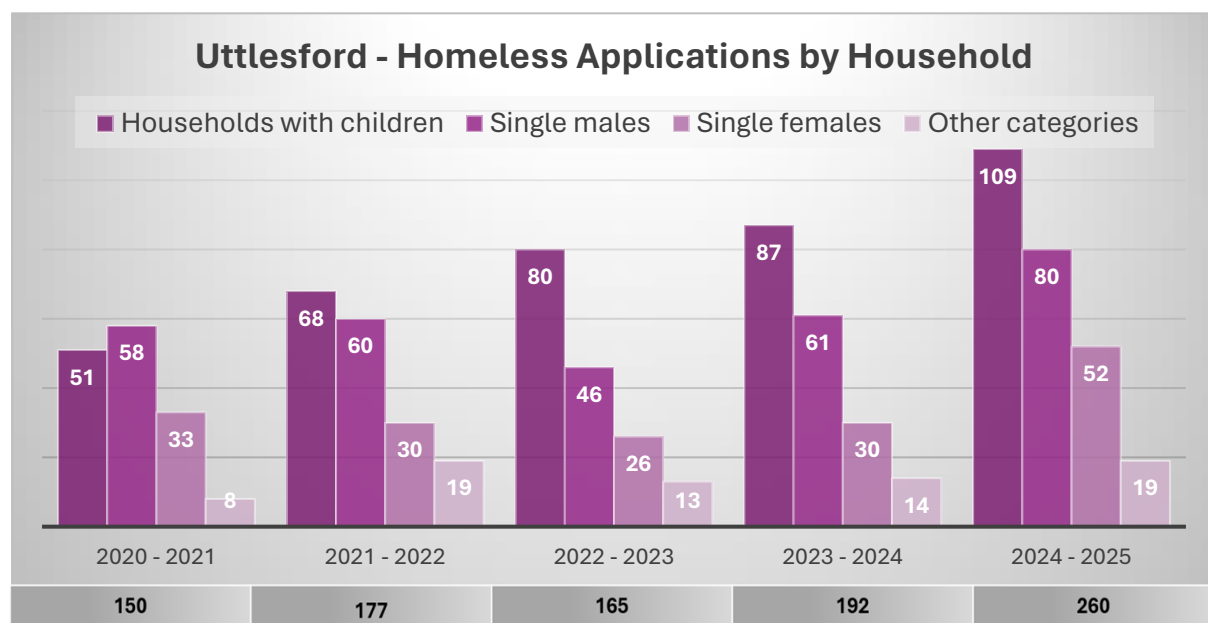


Fig 1. Graph showing number of homeless applications by household

Appendix 1

The main causes of homelessness have remained consistent over the last five years. The three main causes of homelessness 2024/25 were:

1. Loss of private sector tenancy – 77 (29.62%)
2. Family or friend eviction – 56 (21.54%)
3. Domestic Abuse – 50 (19.23%)

Other notable causes were relationship breakdown (non-violent), notice to quit including from social housing and an increase in asylum cases.

The need for support for those owed a prevention or relief duty has increased. In 2024/25 of the 260 households approaching us 545 support needs were identified. Some people will have more than one support need.

The overwhelming need, in line with other areas around the country is for support for mental health issues, followed by support due to physical ill health or disability, and due to domestic abuse. We are being approached more often by people who have multiple and more complex needs which are harder to meet.

Our relationships with partner agencies are developing and joint working across services is delivering a more joined-up approach. We have a good supply of supported accommodation for single people and young parents with low to medium needs. However, there is a gap in provision for single people with higher and/or more complex needs, which we acknowledge and seek to address in this strategy.

The regulation which is anticipated for the supported housing sector following the passing of the Supported Housing Act in 2023 will focus on regulating standards in supported housing but is not designed to increase supply. Some units of supported housing receive housing-related support funding from Essex County Council and where this has ended, we have worked hard to make sure alternative funding is in place.

Appendix 1

Rough Sleeping is one of the main indicators of acute housing need in an area. Historically numbers have been low, between one and five recorded annually, and this has been maintained as reported rough sleepers at the last estimate carried out in November 2025 was zero. Although this is not a major concern, we are however determined to maintain a low level of rough sleepers through improving housing options for single people. We work closely with CHES, a service commissioned by Essex County Council, that provides support and advice to rough sleepers making an important contribution to keeping the numbers low.

Provision of temporary accommodation

The numbers placed in temporary accommodation demonstrate the scale of homelessness we are tackling in Uttlesford, and the table below shows the upward trend in the number of households needing emergency accommodation.

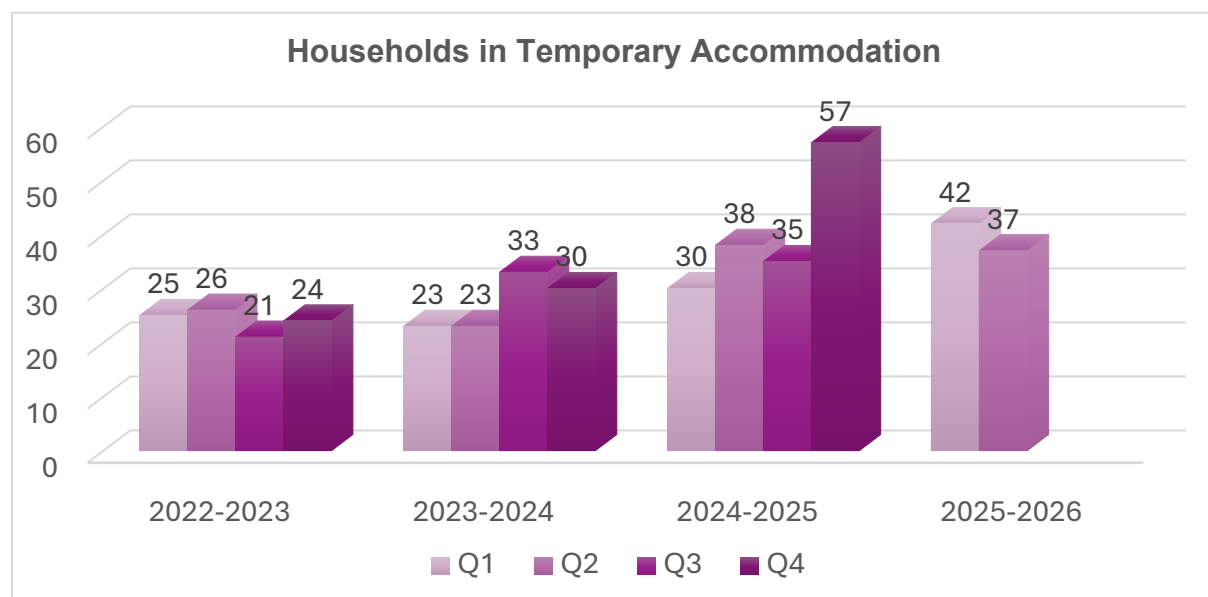


Fig 2. Graph showing number of households in Temporary Accommodation

Appendix 1

The following provides a snapshot showing what type of accommodation households were living in on 30th September 2025. We are pleased that only two families with children were living in shared accommodation with most placed in self-contained accommodation either within the council's own stock or in nightly paid. However, the continued use of bed and breakfast, for single people, is an ongoing concern that we also seek to address within the strategy.

Temporary Accommodation as at 30 th September 2025	Total households	Households with children	Singles (no dependants)	
			Single male	Single female
Accommodation within UDC stock	13	7	3	3
Hotels/nightly paid with shared facilities	16	2	10	4
Self-contained nightly paid accommodation	8	5	2	1
Total	37	14	15	8

Fig 3. Table showing a snapshot of households in Temporary Accommodation by accommodation type

It is difficult to precisely predict future levels of homelessness. Nevertheless, the expectation is that it will continue to rise nationally. The following factors are likely to continue to impact on the demand for homelessness services in Uttlesford, as elsewhere:

- Introduction of the Renters Rights Act impacting private landlords. This may prompt some landlords to withdraw from the rental market. Conversely, the Renters Rights Act will provide tenants with more security, as s.21 evictions (no fault eviction notice) will be abolished.
- Low Local Housing Allowance rates below the average rental prices, meaning rents will not be covered by the allowance and landlords may not want to risk non-payment of the gap.
- Lack of new affordable housing supply. New supply is crucial to meeting the demand for housing in the area, including for homeless families and vulnerable individuals.

Housing Register and Housing Allocations Policy

The main homelessness prevention tool available to our service is the Housing Register. Being a stock holding authority we aim to make best use of our homes and award priority through our Housing Allocations Policy to those at risk of homelessness. We have recently reviewed our Housing Allocations Policy to ensure it is up to date and delivers the best outcomes for people in housing need in the district. The new Housing Allocations Policy came into force in August 2025 and is currently being implemented.

The number of households on our housing register has fluctuated over the last three years but remain around 1300 – 1400. Lettings have increased to housing association partners who make an important contribution to meeting housing need. Over the last three years the number of lettings overall has increased and as new developments come forward with partner housing associations this number will increase further.

Year	HA Lets	Council Lets	Total
2022 -2023	156	179	335
2023 - 2024	256	236	492
2024 - 2025	323	171	494

Fig 4. Table showing lets by housing provider



New affordable housing supply

While progress is being made in developing partnerships around homelessness prevention, without a pipeline of new housing supply this will not in itself solve the housing pressures we face. A pro-active approach is being taken with housing providers to identify new sites and deliver new affordable homes in the district as increased supply will contribute significantly to the Council's ability to manage the demands on the homelessness service and the costs of temporary accommodation.

	2024/25	2023/24	2022/23
Registered Provider	172	114	103
UDC	16	24	13
Total	188	138	116

Fig 5. Table showing all new affordable housing completed in the last 3 years

Supported accommodation and support provision

The review of supported accommodation services we commissioned from Bridges Outcomes Partnership, assesses the performance and future direction of accommodation-based and housing-related support services within the district. These services play a critical role in preventing homelessness, supporting vulnerable residents to live independently, and reducing crisis demand across housing, health, and social care.

While current provision achieves meaningful outcomes—particularly for people experiencing homelessness, survivors of domestic abuse, and rough sleepers—systemic barriers limit overall effectiveness. These include a shortage of suitable move-on accommodation, fragmented referral pathways, inconsistent partnership coordination, and limited shared data.

Appendix 1

Stakeholders highlighted the commitment of frontline staff and the voluntary sector, but also challenges arising from rural isolation, complex needs, and limited local capacity. Rising rents, hidden homelessness, and an ageing population are intensifying local pressures.

The review identifies opportunities for improvement that align directly with the three strategic priorities within this strategy:

1. Earlier intervention and prevention – Embed housing support within community and health settings, strengthen referral pathways, and act sooner to prevent crisis.
2. Improved partnership working and data integration – Build on local strengths through shared data systems, co-production, and multi-agency collaboration.
3. More accommodation options for single people – Expand access to move-on and private rented housing and develop tailored pathways for young people and those with complex needs.

The review also identified the need to plan for future demand in terms of the needs of older residents and those with multiple or complex needs through accessible and adaptable housing. We will take this forward within our future Housing Strategy 2026-2031.

Consultation with partners

A Homelessness Forum was held at UDC's offices on 20 October 2025 attended by over twenty representatives from local statutory services and the voluntary and community sector. A workshop was held to understand and reflect on the challenges we face in terms of homelessness, and to discuss the findings of the review and help develop the priorities for this strategy.

Those attending included Directors, officers from the housing team and external agencies. Attendees welcomed the opportunity to attend such an event and the priorities identified in the workshop have shaped this strategy. There was wide support for the following emerging priorities and the actions we propose to take as a result. The workshop emphasised access to services, raising awareness of the services on offer, and the importance of early help which we have reflected in the overall priorities below. It is hoped that regular twice-yearly partnership meetings will continue in future.

Part 3 – Our Key Priorities

We have developed three strategic priorities from our review of homelessness and from discussions with our partners. These are:

1. Earlier intervention and prevention of homelessness.

We will achieve this through:

- ❖ Developing good quality, easily accessible housing advice materials.
- ❖ Helping people sustain their accommodation through the increased provision of debt and welfare and tenancy advice
- ❖ Exploring opportunities to expand on the SOS Hub to include other agencies
- ❖ Exploring digital solutions to improve customer interactions
- ❖ To seek opportunities to work with other agencies to provide education, information leaflets and early advice
- ❖ Work with Private Sector Housing to implement the Renters Rights Act, secure evidence to deliver effective enforcement action
- ❖ Increase uptake of the council's Rent Deposit Guarantee Scheme
- ❖ Review the allocations policy for move on nominations for single people from supported housing

2. Improved partnership working:

- ❖ Develop closer relationships with statutory and voluntary partners throughout the district
- ❖ Explore the opportunity to share office premises between partners
- ❖ Develop furnished, safe supported accommodation for survivors of domestic abuse

3. Develop more accommodation options for single people

- ❖ Identify opportunities to develop new short-term housing
- ❖ Develop more single persons accommodation on new developments
- ❖ Build effective working relationships with probation, social care/children's services

Part 4 – Monitoring and Review

Some of the actions in this strategy are short-term and can be realised quickly. Others will take several years to bear fruition. With Local Government Reorganisation planned in the coming years there may be actions that ultimately prove redundant or unachievable. It is however important to be clear what our priorities are as we go towards the changes ahead, and we respond to our changing needs.

The strategy is accompanied by a delivery plan in Appendix 1 which will set out when the actions will be completed and achieved. The strategy and action plan will be reviewed and monitored regularly, and a review will be produced and published annually to update the Homelessness Stakeholder Forum, Members, the wider community and other partners on how the strategy is progressing.



Appendix 1

Appendix 1– Delivery Plan

Action Plan – Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2026 – 2031

Priority 1: Earlier Intervention and prevention of homelessness				
How this priority will be achieved	When	Resources	Outcome	Key Officer
Develop good quality, easily accessible housing advice materials: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review the website housing pages to reflect the diversity of applicant's needs and abilities Develop information in different formats Ensure information is available at different locations throughout the district 	By April 2026	Within current resources	Up to date and accurate information accessible to clients	Principal Policy and Performance Officer
Help people sustain their accommodation through the increased provision of debt and welfare advice: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work with Citizens Advice and other agencies to increase early access to welfare and debt advice Promote the UDC welfare service 	June 26	Within current resources	Homelessness reduces due to debt and welfare issues	Housing Options Manager/Communities Team
Explore opportunities to expand on the SOS Hub: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider additional locations Work to include other partners to ensure service continues to grow and develop 	September 2026	Within current resources	More accessible advice for residents	Revenues and Benefits/Communities Team and Policy and Performance Officer
Explore digital solutions to improve customer interactions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use social media to promote services available including SOS Hub Explore use of video conferencing for interviewing. 	April 2027	Within current resources	Easier access to the service for customers	Comms Team/Welfare Team/Revenues and Benefits/Housing Options team



Appendix 1

<p>To seek opportunities to work with other agencies to provide education, information leaflets and early advice:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seek opportunities to work with schools • Provide information leaflets to GP surgeries/health centres/foodbank/faith groups 	September 2026	Within current resources	Early intervention for potential clients	Housing Options Team/comms/communities
<p>Work with Private Sector Housing to implement the Renters Rights Act:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore the use of any Government funding • Increase knowledge of Renters Rights Act through a landlord forum • Explore joint roles across the teams 	TBC	Potential Government funding	Reduce the impact on homeless presentations and opportunities for early prevention	Housing Options Team and Principal Policy and Performance Officer/Private Sector Team
<p>Increase uptake of the council's Rent Deposit Scheme to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review the current policy considering the introduction of the Renters Rights Act • Contact local landlords to establish working relationships • Establish budget • Explore incentives that can be offered 	April 2026	Within current resources	Increased uptake of private rentals and homelessness avoided	Housing Options Team and Principal Policy and Performance Officer/Private Sector Team



Appendix 1

Priority 2: Improved partnership working				
How this priority will be achieved	When	Resources	Outcome	Key Officer
Develop closer relationships with statutory and voluntary partners throughout the district by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Holding stakeholder forums at a minimum of twice yearly • Attendance at partner team meetings • Providing direct points of contact within organisations, agreeing limitations and good practice. • Embed referral pathways for all partners to use, ie, Frontline • Share updates with partners to prepare for Local Government reorganisation. 	June 2026	Within current resources	Ensure a more efficient, consistent approach for staff and clients	Housing Options Team
Explore the opportunity to share office premises between partners: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • review partners current office accommodation • develop a proposal on co working 	December 2026	Within current resources	Allows more flexibility on working location for staff and a more joined up approach for certain clients	Housing Options Team
Develop furnished, safe supported accommodation for survivors of domestic abuse: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify a property • Develop a service level agreement with support provider • Furnish the property • Allocate the property 	April 2026	Within current resources and funding	Provides accommodation to client groups that may not have access to other safe accommodation	Housing Options Team



Appendix 1

Priority 3: Develop more accommodation options for single people				
How this priority will be achieved	When	Resources	Outcome	Key Officer
Identify opportunities to develop new short-term housing through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 8 units of temporary accommodation in Takeley for single and family households Develop a house to use for shared accommodation for single people Explore the option of an emergency bed 	April 2026	Within current resources	More accommodation is available for single people	Housing Enabling & Development Officer
Develop more single persons accommodation on new developments <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure single 1 bedroom accommodation is included on new development sites Explore the use of modular homes 	Dec 2027 and ongoing		Year on year development program in place	Principal Policy and Performance officer/Housing Enabling & Development Officer
Build effective working relationships with probation, social care/children's services through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review the 16/17 joint protocol Review the prison discharge protocol Implement protocols throughout the service 	December 2026	Within current resources	Protocols in place	Principal Policy and Performance officer

