

# West Lothian Homeless Strategy

2025-2028



# Foreword

The West Lothian Council Homeless Strategy confirms the Council's commitment to prevention of homelessness and ensuring that everyone has a safe, warm place they can call home.

The Strategy outlines what the Council will do to meet the needs of those assessed to be in greatest housing need and sets out the critical work being undertaken within the council and across local partnerships to prevent homelessness from occurring in the first instance.

In West Lothian in 2024, over one thousand households will be without a permanent residence. Since the introduction of Rapid Rehousing Transition Plans in 2019, the average length of stay in temporary accommodation in West Lothian has increased from 91 days to 141 days, with increasing numbers of families with children in accommodation deemed to be unsuitable. The imbalance between supply of suitable accommodation and demand for that housing has led to the declaration of a housing emergency in West Lothian, a position mirrored across a third of all Scottish local authorities, and also declared at a national level.

This housing crisis has been evolving over several years, with long-term supply challenges made more acute by an aging housing stock, record numbers of people presenting as homeless a declining private rented sector and a substantial decrease in social housing numbers during the late 20th Century.

The Homeless Strategy signifies a critical shift in acknowledging and addressing the issues being experienced by the Council and its partners who are striving to support those who are threatened with, or who are experiencing homelessness. Extensive work undertaken by the Council and its partners, ranging from exploring innovative new build solutions, undertaking targeted prevention work and prioritising action to

increase availability of temporary accommodation aim to effect real change and impact for those who approach us in need and ensure that we deliver services to those at risk, with care and compassion.

Ultimately, practical and meaningful solutions must be devised at a national and local level to address this humanitarian crisis and the much-needed, lasting change to reshape the housing sector. Homelessness is not merely a housing issue – it is driven by many wider issues in society and is closely connected with wellbeing and health, employment and financial stability, and education. Our Homeless strategy has been devised locally, stemming from years of working with partners from many different services and organisations focussed on improving housing stability across social, rented and private sectors. The aims of our strategy are driven by commitment and experience in improving housing options for our citizens and are designed to help us face the new challenges that the Housing Emergency presents us with.

This is a strategy reflective of our approach in West Lothian Council to deliver good housing outcomes for our people and enabling those who are impacted by homelessness to find a permanent home.

**Councillor George Paul**



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# Introduction

The West Lothian Council Homeless Strategy sets out our vision in responding to housing need, and our priorities in the delivery of homelessness related services.

## 1.1 Overview

This strategy is the next step in creating a prevention led approach, and builds on 5 years of the Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan (RRTP). We have adopted and embedded the successful developments RRTP brought, and have used the key principle of prevention first as the driving force behind the new strategy. This strategy has evolved to take a sharper, refreshed focus on the actions that are needed to continue efforts to reduce homelessness in West Lothian and when this is unavoidable, to ensure the homeless experience is as short a journey as possible to a settled home.

RRTP was designed as an interim plan to set out how West Lothian would transform homeless and temporary accommodation services. The plan paved the way for changes across a range of new services, bringing partners together to develop a shared vision and plan to end homelessness. The plan was developed against a background of funding constraints and was impacted by a range of significant global, national and local factors that changed the economic landscape and operating context for homeless services to a considerable extent.

Rising pressures and demand for homeless services has led to unsustainable financial pressures for the council. An Improvement Programme was developed in 2022, and was designed to develop a range of cost saving measures and improve income management across homeless services to reduce the significant financial risk to the council.

Despite positive success in reducing homeless demand and improving supply, the pressure for increased homeless services has remained critically high as the council continues to have a significant shortfall in the availability of affordable social homes. These pressures resulted in West Lothian Council Executive declaring a Housing Emergency on 28 May 2024, and subsequently accelerated a range of actions across all areas of the service, and called for further support from the Scottish Government as part of a Housing Emergency Action Plan (HEAP). West Lothian Council is one of ten councils in Scotland that the Scottish Housing Regulator has confirmed that despite considerable strategic and operational efforts, are either suffering systemic failure in the services provided to people who are homeless, or are at heightened risk of it due to increasing demand.

The new Homeless Strategy incorporates a programme of improvement work across homeless services and is set out within the key actions of the HEAP. The strategy and these actions affirm the view that homelessness is not merely a housing issue, it is wider and deeper than that – it is an issue for society, the collective housing sector, local partners in health, the voluntary sector and support. This strategy will align the focussed work of Housing Need Service with housing and community related objectives set within the Local Housing Strategy and the Local Outcome Improvement Plan.

The strategy has three refreshed priorities:

1

Ensuring prevention is the first response to reduce homelessness where possible and safe to do so.

2

Increasing opportunities and improving access to supply.

3

Ensuring people who become homeless are supported to achieve long term sustainable outcomes.

The strategy is developed within the constraints of existing budget pressures recognising the ongoing risk of economic, social and environmental changes that could impact its success. The supporting action plan has been developed recognising these constraints and has been jointly developed with operational staff from across Housing Services, key stakeholders and people who are accessing homeless services.

## 1.2 Key Issues and Challenges

The imbalance between the demand and supply of affordable social housing is the largest and most significant challenge that West Lothian faces. Demand for social housing in West Lothian has traditionally been high, poverty and the consequences of the cost of living crisis including increases in inflation, energy costs and mortgage interest rates have contributed to a sustained high demand for affordable social homes.

West Lothian also experiences some of the highest rates of sustainability in Scotland which results in fewer lettable properties becoming vacant and available for people in housing need. These main drivers create the perfect storm for large scale pressures across homeless services. The ability to move homeless households into permanent housing is reduced, reducing the ability to move homeless households out of temporary accommodation and reducing the ability to avoid using unsuitable forms of temporary accommodation. These key pressures lead to systematic failures in the homeless system and breaches of statutory duties.

The demand for homeless services is not anticipated to reduce as the supply of affordable social homes is not anticipated to increase in line with demand further impacted by cuts to the Affordable Social Housing Programme. Additional demand is expected following the asylum and refugee arrivals, and related resettlement and dispersal programmes, and as a result of changes to legislation including the removal of local connection and the implementation of prevention duties.

The strategy sets out the council's aims to meet the challenge for services to mitigate pressures within temporary accommodation, increase supply, and develop early interventions that seek to reduce homelessness from occurring in the first place, whilst operating within severe financial constraints and an uncertain strategic direction at a national/housing sector level.

## 1.3 Equality & Inclusion

The Equality Act 2010 provides a legal framework to protect the rights of individuals and advance equality of opportunity for all and delivers clarity around discrimination which protects individuals from unfair treatment and promotes a fair and more equal society.

Individuals at an increased risk of homelessness include people with alcohol and drug issues, those involved with the criminal justice system and people with mental health issues. Homeless people are themselves by definition disadvantaged and frequently experience more difficulty than others in accessing mainstream services.

It is recognised that some groups of individuals can be subject to cross-sectional discrimination, where individuals have more than one characteristic which is traditionally subject to a higher risk of discrimination, which can compound the effect of the discrimination they experience. Some common examples of this are the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) community and minority ethnic groups, women and those who are disabled.

The work to create this strategy has involved undertaking an Integrated Impact Assessment and the results of this work have been incorporated into its vision, aims and is reflected in the priorities of the work being taken forward by the Housing Need service.

This strategy aims to ensure that those experiencing homelessness or are at risk of homelessness, have their individual needs recognised, and are treated fairly, with respect and receive equitable access to services.



# Consultation & Engagement

## 2.1 Workshop Sessions

Consultation on the development of the Homeless Strategy was undertaken across August and September 2024. Addressing homelessness remains more than a Housing issue and involvement and buy in from a wide range of partners was essential to developing the suite of actions to be taken forward.

Workshops were undertaken which consisted of representatives from across council services and partner community organisations. This involved representatives from Anti-Poverty Services, Social Policy, NHS, local Registered Social Landlords and Community Planning Partners.

These sessions were designed to have partners to consider their role in responding to homelessness and what actions they felt they could take to address the key three priorities of the strategy. These workshops were well attended with positive feedback.

Surveys conducted on this work asked partners how relevant they now considered their role to be in the development of the actions for the Homeless Strategy - 76% stated that their role was critical.

This feedback offers strong support to the view of the council that homelessness is not merely a housing issue, it is an issue that all public sector, third sector and wider community organisations have a stake in responding to. The wider input gained during sessions adds value to the action plan attached to this strategy, and the various council services and partners involved in the formation of the strategy understand the requirement for a multi-agency approach to tackling the challenges being faced.

## 2.2 Customer Experience of Homelessness

The Homeless Strategy has been discussed with a number of homeless residents at Blackburn Homeless Unit. There was a range of people of different backgrounds, experience and age at the session to ensure we capture as many views of the homeless journey as was possible. Residents welcomed the opportunity to be included in the development of the strategy, and spent time considering each theme, and whether they felt it was the right action to address the pressures within homeless services from a customer viewpoint.

A range of their feedback and comments are included below.

My experience of being homeless was positive and the support received was helpful. If the new strategy can add to an even better experience then this can only be good for anyone who is homeless.

**18 - 25 year old**

Temporary accommodation should ensure that people with access to their children are given accommodation to allow them see their children.

**25-59 year old**

This is good for anyone in the future who may be homeless knowing the work that is being put in and homeless people just now are being listened to before this is launched.

**25-59 year old**

It can be really lonely when being homeless and using emergency accommodation if the new strategy can help with less time in emergency accommodation this would be very good for anyone.

**18 - 25 year old**

# Local Context

## 3.1 Profile of West Lothian

West Lothian has one of the fastest growing and youngest populations in Scotland. As of June 2021, the UK census results found that West Lothian to be the ninth largest local authority in Scotland serving a population of approximately 185,580. As of June 2021, West Lothian is the ninth largest local authority in Scotland serving a population of approximately 185,580. Between 1998 and 2020, the population of West Lothian has increased by 20.0%. This is the 2nd highest percentage change

out of the 32 council areas in Scotland, with East Lothian being the highest. Over the same period, Scotland's population rose by 7.7%.

Population growth is expected to continue in West Lothian with a projected increase of 5.8% expected between 2018 and 2028. It is forecast that by 2028, the area is predicted to have the 10th highest number of households of all 32 council areas in Scotland.

Table 1: Housing Tenure

Age Group	2018	2028	% change	Scotland % Change
All people	182,140	192,812	5.9	1.8
0 to 15	35,485	33,562	-5.4	-6.0
16 to 24	18,575	19,604	5.5	-0.9
25 to 44	46,800	50,401	7.7	3.1
45 to 64	51,470	51,212	-0.5	-5.5
65 to 74	17,404	20,744	19.2	14.4
75 and over	12,406	17,289	39.4	25.4

[https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/files/statistics/council-area-data-sheets/west-lothian-council-profile.html#table\\_pop\\_proj\\_age](https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/files/statistics/council-area-data-sheets/west-lothian-council-profile.html#table_pop_proj_age)



## 3.2 Economic Context

West Lothian is located in the middle of the central belt of Scotland, with a range of urban and rural communities that lie between Scotland's largest cities, Glasgow and Edinburgh. This makes it an attractive area of choice for easy access to employment and services. West Lothian has its own job base with an economic history which has largely been shaped by industrial change.

Material poverty continues to be a significant issue for many households and communities locally.

Despite unemployment rates in West Lothian returning to pre-pandemic levels at the start of 2023 there remains underlying issues of poverty and deprivation with households experiencing hardship and financial difficulties.

Key contributing factors to this include:

- Low pay, underemployment and unemployment.
- 12% of the population are classed as income deprived
- 14.5% of employees earn below the living wage
- 42% (23,000 people) of people working in West Lothian are employed in low pay sectors
- 9.7% of West Lothian working residents earn below the living wage level of £11.44 per hour compared to 14.4% for Scotland

The number of in-work claimants also remains high with 7,351 claimants in November 2024 representing a 174% increase from January 2020.

West Lothian has also seen a continued increased number of people becoming 'economically inactive'. Inactive claimants were at 10,521 in December 2024 which was up 377% since pre-Covid in Jan 2020.

Some of this, however, was due to people migrating from Employment and Support Allowance (ESA). Reasons attributed to the increasing numbers of people economically inactive include a significant rise in long-term sickness figures including Long-Covid, increases in mental ill health issues, increases in NHS waiting times and an ageing workforce.

Inflation reached a 45-year high in 2022 at 11.1%. and as outlined in previous RRTP updates the rising cost of living continues to contribute to large reductions in household disposable income.

Inflation has since decreased, falling to 2.5% in December 2024 – but still above the Bank of England's 2% target. Growth in the UK economy remains slow in 2024.

The UK fell into recession at the end of 2023, when the economy shrank in the last two quarters of the year. It rebounded strongly in the first half of the year, however, it barely grew between July and September, with uncertainty about the Budget in October being blamed for the weak growth.

## 3.3 Housing Stock and Turnover

The estimated number of dwellings in West Lothian was at 82,591 in 2021 making it the 10th highest authority for dwellings out of all 32 council areas in Scotland. Over two thirds of the stock is owner occupied with nearly a third for social housing. West Lothian sees a smaller than average number of Privately Rented properties compared to the Scottish Average.

Table 2: Housing Tenure

Housing Tenure	West Lothian	Scotland
Owner Occupied	61%	59%
Rented Privately	11%	14%
Vacant Private Homes & Second Homes	2%	4%
Registered Social Landlords	9%	11%
West Lothian Council Homes	17%	12%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/housing-statistics-stock-by-tenure/> (\*2019 is the most recent complete statistic)

Table 3: West Lothian Stock Profile

Stock	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Local Authority Stock	13,442	14,031	14,075	14,243	14,327
Local Authority Lettable Properties that became Vacant	929(6%)	608 (4%)	632 (4%)	785 (5.5%)	726 (5%)
Total Number of Applicants on the Common Housing Register	7,998	10,326	11,003	10,476	11,269

Source: HCBS year end reports 2019/20-2023/24

The total number of social rented units owned by West Lothian Council was at 14,327 as of 31st March 2024. 5% of this stock became available for let in 2023/24. The reason West Lothian has such a low turnover rate is that the council has very high sustainability – which means once people move into a council house, they tend to successfully stay there. This high sustainment of council housing is a positive indicator that the accommodation and services we provide is of a very high quality, however it does result in very low turnover, meaning less properties that can be allocated to new tenants.

Low property turnover and very high demand for accommodation in the West Lothian area are key issues for the council, and this is a critical factor which drives up the demand for temporary accommodation, as homeless households struggle to move through the homeless system into a permanent home quickly, with longer stays in temporary accommodation.

### 3.4 Demand for Council Housing

The imbalance between supply and demand for permanent social rented accommodation continues to be a key challenge for social housing providers in West Lothian. There remains a high number of people applying directly to the council for permanent housing through the council’s allocations policy, as well as accommodation required for homeless applicants to enable the council to discharge its statutory homeless duty.

Over the last 5 years there has been a 41% increase in the number of applications for housing reaching a high in 2023/24 of 11,269 applications. The largest proportion of these applications is from applicants in the general needs category followed by tenants seeking a transfer and then homeless applicants.

Table 4 sets out this demand in terms of the groups of applicants the council policy uses to allocate our accommodation to.

**Table 4: Common Housing Register demand**

Group	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Homeless Applicant	560 (7%)	909 (9%)	793(7%)	835(8%)	1,073 (9%)
Transfer Applicant	1,440 (18%)	1,851 (18%)	1,813 (16%)	1,597(15%)	1,760 (16%)
General Needs Applicant	3,519 (44%)	4,987 (48%)	7,714 (71%)	7,521(72%)	7,776 (69%)
Unsatisfactory Housing	2,079 (26%)	1,877 (19%)	No longer in use	No longer in use	No longer in use
Housing with Care	80 (1%)	84 (1%)	86 (1%)	96(1%)	97 (1%)
Outwith West Lothian	320 (4%)	618 (6%)	597 (5%)	427(4%)	563 (5%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>7,998</b>	<b>10,326</b>	<b>11,003</b>	<b>10,476</b>	<b>11,269</b>

Source: HCBS year end reports 2019/20-2023/24

The table shows that homeless applicants have almost doubled over the 5-year period shown. This has occurred despite a reduction in the number of statutory homeless presentations over the same period.

The reason for increasing demand from homeless applicants, at the same time as lower presentations relates directly to the lack of adequate supply of permanent, affordable accommodation in West Lothian.

The low turnover/availability of all types of accommodation in West Lothian has meant that people are living in temporary accommodation longer, as outlined in Tables 11 and 12, and achieving a permanent offer of housing is taking much longer to deliver to applicants. This means the number of homeless applicants never reduces, and as homeless presentations

continue to occur at a faster rate than properties become available, the gap between supply and demand remains.

The council made significant changes to the Allocations Policy in 2021 which saw the service move to intervene in cases much sooner to prevent homelessness occurring in the first place. This resulted in the decrease in statutory homeless presentations the council experiences as we seek to find alternatives that are affordable, and this is preventing the gap becoming even wider.

The lack of supply means that people with higher housing needs are presenting as homeless when all other options have been exhausted, this is evidenced through the high number of homeless people who self-accommodate in housing they wish to move on from.

**Table 5: Breakdown of Lets**

Group	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Homeless Applicant	480	400	370	391	463
Transfer Applicant	254	83	26	168	28
General Needs Applicant	16	17	273	181	252
Unsatisfactory Housing	585	99	N/A	N/A	N/A
Housing with Care	13	9	14	9	13
Outwith West Lothian	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>1348</b>	<b>608</b>	<b>683</b>	<b>749</b>	<b>756</b>

Table 5 shows a breakdown of lets for each group. Homeless applicants have been the highest over the last 5 years with 61.2% of properties let to this group in 2023/24. The second highest was general needs with 33.3%.

### 3.5 Homeless Position

Homeless applications have declined over the last five years by 20%. Part of this reduction is attributed to a rise in housing options approaches and earlier interventions to mitigate the risk of homelessness occurring. Housing Options is a national approach which is promoted as a tool to aid prevention of homelessness by seeking good outcomes for those in housing need, or threatened by homelessness. The service has made this prevention first approach the centre of its work, where housing options work seeks to consider all tenures of social

housing - council, housing associations, mid-market rent and the private sector to find an appropriate housing solution.

This work is supported by partnerships with many local Registered Social Landlords, where applicants are nominated for housing for properties. The council works with a range of housing providers and landlords to improve housing options and secure permanent accommodation that meets applicants housing need before homelessness occurs.

**Table 6: Homeless Applications**

Homeless Applications	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
<b>Total</b>	1,468	1,462	1,190	1,251	1,169

Source: Scottish Government West Lothian specific HL1 annual reports & Scottish government Homeless annual statistics publications, supplementary tables and charts

As table 7 demonstrates, the largest group of applicants continues to be from 26 – 59-year olds, which reached 64% of all applicants in 2023/24. The 18-25s year old age group remains the second largest group of applicants accounting to 24.9% for the same period.

Table 7: Age Range

Age Range	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
16 - 17	71	82	74	67	63
18 - 25	406	335	324	339	291
26 - 59	940	889	751	781	745
60+	51	46	41	64	70
<b>Total</b>	<b>1468</b>	<b>1462</b>	<b>1190</b>	<b>1251</b>	<b>1169</b>

Source: Scottish Government West Lothian specific HL1 annual reports & Scottish government Homeless annual statistics publications, supplementary tables and charts

Young people (age 16-17) make up 0.5% of applications in 2023/24. West Lothian has traditionally had significant numbers of homeless applications from young people and as such has targeted specific interventions at under 18s over 2022-2024 aimed at reducing youth homelessness.

Table 8 shows that applications from people aged 16-25 years old decreased from 408 in 2022/23 to 354 in 2023/24, this is a decrease of 12.8% when considered as a proportion of all homeless applications.

Table 8: Homeless Applications by 16-25 years olds

Year	West Lothian Applicants (16-25 years)	West Lothian % of Homeless Applicants 16- 25 years	National % of Homeless Applicants 16 – 25 years
2019/20	473	32%	23%
2020/21	478	33%	25%
2021/22	397	33%	23%
2022/23	406	32%	22%
2023/24	354	30%	22%

Source: Scottish Government West Lothian specific HL1 annual reports & Scottish government Homeless annual statistics publications, supplementary tables and charts

Table 9: Reasons for Homeless Application

Main Reason for Homelessness	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Asked to leave	591	430	437	571	486
Dispute in household non-violent	301	505	326	233	220
Dispute in household violent	188	181	177	141	121
Other reason for leaving accommodation	102	94	72	79	105
Other reason for loss of accommodation	75	50	36	56	59
Other action by landlord resulting in termination of tenancy	74	28	23	46	57
All other categories	137	174	119	125	121
<b>Total</b>	<b>1468</b>	<b>1462</b>	<b>1190</b>	<b>1251</b>	<b>1169</b>

Source: Scottish Government West Lothian specific HL1 annual reports & Scottish government Homeless annual statistics publications, supplementary tables and charts

Table 9 sets out the main reasons for homelessness in 2023/24, the highest categories were asked to leave (42%), dispute in household non-violent (19%), dispute in household violent (10%), other reason for leaving accommodation (9%) and other reason for loss of accommodation (5%).

Table 10: Homeless Outcomes

Outcomes	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Scottish Secure Tenancy	1054	658	571	662	772
Private Rented Tenancy	25	23	18	12	36
Returned to Previous/Friends	125	86	58	47	89
Other - Known	23	37	51	36	80
Other Not-Known	48	8	18	32	26
<b>Total</b>	<b>1275</b>	<b>812</b>	<b>716</b>	<b>789</b>	<b>1003</b>

Source: Scottish Government West Lothian specific HL1 annual reports & Scottish government Homeless annual statistics publications, supplementary tables and charts

For those who were accepted as unintentionally homeless table 10 shows the outcomes achieved for each category. 77% of those assessed as unintentionally homeless were granted a Scottish Secure Tenancy, 9% chose to return to their previous accommodation, 8% were categorised as other - known, 4% were able to obtain a private rented tenancy and 3% were other not-known.

### 3.6 Demand for Temporary Accommodation

The significant shortfall of houses to meet homeless demand has resulted in a high sustained use of temporary accommodation in West Lothian. Despite positive reductions in homeless applications the numbers of placements in temporary accommodation has risen to 1,806 in 2023/24. This consisted of an 9% increase in placements in Bed & Breakfast accommodation and 8% in council owned temporary accommodation. This continuous trend of high demand for all types of accommodation, despite reductions in homeless demand results in ongoing pressures in temporary accommodation due to the lack of sufficient supply becoming available for let.

In 2023/24 the Housing Need Service implemented the Rapid Access model of temporary accommodation to reduce the use of Bed & Breakfast. Rapid Access offers an enhanced assessment of needs of households who present as Roofless to the council. Roofless clientele are cases which often occur at a point of crisis for the household, and the service generally has not had the benefit of prior contact or knowledge of the case.

The assessment of needs works in tandem with the provision of short-term accommodation for the first 10 households who are roofless each day. The service can then identify their specific support and accommodation needs, and provides additional support to them in creating stability, and an informed transition to appropriate temporary accommodation.

Rapid Access provides an option of support and resettlement to higher need applicants. Whilst the model has had some success in cost avoidance, households have still entered Bed and Breakfast due to the overall lack of accommodation supply to support the model of Rapid Access, which relies upon an adequate number of properties to transition people into. This is a preferred model of service delivery for higher need applicants for the service, and is undertaken where supply will allow.

Table 11 demonstrates the numbers of placements in types of temporary accommodation since 2019.

**Table 11: Temporary Accommodation Placements**

Temporary Accommodation Placements	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
WLC Ordinary Dwelling	575	481	434	399	431
Housing Assoc/RSL	67	53	37	33	30
Private Sector Lease	74	78	102	82	69
Hostel WLC Owned	201	116	113	78	96
Bed and Breakfast	908	1,021	1,085	904	985
Women's Refuge	0	0	20	26	27
Rapid Access	0	0	0	0	168
<b>Totals (all)</b>	<b>1,825</b>	<b>1,749</b>	<b>1,791</b>	<b>1,522</b>	<b>1,806</b>

Source: Scottish Government West Lothian specific HL1 annual reports & Scottish government Homeless annual statistics publications, supplementary tables and charts

Moving people swiftly through temporary accommodation requires a steady and adequate flow of permanent accommodation. As the lets to homeless households continues to fall below the demand for permanent accommodation, the demand for temporary accommodation remains high with limited throughput, which results in length of stay increasing in temporary accommodation. Table 12 highlights this increase in length of stay over the last 5 years.

**Table 12: Temporary Accommodation Length of Stay**

Temporary Accommodation Length of Stay (average days)	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
WLC Ordinary Dwelling	184	248	293	316	330
Housing Assoc/RSL	218	204	279	337	343
Private Sector Lease	162	211	244	306	355
Hostel WLC Owned	67	97	110	167	113
Bed and Breakfast	26	30	46	55	61
Womans Refuge	0	0	82	73	115
Rapid Access	0	0	0	0	10
<b>Totals (all)</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>124</b>	<b>152</b>	<b>141</b>

Source: Scottish Government West Lothian specific HL3 annual reports & Scottish government Homeless annual statistics publications, supplementary tables and charts

Due to the increasing demand for temporary accommodation, and a lack of all types of property, the use of Bed and Breakfast has been high over the last 5 years. This type of accommodation is broadly classed as unsuitable accommodation under the Unsuitable Accommodation Order (UAO). As a result of the increases in length of stay the service is in breach of the UAO, putting it at risk of financial sanctions by the Scottish Government. A household has breached the UAO when it is in unsuitable accommodation for a period of more than 7 days. Prior to October 2021 the UAO only applied to families and pregnant women, however this was then extended to all households.



Table 13 highlights the number of breaches of the Unsuitable Accommodation Order since it was extended in 2021/22.

Table 13: Breaches of the UAO

Breaches of the UAO	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Number of breaches	26	11	328	516	523

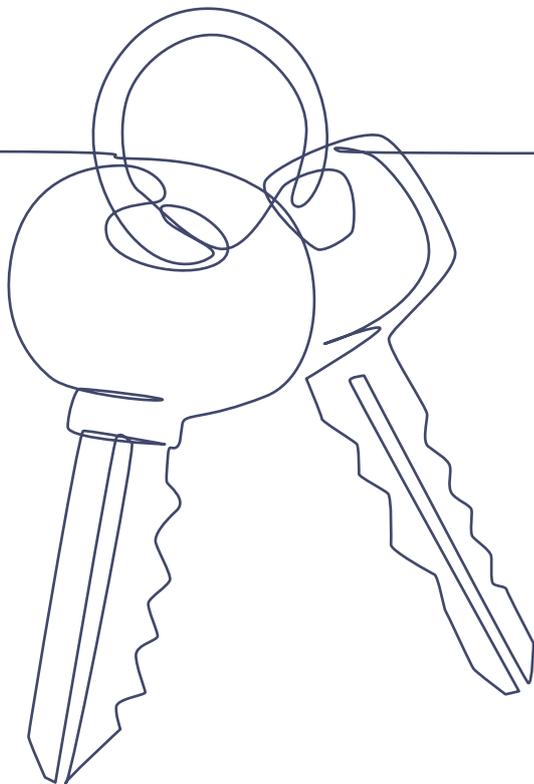
Source: Scottish Government West Lothian specific HL3 annual reports & Scottish government Homeless annual statistics publications, supplementary tables and charts

### 3.7 Measures to Respond to Pressures

In order to mitigate and address pressures in homeless services, the council has aimed to keep lets to homeless households high at 60-70%, whilst trying to balance demand from other applicants in high housing need. Each of the four main providers of social rented housing have provided support to the council in addressing homeless demand pressures over the course of the plan.



## Key Priorities & Actions



For the duration of the lifetime of RRTP, critical lessons have been derived from successful initiatives and service delivery.

The service identified and focussed on key areas of local strategic need such as youth homeless prevention, health and homelessness, and boosting supply.

This has enabled a strong West Lothian wide partnership approach to all prevention work, and has informed the refinement of the council aims in tackling homelessness and its causes into the targeted objectives of this strategy.

Our strategic vision for a strategy focussed on prevention, supply and support are underpinned prioritising the key functions across the partnership as set out over the following pages.

4.1 Preventing Homelessness

West Lothian has one of the fastest growing and youngest populations in Scotland. As of June 2021, the UK census results found that West Lothian to be the ninth largest local authority in Scotland serving a population of approximately 185,580. It is forecast that by 2028, the area is predicted to have the 10th highest number of households of all 32 council areas in Scotland.

West Lothian is located in the middle of the central belt of Scotland, with a spread of urban and rural communities. The county lies between Scotland’s largest cities of Glasgow and Edinburgh, and is situated on the M8 corridor, making the area an area of choice for its’ easy access to employment and services

Priority 1

The best way to tackle homelessness is to stop it happening in the first place. Effective early prevention and housing options services provide upstream services which mitigate the risk of homelessness occurring. This reduces the impact on peoples physical and mental health needs and provides cost benefits by reducing the demand for temporary accommodation services.



Key Challenges

- High demand for homeless services
- Low turnover of stock
- Statutory homeless duties
- UAO breaches
- Prevention duties
- Lack of sufficient funding to enhance services

Actions

- Develop enhanced tenancy sustainment to reduce evictions/ abandonments
- Enhance the Section 11 process in partnership with Anti-Poverty Services
- Consider best approach to reduce lets to homeless households to increase housing options and reduce homeless demand
- Review Allocations Policy to ensure high priority groups have better opportunity to have their needs met
- Develop Personal Housing Plan (PHP) to enhance housing options discussions
- Support RSLs to utilise PHP and provide housing options training
- Increase partnership with Private Rented Sector and raise awareness of the tenant find service to increase outcomes in the PRS.
- Improve homeless case management to reduce time waiting for permanent housing
- Develop opportunities for tenants to undertake mutual exchanges
- Implement new approach to encourage tenants to downsize
- Prepare and publish accessible formats of annualised data on housing allocations, completions, and homelessness rates including demographics of those accessing housing
- Review delivery of upstream services and seek to develop a long term sustainable model that prevents youth homelessness in secondary schools
- Deliver specialist Youth Housing Options Services working in partnership with Education
- Deliver and enhance housing options approach to respond and mitigate the risk of homelessness
- Investigate capacity to extend housing options approach to those at risk within 6 months or targeted groups
- Support Community Planning Partnership (CPP) to increase awareness of forthcoming prevention duties
- Ensure CPP partners have homeless prevention plans in place

## 4.2 Increasing Supply &amp; Access to Supply

## Priority 2

Whilst prevention is key to reducing homelessness, homelessness cannot be solved without adequate housing. Increasing supply will help to ensure housing needs are met and increase the range of options and choice. Ensuring better access to the current supply by making best use of existing stock and minimise the time stock is out of use will also maximise capacity.



## Key Challenges

- Live homeless cases awaiting permanent outcomes
- High demand for temporary accommodation
- Low turnover of stock
- Reductions to Affordable Housing Programme grant funding
- HRA and capital fund pressures due to labour, materials and supply costs
- UAO legislation

## Actions

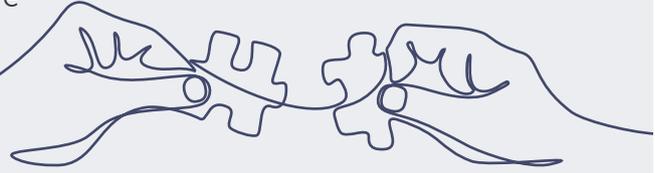
- Deliver void improvement plan measures to reduce number of void properties & increase throughput of properties
- Develop Choice Based Letting (CBL) approach required for the new housing management system
- Work in partnership with RSLs to delivery high target lets to homeless households
- Deliver new build supported accommodation for young people at Almondvale Crescent
- Work with partners to deliver the level of quality homes projected in the approved West Lothian Affordable Housing Programme
- Complete the balance of the 383 new affordable council houses targeted over the period 2023/24-2027/28
- Maximise the contribution of the private sector through the West Lothian Empty Homes Partnership
- Purchase houses through the Open Market Acquisitions Scheme
- to increase portfolio of permanent properties by a further 19 properties
- Work with Scottish Government to explore alternative funding models to increase the supply of housing
- Work with Third Sector to scope out opportunities to increase supply
- Work with utility companies to ensure quicker access to both temporary and permanent housing
- Improve information to applicants and tenants on how to look after their home to reduce the level of repairs required once a tenancy is terminated
- Consider and scope the benefits of flipping temporary tenancies
- Review of temporary accommodation allocation process to reduce demand for B&Bs
- Develop other models of shared accommodation for young people
- Review delivery of rapid access provision in hotels and at Blackburn Homeless Unit
- Implement new charging model for temporary accommodation
- Implement new charging model for supported accommodation
- Develop a blanket SLA and lease framework for all special lets
- Develop enhanced housing management practices mainstreaming temporary accommodation services
- Review exceptional circumstances process in TTs to reduce blockages in hotels
- Review sensitive let process across area offices to reduce withdrawals
- Review suspension process in allocations to ensure faster throughput to housing
- Review allocation processes for section 55 and points for homeless households to ensure quicker processing of applications
- Implement enhanced quality assurance for housing options case management to ensure efficient use of furniture and school transport services

## 4.3 Improving Long-Term Outcomes for Homeless Households

## Priority 3

Many households who experience homelessness also require additional support to get the right outcome to live independently and reduce repeat homelessness.

A joined-up approach to homelessness will ensure that homeless households get access to the right type of support services to achieve long term sustainable outcomes.



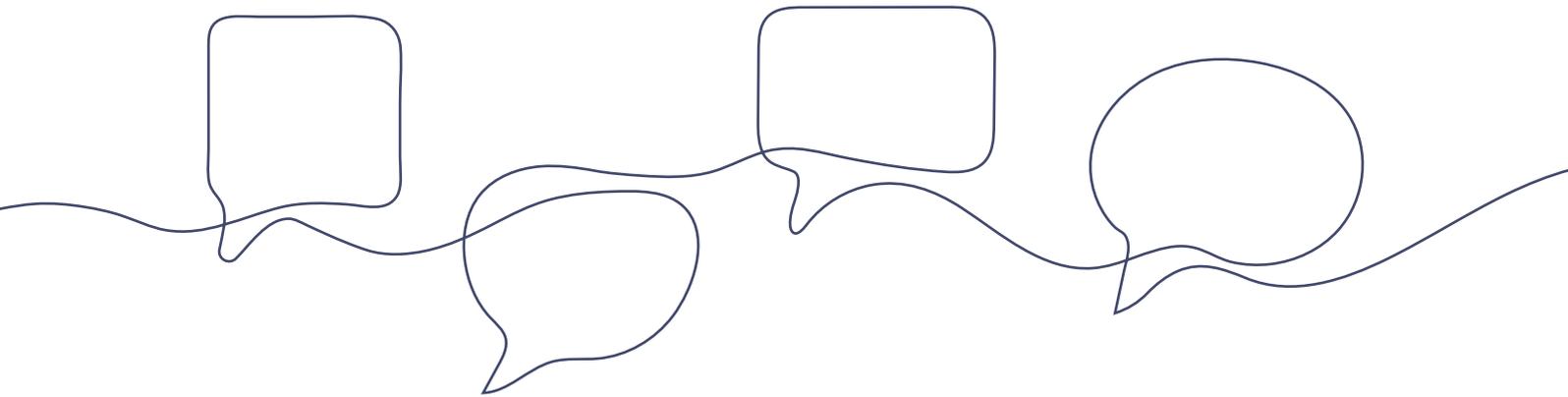
## Key Challenges

- Increasing complex needs of homeless households
- Lack of sufficient supply to meet needs
- Increasing population and demand on other services

## Actions

- Quantify the residential accommodation requirements for adults where housing in the community would not be suitable including Addictions and Mental Health.
- Implement new approach to supporting homeless households access specialist mental health services in partnership with NHS
- Upscale Housing First services for both adults and youths and develop new Intensive Housing Support Services (IHSS)
- Ensure all households undertake a financial assessment/benefit check before being permanently housed
- Improve information sharing across housing services to allow homeless people to successfully settle into accommodation
- Consider opportunities to extend SQF Level 4 tenancy sustainment to all households
- Review pathways for women fleeing domestic abuse
- Review opportunities with local communities to develop starter pack/furniture scheme for homeless households
- Develop cooking classes at supported homeless units for those who would benefit from it
- Ensure accurate collection of homeless households support needs through housing options approach
- Co-ordinate and ensure the delivery of Trauma Informed training across Housing Need Services
- Review risk assessment process and appropriate data sharing between Housing Need and Housing Operations

## Governance and Monitoring the Strategy



As outlined in section 2 this strategy has been developed in consultation with operational staff, key stakeholders and people with lived experienced of homelessness.

The Homeless Strategy Board is responsible for the governance of this strategy, monitoring and evaluating the success of the strategy. The Homeless Strategy board will meet each quarter to scrutinise the progress of actions and discuss challenges or issues. The board will be supported by a series of workstreams consisting key leads from each area who are responsible for key actions. The board will work to ensure that the strategy is reviewed to ensure the best use of resources should funding sources cease or reduce or there are changes to the operating landscape.

The governance board will consist of key stakeholders relevant to each priority who have the ability to drive change and make quick decisions that are needed to take forward the actions. The board will replace the previous R RTP board with a refreshed membership and new terms of reference.

## Homeless Strategy Board

- Head of Housing Customer & Building Services (Chair)
- Housing Needs Manager
- Housing Needs Strategy Manager
- Housing Operations Manager
- Housing Strategy & Development Manager
- Building Services Manager
- Social Policy lead
- Education Lead
- Anti Poverty Services
- NHS lead
- RSL partner lead
- Third Sector partner lead
- Community Planning Partner lead

## Prevention

- Housing Need Strategy Manager (Chair)
- Quality Development Officer
- Anti-Poverty Services
- Allocations Manager
- Housing Options Manager
- Housing Operations
- Education Rep
- Youth Housing Support Manager
- CPP partner
- Third Sector partner
- RSL partner

## Supply

- Housing Needs Manager (Chair)
- Quality Development Officer
- Building Services Rep
- Central Voids Team
- Housing Strategy
- Housing Operations
- Temporary Accommodation Manager
- Allocations Manager
- Housing Options Manager
- RSL partner

## Long Term Outcomes

- Mental Health Addictions Manager (Chair)
- Housing Need Strategy Manager
- Quality Development Officer
- Health
- Homeless Support Services Manager
- Homeless Support Manager – Blacburn Homeless Unit
- Homeless Support Manager – Intensive Support Service
- Housing Operations
- Social Policy – Older People
- Social Policy – Domestic Abuse
- Social Policy – Children & Families
- Third Sector partner

# Action Plan

## Priority 1 – Preventing Homelessness

### HEAP High Level Action 1 & 3

Improving supply and access to affordable housing options and reducing length of stay in temporary accommodation

Where homelessness occurs focus housing options to enable households to navigate through the system as quickly as possible

### Outcome:

Working together people who are in housing need are prevented from becoming homeless through early intervention

People who experience homelessness find a settled home as quickly as possible

Activity	HEAP High Level Action	Planned Completion Date	Lead Agency	
1	Develop- enhanced Section 11 Process	N/A	December 2025	West Lothian Council/Anti Poverty Services
2	Consider best approach to reduce lets to homeless households to increase housing options and reduce homeless demand	N/A	March 2026	West Lothian Council
3	Develop and implement Personal Housing Planning approach	N/A	April 2025	West Lothian Council
4	Support RSLs to utilise Personal Housing Planning and provide housing options training	N/A	March 2026	West Lothian Council/RSLs
5	Enhance homeless case management	N/A	March 2026	West Lothian Council
6	Develop opportunities for tenants to undertake mutual exchange	N/A	December 2026	West Lothian Council
7	Implement new approach for tenants to downsize	N/A	December 2026	West Lothian Council
8	Prepare and publish accessible annualised data on housing allocations, completions & homelessness	N/A	December 2025	West Lothian Council
9	Consider options to extend housing options approach to people at risk of homelessness within 6 months	N/A	March 2027	West Lothian Council
10	Work with CPP partners to support them to increase awareness of Public Prevention Duties	N/A	December 2025	West Lothian Council
11	Work with CPP partners to ensure partners develop Homeless Prevention Plans	N/A	December 2025	West Lothian Council
12	Review first year of early intervention model to prevent homelessness in secondary schools	1	March 2025	West Lothian Council
13	Mainstream and develop Young Peoples Emergency Prevention Service to minimise the risk of youth homelessness	1	March 2025	West Lothian Council/Third Sector
14	Continue to work in partnership with Education, developing referrals and supporting secondary schools to minimise homelessness and support young people to stay engaged in schools	1	March 2025	West Lothian Council
15	Review Allocations Policy	1	December 2025	West Lothian Council
16	increase partnership with PRS and raise awareness of the tenant find service.	1	July 2025	West Lothian Council
17	Upscale Housing First services for both adults and youths and develop new Intensive Housing Support Services (IHSS)	1	March 2025	West Lothian Council

## Priority 2 – Increasing Supply & Access to Supply

### HEAP High Level Action 1 & 3

Improving supply and access to affordable housing options and reducing length of stay in temporary accommodation

Where homelessness occurs focus housing options to enable households to navigate through the system as quickly as possible

### Outcome:

People in housing need are given a range of housing solutions to find a settled home

People who experience homelessness find a settled home as quickly as possible

Activity	HEAP High Level Action	Planned Completion Date	Lead Agency	
1	Deliver void improvement plan measures to reduce number of void properties & increase throughput of properties	2	March 2026	West Lothian Council
2	Develop Choice Based Letting (CBL) approach required for the new housing management system	3	December 2025	West Lothian Council
3	Work in partnership with RSLs to delivery high target lets to homeless households	2	March 2025	West Lothian Council
4	Deliver new build supported accommodation for young people at Almondvale Crescent	2	January 2025	West Lothian Council
5	Work with partners to deliver the level of quality homes projected in the approved West Lothian Affordable Housing Programme	N/A	March 2027	West Lothian Council
6	Complete the balance of the 383 new affordable council houses targeted over the period 2023/24-2027/28	3	March 2028	West Lothian Council
7	Maximise the contribution of the private sector through the West Lothian Empty Homes Partnership	2	March 2025	West Lothian Council
8	Purchase houses through the Open Market Acquisitions Scheme to increase portfolio of permanent properties by a further 19 properties	2	March 2025	West Lothian Council
9	Work with Scottish Government to explore alternative funding models to increase the supply of housing	N/A	December 2025	West Lothian Council
10	Work with utility companies to ensure quicker access to both temporary and permanent housing	N/A	March 2026	West Lothian Council
11	Improve information to applicants and tenants on how to look after their home to reduce the level of repairs required once a tenancy is terminated	N/A	December 2026	West Lothian Council
12	Consider and scope the benefits of flipping temporary tenancies	N/A	December 2026	West Lothian Council
13	Review of temporary accommodation allocation process to reduce demand for B&Bs	N/A	December 2025	West Lothian Council
14	Develop other models of shared accommodation for young people	N/A	December 2025	West Lothian Council
15	Review delivery of rapid access provision in hotels and at Blackburn Homeless Unit	2	March 2025	West Lothian Council
16	Implement new charging model for temporary accommodation	2	December 2024	West Lothian Council
17	Implement new charging model for supported accommodation	2	March 2025	West Lothian Council
18	Develop a blanket SLA and lease framework for all special lets	2	March 2025	West Lothian Council
19	Develop enhanced housing management practices mainstreaming temporary accommodation services	N/A	December 2025	West Lothian Council
20	Review exceptional circumstances process in TTs to reduce blockages in hotels	N/A	December 2025	West Lothian Council
21	Review sensitive let process across area offices to reduce withdrawals	N/A	December 2026	West Lothian Council
22	Review suspension process in allocations to ensure faster throughput to housing	N/A	December 2026	West Lothian Council
23	Review allocation processes for section 5s and points for homeless households to ensure quicker processing of applications	N/A	December 2025	West Lothian Council
24	Improve housing options case management to ensure efficient use of furniture and school transport services	N/A	December 2025	West Lothian Council

### Priority 3 – Improving Long-Term Outcomes for Homeless Households

#### HEAP High Level Action 1 & 3

Improving supply and access to affordable housing options and reducing length of stay in temporary accommodation

Where homelessness occurs focus housing options to enable households to navigate through the system as quickly as possible

Implement actions to ensure people can access the required levels of support

#### Outcome:

People in housing need are given a range of housing solutions to find a settled home

People who experience homelessness find a settled home as quickly as possible

People are offered a range of housing options with access to the required services and support options

Activity	HEAP High Level Action	Planned Completion Date	Lead Agency	
1	Quantify the residential accommodation requirements for adults where housing in the community would not be suitable including Addictions and Mental Health.	2, 4	March 2025	Health
2	Implement new approach to supporting homeless households access specialist mental health services in partnership with NHS	3, 4	March 2026	Health
3	Upscale Housing First services for both adults and youths and develop new Intensive Housing Support Services (IHSS)	3, 4	March 2025	West Lothian Council
4	Ensure all households undertake a financial assessment/benefit check before being permanently housed	N/A	March 2026	West Lothian Council
5	Improve information sharing across housing services to allow homeless people to successfully settle into accommodation	N/A	March 2026	West Lothian Council
6	Consider opportunities to extend SQF Level 4 tenancy sustainment to all households	N/A	March 2027	West Lothian Council
7	Review pathways for women fleeing domestic abuse	N/A	March 2027	West Lothian Council
8	Review opportunities with local communities to develop starter pack/furniture scheme for homeless households	N/A	December 2026	West Lothian Council
9	Develop cooking classes at supported homeless units for those who would benefit from it	N/A	December 2025	West Lothian Council
10	Ensure accurate collection of homeless households support needs through housing options approach	N/A	December 2025	West Lothian Council
11	Co-ordinate and ensure the delivery of Trauma Informed training across Housing Need Services	4	March 2025	West Lothian Council
12	Review risk assessment process and appropriate data sharing between Housing Need and Housing Operations	N/A	March 2025	West Lothian Council
13	Work in partnership to improve access to appropriate housing and support for people with problematic substance use.	N/A	March 2027	Health/West Lothian Council

# West Lothian Homeless Strategy

2025-2028