

ANNUAL REPORT

Housing Solutions

2023/24



Welcome

Welcome to the 2023/24 Housing Solutions Service Annual report

This annual report provides an overview of our performance and relevant housing statistics within Sandwell Council's Housing Solutions service over the past year.

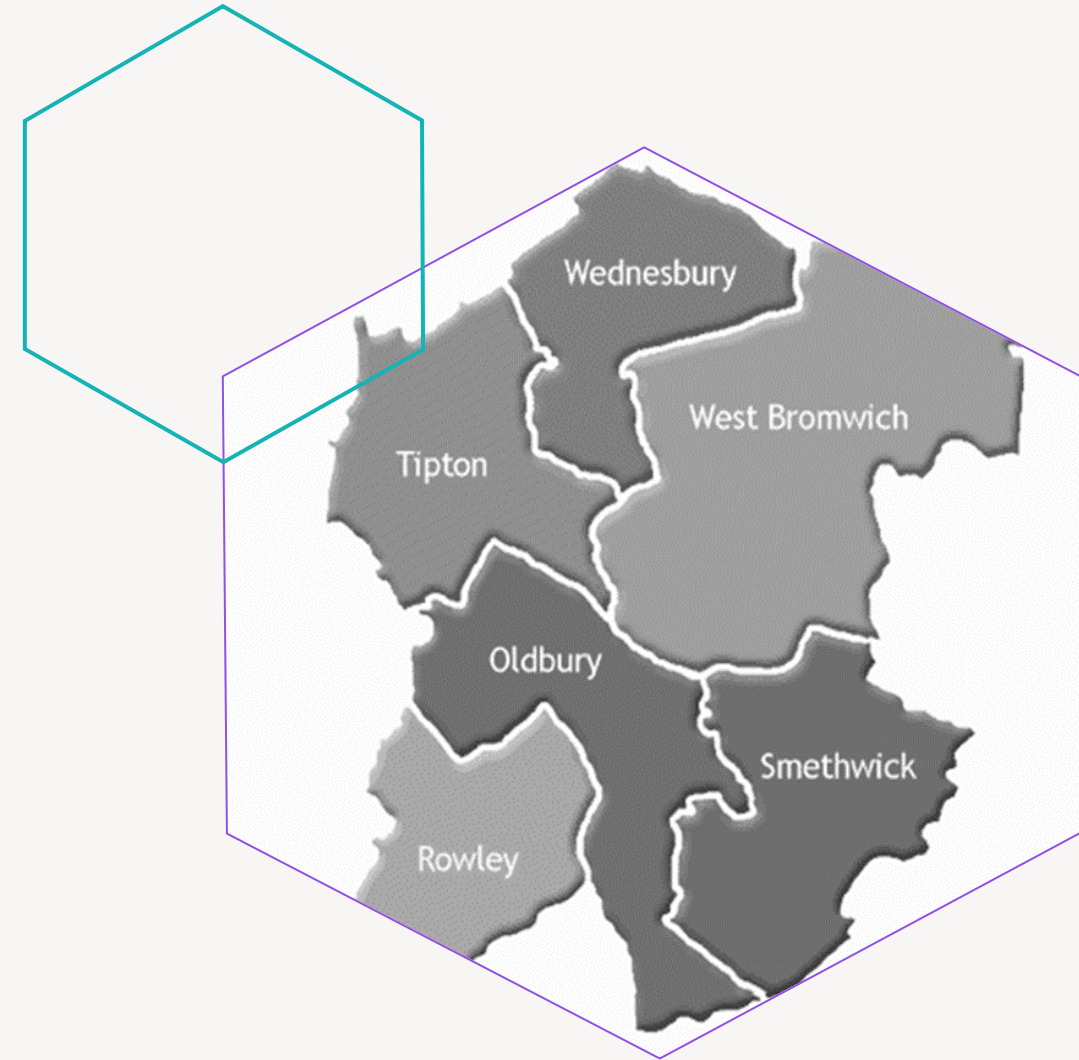
The report includes analysis of the latest trends, supply and demand, affordability, rental rates, housing policy and programs, homelessness, and future housing plans.

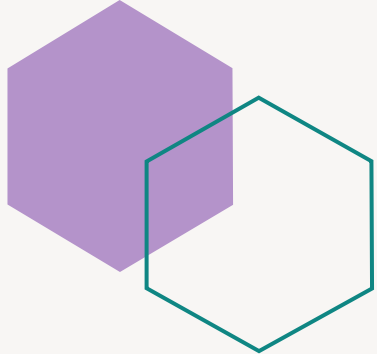
The past year has been a challenging one for the housing market, with the prolonged cost of living crisis and potential legislative changes having a significant impact across most sectors.

Despite these challenges, the Housing Solutions service has remained resilient and we have continued to work innovatively to effectively support service users with their housing needs; working to educate people on alternative housing options, support people to stay in their homes, and instilling our key operating principles and practice – putting prevention at the core of everything we do.

This report provides valuable insights into the Housing Solutions service, as well as the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead.

We hope that you find this report informative and useful, and we look forward to continuing to work together to address and support the housing needs of Sandwell residents.





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Key facts in numbers

COUNCIL REGISTER GROWTH

There are **17,274** applicants on the waiting list, this is up **180%** from 2020.

LETTINGS AND REDUCTION IN COUNCIL STOCK

1390 properties were let in 2023/24.

In 1980 the council had **55,000 properties total stock** the council now have **27869**

*not total available to let

HOMELESS APPROACHES 23/24

There was a total of **6759** homeless approaches to the housing solutions service – a 39% increase on the previous year

ROUGH SLEEPING FIGURE

3 rough sleepers found on our national rough sleepers count, echoing constant daily work to keep people from rough sleeping

TEMPOARY ACCOMODATION PLACEMENTS

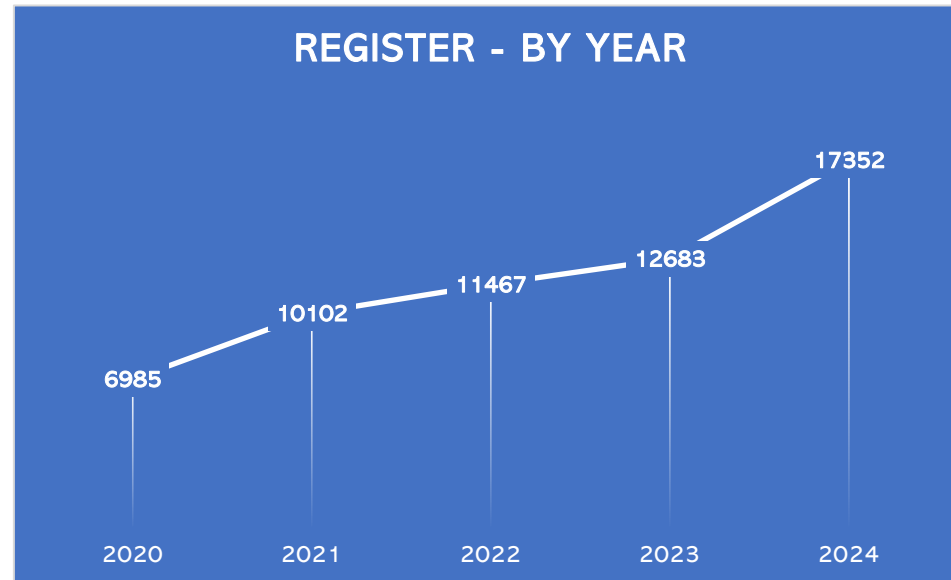
As of March 2024, there were **196** households in temporary accommodation

Housing Applications

The Housing Register

Average of **111** new applications per week

The housing register has increased by **180%** since 2020



The amount of applications on the register per year

The registrations service has seen an average of 111 new applications per week, with over 17,000 households on the register.

Looking ahead of the 2023/24,

The service introduced a full auto-registration process. This enables anyone that submits an application (subject to declaration that they meet requirements in the allocations policy) will immediately be registered at Band 5 and will receive their bidding number. In the background, the team then validate the information, complete any assessment for priority groups (bands one to four) and validate the application and change the banding where required.

The team tirelessly at working to set standards relating to verification with set days of auto-registration.

Housing Applications

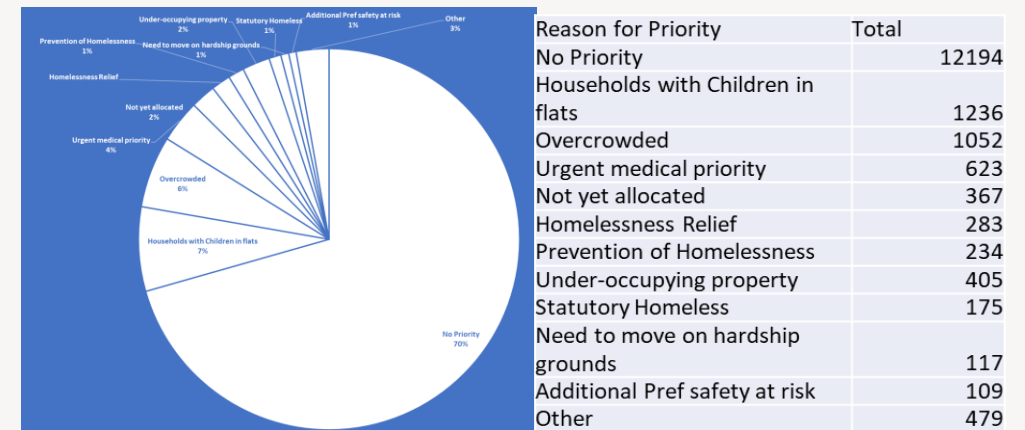
Banding

The banding system is used to prioritise applicants on their level of housing need. The table shows the amount of applicants are currently on our waiting list for each of the bands.

	Total
Band 1	520
Band 2	1422
Band 3	2705
Band 4	109
Band 5	12518

Reason for registering

There are several reasons why someone may choose to join the council register. For some it may be due to financial hardship, others may be homeless or overcrowded. The chart show a breakdown of the reasons of registering for our applicants as a total figure and percentage.



Bedroom Need

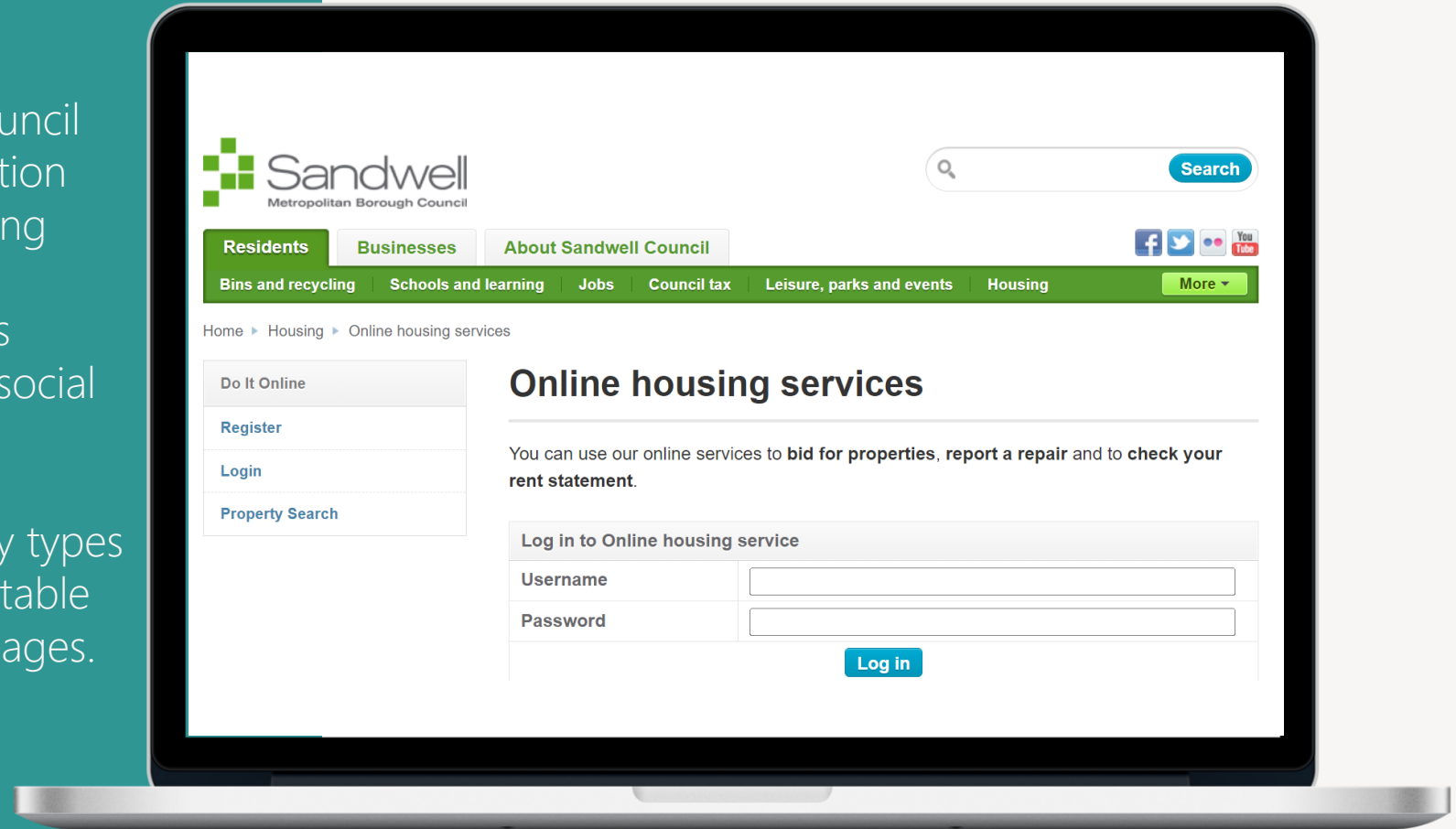
The number of bedrooms required by a household can have a significant impact on their position on the housing register. Large family households could face a longer wait time for housing allocation. The table shows the number of bedrooms that each applicant requires.

Beds	Total
1	8084
2	5038
3	2769
4	1068
5	246
6	54
7	12
9	2
10	1

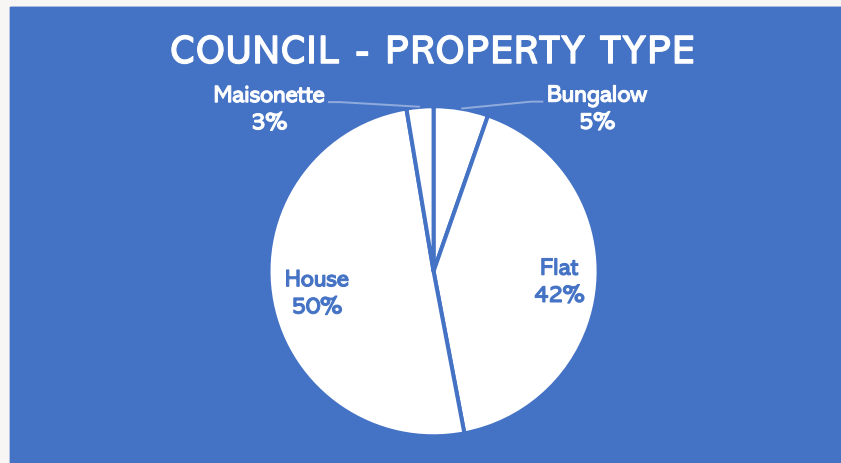
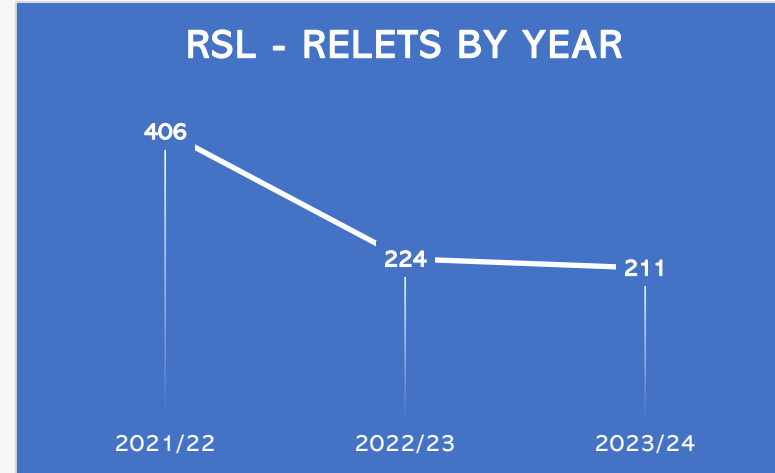
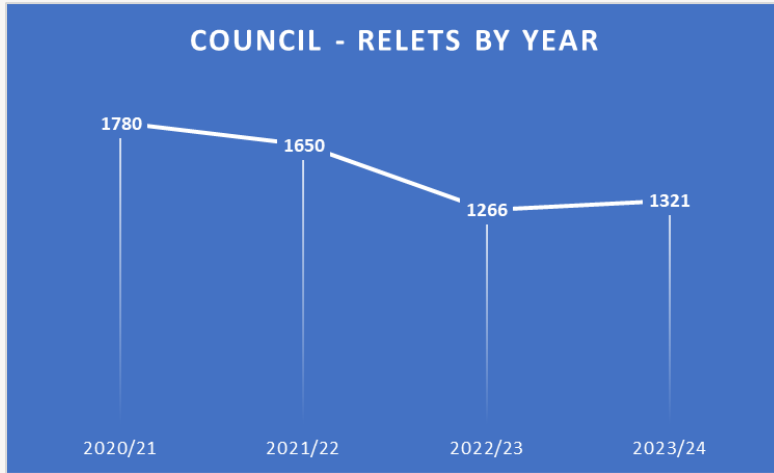
Housing Allocations and Lettings

The service allocated and let nearly 1400 council properties last year and 211 housing association properties. This is further reduction of housing association properties to the previous. This coupled with the growing housing register is placing more pressure on the availability of social housing within Sandwell.

The wait times across all bands and property types have increased in 2023/24 with the most notable examples being displayed in the following pages.



Relets



Abbey	17
Blackheath	69
Bristnall	33
Charlemont with Grove Vale	55
Cradley Heath and Old Hill	86
Friar Park	70
Great Barr with Yew tree	32
Great Bridge	9
Great Bridge	71
Greets Green and Lyng	76
Hateley Heath	74
Langley	81
Newton	19
Old Warley	25
Oldbury	35
Princes End	133
Rowley	92
Smethwick	66
Soho and Victoria	56
St. Pauls	23
Tipton Green	8
Tipton Green	59
Tividale	65
Wednesbury North	47
Wednesbury South	23
West Bromwich Central	66

The above showcases the number of relets are still low compared to previous years. Lettings from registered social landlords have further decreased. The table to the right shows the number of relets by ward area last year.

Average wait times

PROPERTY TYPE	Band 1	Band 2	Band 3	Band 4	Band 5
Bungalow	1 year and 6 months	1 year and 5 months	1 year and 7 months	/	1 year and 10 months
Flat	10 months	10 months	11 months	1 year and 3 months	11 months
House	1 year and 8 months	2 year and 4 months	6 years and 5 months	8 years and 7 months	9 years and 9 months *
Maisonette	1 year and 3 months	11 months	1 year and 5 months	/	2 years and 5 months

Band 5 have an average wait of almost **10 years** for a house

1526 separate bids placed on a single address in Chillington Walk Rowley Regis

81 houses had over 500 bids per property

The facts above give valuable insight into the current average wait times.

The table shows the average wait time by property and band. Please take note of the key below in relation to three

Key

/ - Any property listed as /, relates to data not being available. A reason for this is in recent years no applicant of said banding being successful in the let of this particular property or no average wait time available.

* - A larger average has been recorded to best represent the waiting time for this category.

Homelessness and Emergency Accommodation



The service has gone from **4864** in 2022/23 to **6759** in 2023/24 – this works out at almost 136 households presenting each week. People present for a range of reasons and the service saw **59.% of presentations from single people and couples** and the remaining **40.68 % from families**.



The service is now focussed on trying to keep people in their current home as this is almost always a better solution than trying to source new accommodation.

In the last year we were **successful in preventing 72% of cases** where the household approached us early on which is higher than the national average.

It is not unusual for us to work with up to **16 households** per day who say they have nowhere to stay that night.



The service has worked hard to secure private rented properties for our customers . For properties up to March 2024, we have had a **100% sustainability rates**. There is more chance than ever before that we will be able to offer a private rented property to a homeless family, and quicker than a council offer.



As a result of increased demand, and a more challenging national and local housing market, we saw **61% increase in the number of families in temporary accommodation** over 2023/24

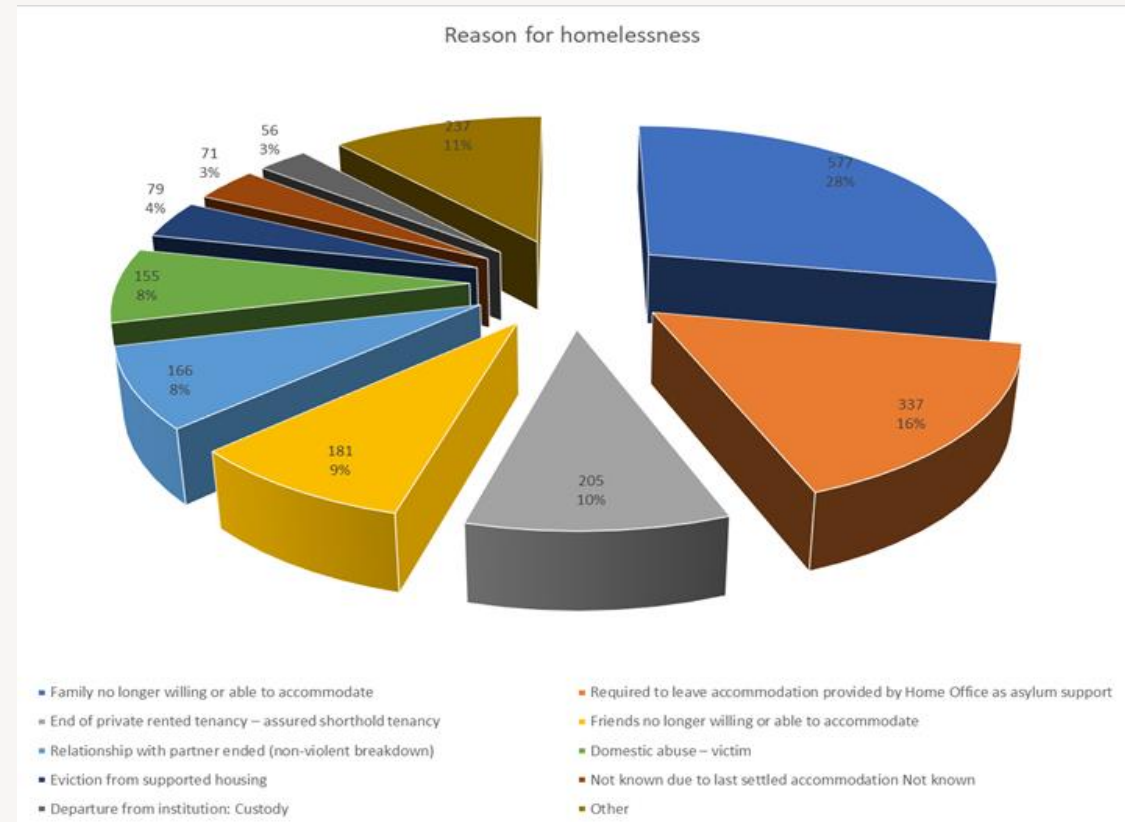
Homelessness and Emergency Accommodation

We are working closely with private landlords to find new alternative accommodation for those that approach us and have nowhere else to go as the pressures on social housing within Sandwell means for most people this is not a realistic immediate solution. To combat the increased demand leading more placements of bed & breakfast, we are now mobilising a further additional homeless centre consisting of 35 self-contained flats.

This year has seen another busy period for the number of households presenting as at risk of or already homeless. The service saw an **39% increase** in presentations.

Reason for homelessness

- Family no longer willing or able to accommodate - 28%
- Required to leave accommodation provided by Home Office as asylum support - 16%
- End of private rented tenancy – assured shorthold tenancy 10%
- Friends no longer willing or able to accommodate 9%
- Relationship with partner ended (non-violent breakdown) 8%
- Domestic abuse – victim 8%
- Eviction from supported housing 4%
- Not known due to last settled accommodation Not known 3%
- Departure from institution: Custody 3%
- Other 11%



Rough Sleeping and Complex Needs

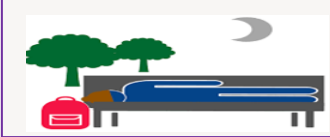
The council assist individuals with complex needs using a single all-encompassing key worker approach to reduce silo working and hand offs for people who are at risk of or already rough sleeping. The model is based on one person working with the individual to develop a relationship and build trust - a key step in gaining engagement from rough sleepers and those with complex needs. Once the trust is built, the Complex Case Officer will develop a support plan and will coordinate all of the other agencies needed to help meet the persons need. This includes support for health, mental health, substance misuse and access to income. Whilst helping with this plan, the team will identify the best accommodation for them at each stage and help them through the housing pathway.



Housed 106
rough sleepers
in longer term
accommodation



Reduced the
prevalence of
rough sleepers
by **79% in the
last 5 years.**



Supported over
**234 rough
sleepers** with
accommodation
and support

Our Partners

Sandwell Council's Housing Solutions Service works with a range of partners to help us deliver our range of services. These range from public sector departments and services to third sector agencies and providers.

These partners have a role to play in preventing and relieving homelessness, supporting people at risk of already rough sleeping and helping support refugees and people seeking asylum to settle in Sandwell.

We would like to take this opportunity to mention our partners and to thank them for their continued support.



Service Priorities

The Housing Directorate has a number of priorities for the forthcoming year alongside delivery of good quality services that meets the expectations of our customers. Housing Solutions has a number of statutory duties but has a role to play in enhancing the offer to the residents of Sandwell. For the 2023/24 year, the service has identified 4 high level priorities in addition to the previous objectives:

Customer Journey

We will strive to put our customer at the heart of everything we do. We want to increase customer satisfaction and put in place improvements plans where necessary to ensure that we meet our customer expectations. The service has a number of new customer standards including triaging homelessness cases within 10 working days and fully assessing housing applications within 30 days. Plans within the service will continue to build to ensure every person accessing our services has a good experience.

Best use of stock

We need to review both our allocations policy and the current housing waiting list. At present the wait lists are increasing and time taken to secure a property is increasing year on year. The service needs to work with tenants and other housing sectors to make sure we are making best use of stock, including incentivising downsizing and ensuring housing options are tailored to people's options and affordability. Housing now have a dedicated best use of stock team.

Corporate Parenting

We will continue to act as 'corporate parents and support people who are or have been in the care system to access suitable and good quality housing - supporting a good start in life. The service will work with other partners to provide a clear local offer with help accessing accommodation, help with welfare rights advice and assistance with rent and deposits if they wish to move into the private rented sector. In partnership with St Basils, the live and work scheme provides apprenticeships and affordable rents to young people in Sandwell and the service has expanded the interim accommodation offer for young people.

Supported Housing

The housing market and needs of our service users have changed since the last review of supported housing. As a direct result of this and after analysing what will be a better fit for the needs of the local community, the service has successfully retendered the supported housing provision.

CUSTOMER
JOURNEY

BEST USE OF
STOCK

CORPORATE
PARENTING

SUPPORTED
HOUSING

Key Successes and Challenges

We would like to bring awareness of the current challenges as well as highlight the key successes the service has experienced

The next few years will see a number of ongoing and new challenges facing the service, with the key pressure being the lack of affordable housing within Sandwell and nationally. This coupled with the current cost of living pressures means that availability of suitable housing for our customers is low whilst demand is increasing. The service has plans in place to mitigate these pressures and to continue to improve our services. These can be seen over the page.

Challenges

- Increasingly more difficult to access the Private Rented Sector and the emerging plans around abolishment of section 21 and tax changes mean this will only become more difficult in 2024/25
- Demand for private rented accommodation significantly outstrips capacity – this means the market has choice and can afford to be risk averse. This is raising rental rates beyond affordable levels for most of our customers
- The cost-of-living pressures will have led to increased homelessness presentations, and this shows no signs of slowing in the coming year
- The turnover of social housing has reduced throughout 2023/24. The number of properties advertised each week has reduced to around 20 per week but as low as 11 some weeks
- Rising prevalence of rough sleeping nationally and locally. The service is now seeing an average of 8 rough sleepers per month during 2023/24
- The number of families requiring temporary accommodation has put pressure on the service budget and people are spending longer in bed and breakfast type accommodation

Key Successes

- Introduced auto-registration enabling customers to join our housing register
- Dealt with significant increases in homelessness demand whilst meeting our triage customer service standard
- Enhanced our front door support and improved the customer journey
- Mobilised additional in-house self-contained temporary accommodation units – reducing the need for bed and breakfast
- Further developed incentives for the private rented sector to provide suitable properties
- Retendered supported accommodation provision
- Had one of the highest homelessness prevention rates nationally

Our plans for 2023/24



Thank You

We would like to take a moment to thank you. We understand that we are in stressful times and appreciate your cooperation and trust whilst delivering the very best service we can.

At Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council our mission is to provide safe and effective housing solutions that meet your needs. We strive to create a community where everyone feels valued and respected.

Your satisfaction is our top priority, and we are committed to continuously improving our services to better meet your expectations.

We would also like to extend our gratitude to those who have provided feedback and suggestions for improvement. Your input is invaluable to us, and we are constantly striving to enhance our services based on your valuable insights.

Our dedicated team of professionals will continue to work tirelessly to ensure that you are supported during your journey with the service and continue to meet your housing needs.



Alan Lunt
Executive Director
of Place



Councillor Vicki
Smith
Cabinet Member
for Housing and
built environment



Karl Robinson
Head of Service
Housing Solutions