



State of the District Report -

Homelessness within Mid Devon: Position Statement

By Mike Parker

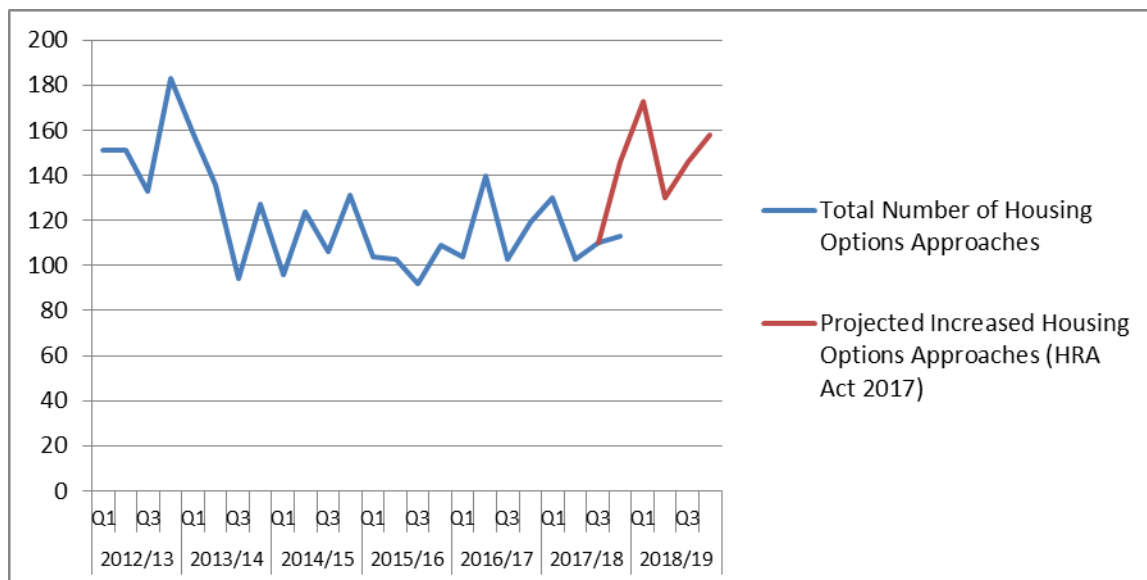
April 2018.

Version 1.7

1.0 State of the District Report - Homelessness within Mid Devon.

- 1.1 As a strategic housing authority, the Council is obliged to offer homeless households assistance in accordance with the provisions of the Housing Act 1996. There is a main duty to secure permanent accommodation (which may be a private rented tenancy), although the obligation may entail providing advice and assistance, for example, through housing advice or referrals to other housing providers.
- 1.2 Local authorities do not have a duty to provide accommodation for all homeless people, only for those who are judged to fall within certain categories of 'priority need'. The categories of priority need are specified in section 189 of the Housing Act 1996 and were expanded in 2002. Local authorities have a duty to make the necessary enquiries to ascertain what level of duty they owe to an applicant.
- 1.3 In 2017/18 within Mid Devon, there were over 450 approaches made to the local authority, compared to 2008/09 when we had over 700 approaches. Temporary accommodation budget spend has reduced since 2011/12 with officers spending more time assessing applicants to move out of bed and breakfast. However, over the last four years the demand and costs for temporary accommodation has increased to over £103k in 2018.

2.0 Housing Options Approaches 2012-2018

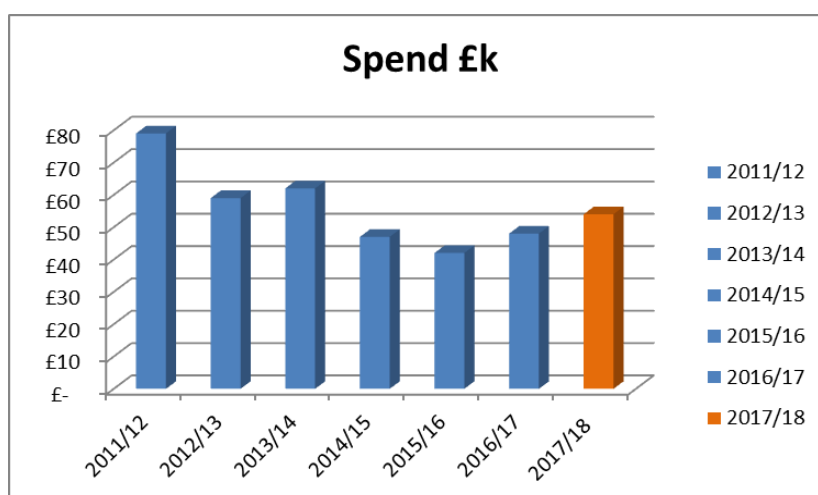


- 2.1 The new Homelessness Reduction Act was implemented with effect from the beginning of April 2018. It is estimated that the changes being introduced by this legislation will increase the applicants presenting as homeless. It is expected that local authorities will be placing more people into temporary accommodation for longer periods. The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) has estimated that there will be a 33% increase in these applications due to the fact that the Council will have a legal

duty to assist applicants when they are threatened with homelessness. These legislative changes will mean that the Council's spending on homelessness will increase.

- 2.2 The cost of helping applicants to secure existing or alternative accommodation in the District has dropped over the last few years; however, it has become more difficult to assist applicants in this way, due to landlords often being unwilling to assist those applicants referred by the Council. One example of this would be where a landlord has accepted a referral in the past and then the tenant has gone into rent arrears. In these situations landlords are reluctant to take another referral. It has been noted that some landlords prefer to rent their properties to people who are working and not those whose income is derived from welfare benefits.

3.0 Deposit and Advance Rent Budget Summary:

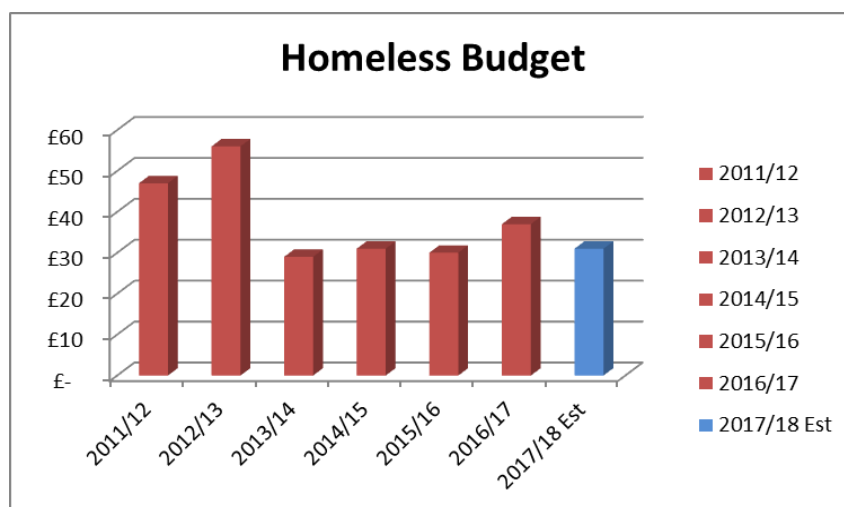


- 3.1 This diagram shows spending on our Deposit and Advance Rent Scheme (DARS) over the period from 2011/12 – 2017/18. This scheme is used to assist applicants to secure accommodation in the private sector. The Council can assist with payments for deposits, bonds or advance rent. Payments are made in the form of a loan and applicants are expected to pay them back. Action to recover these debts is pro-active although given that the client group is usually vulnerable, it is usual for the Council to enter into arrangements so that the debt is paid back in instalments.

- 3.2 Spending on temporary accommodation in the District has also increased over the last 12 months after some of the local bed and breakfast providers no longer accept applicants referred by the Council (due to high risks associated with Council referrals/insurance conditions). In addition, there has been a decrease in available accommodation which the Council is prepared to use, due to property standards deteriorating. However, we are currently working

with one provider who is investing to improve a large property and it is anticipated that this situation will improve in 2018/19.

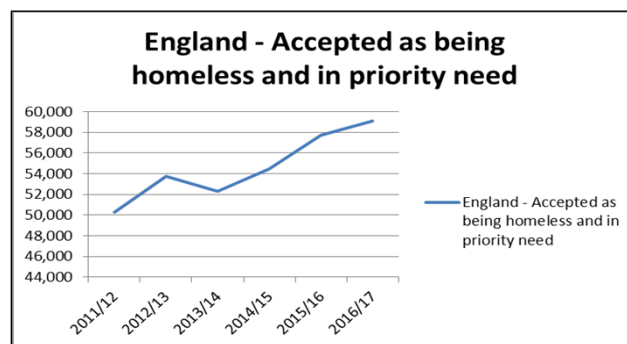
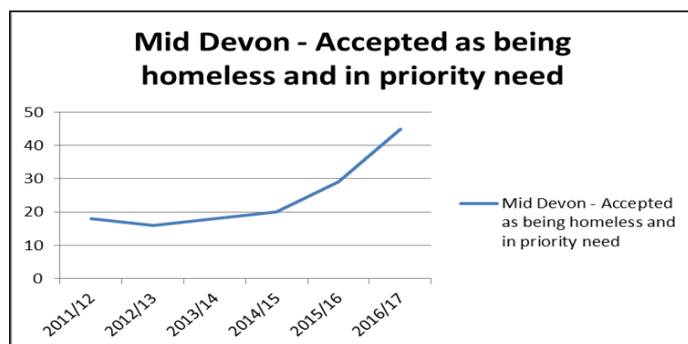
4.0 Temporary Accommodation Budget Summary:



5.0 Statutory Homelessness Decisions

5.1 Local authorities have a duty to make the necessary inquiries to ascertain what level of duty they owe an applicant. Detailed below is a summary of the last 6 years for decisions made under the Housing Act 1996.

6.0 Statutory Homeless Acceptances – Mid Devon



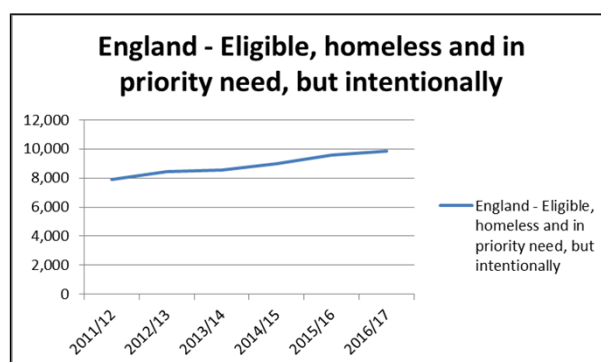
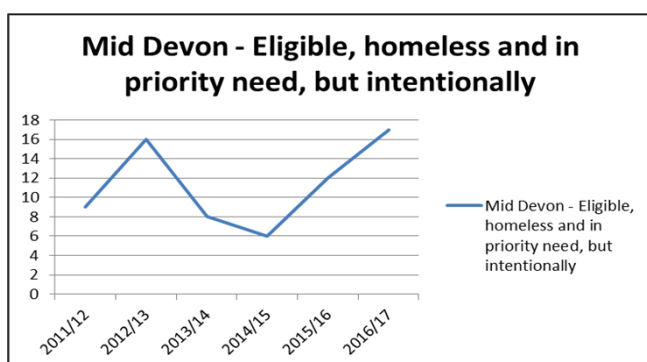
6.1 The Mid Devon figures for statutory acceptances have seen the same trend increases compared with the national averages. Assisting those deemed to be in priority need is a statutory obligation for the Council. When considering these figures, it is important to note that the intervention of the Housing Options team has successfully prevented many other households becoming homeless.

6.2 There can be a lack of affordable private rented accommodation to offer someone threatened with homelessness. Many landlords within Mid Devon are reluctant to take on large families or households where there may be

family members who may exhibit challenging behaviours, therefore leaving the local authority to house those vulnerable households.

7.0 Intentionally Homeless – Mid Devon

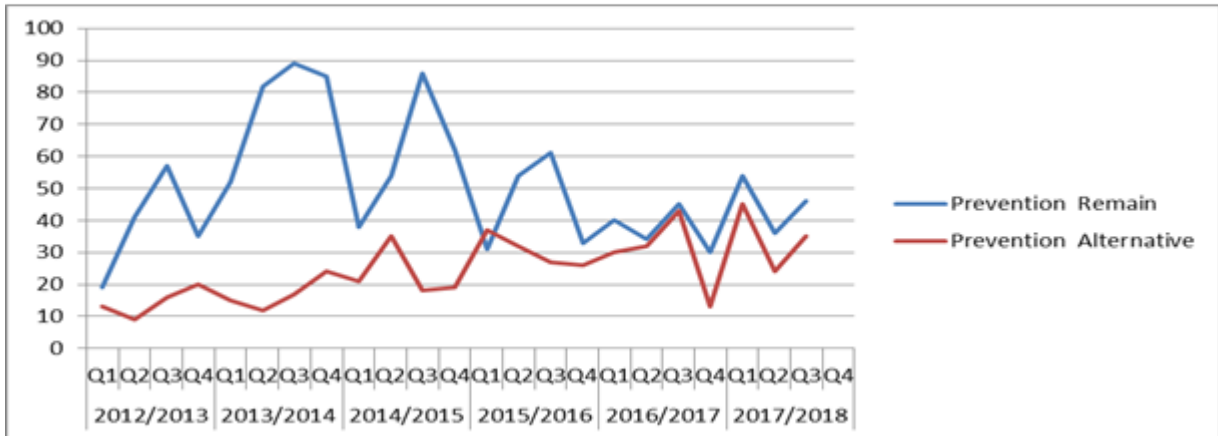
7.1 The number of households found to be intentionally homeless is increasing within the District and across England. This is due to issues such as high private rents, spare bedroom deduction, welfare reform and universal credit, issues which have resulted in tenants across all tenures failing to make the required rent payments. Increasingly, those seeking assistance have rent arrears and other debts, and do not have the capacity to achieve financial resilience, for various reasons.



7.2 Housing Options officers will always negotiate with either the tenant/s or landlord, to help prevent the tenant from becoming homeless. Early prevention work is key when preventing homelessness, over the last three years; officers have been committed to helping applicants remain in their current accommodation.

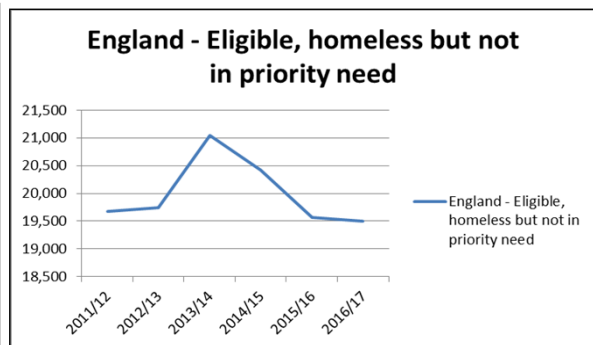
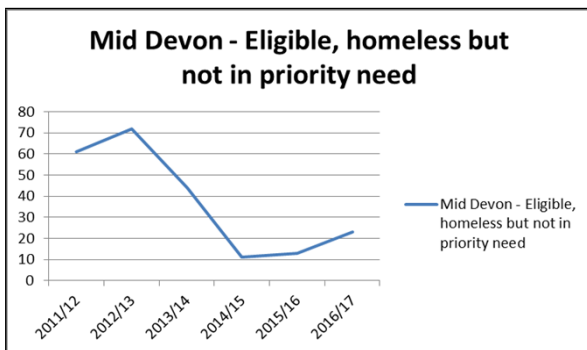
7.3 Should the local authority find a household intentionally homeless then the local authority will not owe a full housing duty. In such cases, the Council can offer assistance using the DARS scheme and assist such applicants to find alternative accommodation in the private sector. Our Officers will also give advice on applying for a home via Devon Home Choice (DHC).. Other areas of help may be via mediation, financial payments, debt advice, organising a re-payment plan, sanctuary scheme, crisis intervention, negotiations etc.

8.0 Prevention Work



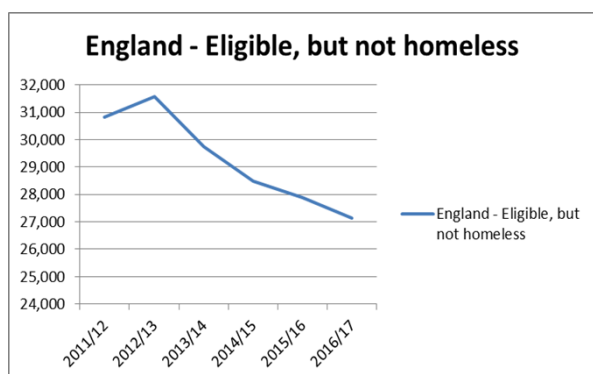
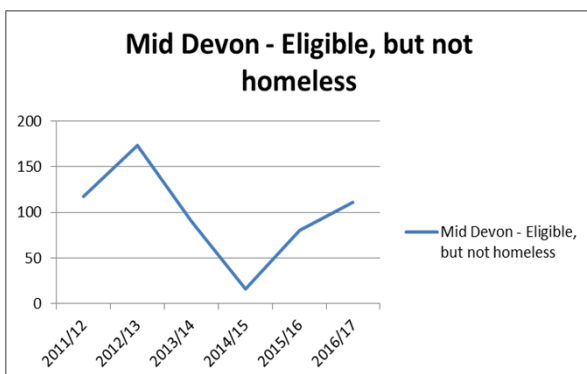
9.0 Homeless but not in Priority Need – Mid Devon

9.1 Councils across the country have tried to reduce the number of homeless applications over the last few years by offering Housing Options interviews with applicants who may be classed as non-priority; this has decreased the amount of decisions made for applicants who are classed as non-priority under the act.

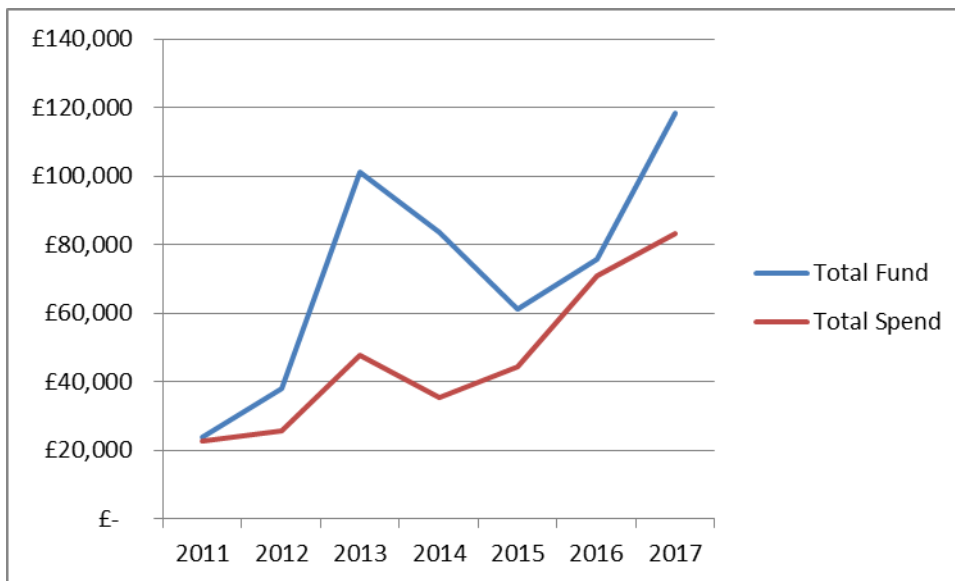


10.0 Not Homeless – Mid Devon

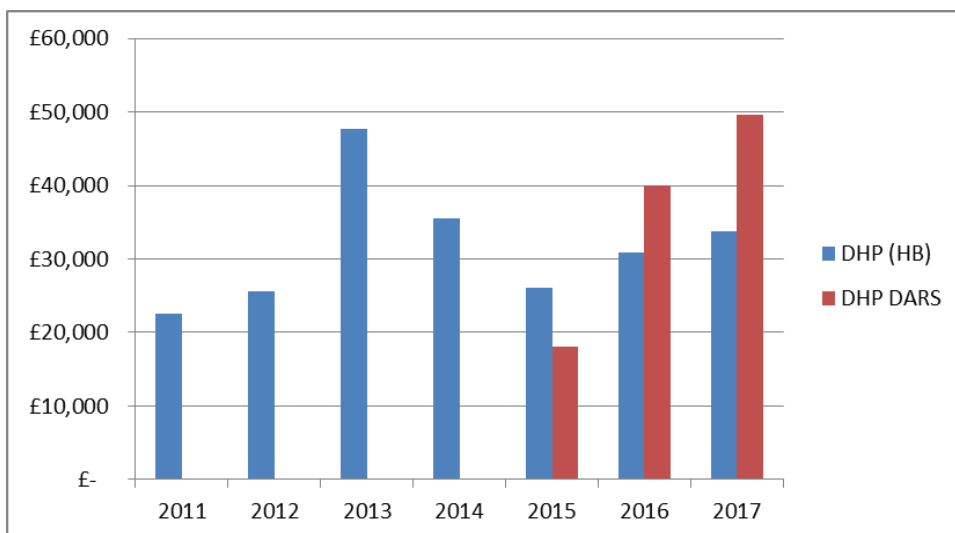
10.1 Over the last three years, there has been an increase in the amount of homeless prevention work. Officers have been able to intervene at an early stage to help applicants remain in their accommodation or to source alternative accommodation. This has been done by using discretionary Housing Payments of Housing Benefit (DHP) and by using this budget to help tenants to remain in their existing accommodation.



11.0 Discretionary Housing Payments



DHP Split summary



It has only been agreed from 2015 that the Housing Options team have access to the DHP budget, to allow applicants to access DHP to secure funding for housing. Since then the Housing Options have maximised the amount available to them

12.0 Rough Sleeping Statistics - Autumn 2017, England

12.1 This set of data provides information on the single night snapshot of rough sleeping that is taken annually in England using street counts and intelligence driven estimates. In 2017, as in previous years, estimates have been used. These are intelligence-based assessments relating to people sleeping rough. In order to obtain the estimates, local authorities consult local agencies such as outreach workers, the Police, the voluntary sector and faith groups who

have regular contact with rough sleepers on the street, and who can help with gathering intelligence.

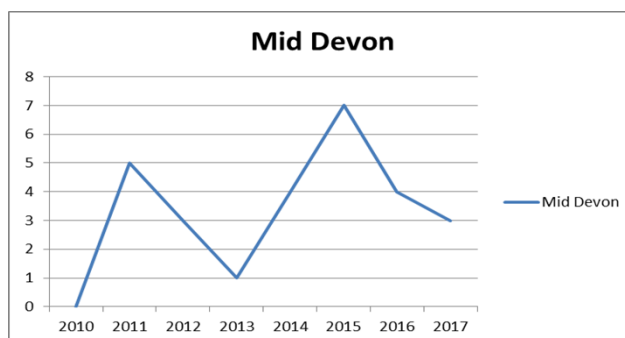
- The autumn 2017 total number of rough sleepers counted and estimated in England was 4,751.
- That was up 617, or 15% from the autumn 2016 total of 4,134.
- The number of rough sleepers increased by 173, or 18% in London and 444 or 14% in the rest of England since autumn 2016.
- London represented 24% of the England total rough sleepers in autumn 2017. This is up from 23% of the England total in autumn 2016.
- 14% of rough sleepers were women, 20% were non-UK nationals and 8% were under 25 years old.

13.0 Rough Sleeping – Mid Devon - South West

Local authority / Region	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	Number of households 2017 ('000) ²	2017 rough sleeping rate (per 1,000 households)
England	1,768	2,181	2,309	2,414	2,744	3,569	4,134	4,751	23,464	0.20
<i>% change from previous year</i>		23	6	5	14	30	16	15		
London	415	446	557	543	742	940	964	1,137	3,652	0.31
<i>% change from previous year</i>		7	25	-3	37	27	3	18		
<i>% of England total</i>	23	20	24	22	27	26	23	24		
Rest of England	1,353	1,735	1,752	1,871	2,002	2,629	3,170	3,614	19,812	0.18
<i>% change from previous year</i>		28	1	7	7	31	21	14		
<i>% of England total</i>	77	80	76	78	73	74	77	76		
South West	270	337	301	308	362	509	536	580	2,402	0.24
<i>% change from previous year</i>		25	-11	2	18	41	5	8		
<i>% of England total</i>	15	15	13	13	13	14	13	12		

13.1 Mid Devon is working in partnership with Julian House, as part of the Trailblazer bid with Exeter, Teignbridge and East Devon District Council. The partnership arrangement will last until March 2019. Julian House provides an outreach service for Mid Devon, where they will engage with any rough sleepers in the District. Workers visit the District in the early hours of the morning to seek reported rough sleepers. They will try to engage with them to encourage them seek help and assistance.

	Cornwall	East Devon	Exeter	Mid Devon	North Devon	Plymouth	South Hams	Teignbridge	Torbay	Torrige	West Devon
2010	65	3	21	0	12	9	5	3	6	10	3
2011	80	8	29	5	16	18	6	8	3	4	4
2012	50	5	30	3	11	10	7	4	6	1	2
2013	77	4	23	1	7	9	8	0	5	3	0
2014	40	6	34	4	11	13	7	4	17	5	2
2015	65	8	27	7	28	12	9	1	21	0	0
2016	99	5	41	4	16	20	3	3	20	2	0
2017	68	6	35	3	20	26	7	3	24	4	0



- 13.2 Although the rough sleeper count in Mid Devon has increased since 2010, it has decreased over the past 2 years. In 2015, it peaked due to there being a couple sleeping rough in the district causing the numbers to rise. The trends indicate that all of our rough sleepers are white British males; aged between 18 and 45. A high percentage of rough sleepers have indicated that they have some mental health, drug or alcohol issues whilst sleeping rough. Often, these applicants tend not to engage with the relevant services for help. This year, two of the three rough sleepers in the District continue not to engage with the Council or Julian House due to various reasons. We are trying to assist the third applicant in partnership with other agencies in the county.



14.0 Partnership Working with East Devon, Exeter, Teignbridge

- 14.1 In late 2016, a partnership of four Local Authorities, Teignbridge, Exeter City Council, East Devon District Council and Mid Devon District Council were successful with a bid to Department for Communities and Local Government (now the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government) to become a Homeless Prevention Trailblazer. The partnership was awarded £359,000 over a two year period.

14.2 The Trailblazer bid includes the following projects:-

- 14.3 Homeless Prevention Champion (HPC) - Project led by Community Housing Aid developing a wide ranging new initiative which seeks to identify, promote and support homeless prevention activity across the four local authority areas. The service will also provide access to a homeless prevention outcomes pot, which will enable voluntary sector agencies to claim payments for their prevention activities.

14.4 To deliver this, the HPC will:

- Employ a dedicated Prevention Co-ordinator
- Host a new website & social media channels, which will offer resources, case studies and provide access to the outcomes 'pot'

- Actively engage with agencies concerned with or affected by homelessness and its prevention.
- Work with homeless charities in Devon to identify any related training or support needs and respond accordingly

- 14.5 Homeless Advice Guides and E-Learning Platform – Project is led by Citizens Advice Exeter. The platform will empower households to take an active part in resolving their own housing difficulties, by enhancing their options to manage their own property search and a sustainable tenancy. This would include debt advice, property help guides, landlord lists etc. The project will feature instructional videos with a current cohort of homeless people to offer a lived experience insight and improve the credibility of the content. A key component will be the Personal Asset Review, which once completed by clients, will act as a passport to better housing in the private rental market. Through this, applicants will be encouraged to review their situation and focus on a strength-based approach by highlighting what they have to offer a potential landlord. We will also actively encourage enhancement of confidence and wider skills through embedded digital resources derived from the print Advice Guides.
- 14.6 In addition, Citizens Advice Exeter, will research, develop (design and write), distribute and train organisations in using a new suite of Advice Guides to tackle the root causes of homelessness. These advice guides once developed will be available online, with links from other providers to the web page. Our focus will be on producing a series of guides based around life events, including: redundancy, relationship breakdown, birth of a new baby (planned or unplanned), disability or illness, leaving institutions and bereavement. Catering for such ‘life events’, these guides will mitigate homelessness by putting an accurate source of information directly into the hands of a person when they need it most.
- 14.7 Tenancy Rescue Officers, Tenancy Rescue Fund and Landlord Incentive Pot – The Tenancy Officer will respond to landlords’ calls for help when facing difficulties with their tenants. Fast response to issues around rent arrears or anti-social behaviour can resolve the problem before a threat of homelessness is established. A ‘tenancy rescue fund’ will help workers find creative solutions. Intervention before tenancy breakdown removes the emotive barriers that eviction prevention brings once the landlord has started the process.
- 14.8 Landlord Incentive Pot can be drawn down to initiate new shared houses across the four areas, can help pay towards works or incentive for landlord to work with us.

14.9 Tenancy Passport Coaching – Led by St Petrocks, this project is designed to deliver tenancy training sessions. These are being held at venues in Exeter, East Devon, Mid Devon and Teignbridge, on a rolling basis. The course will be available for anyone who is currently experiencing homelessness or in temporary accommodation with referrals made directly through agreed referral agencies to a specific referral email address. The training course will operate on a rotation of 5 separate 2-hour modules and cover various aspects of managing a tenancy and living independently. There will be flexibility to adapt the course schedule and modules in line with level of demand, requirements and attendance rates.

15.0 Universal Credit

15.1 The roll out of Universal Credit (UC) has been delayed in Mid Devon until July 2018, following the recent announcements in the Chancellors budget (November 2017). But early indications show UC may cause problems to the service due to delayed payments and DWP & UC administration users.

15.2 From May 2018, most working age people living in Mid Devon who need to make a new claim for Housing Benefit, Jobseekers Allowance, Employment and Support Allowance, Income Support, Working Tax Credit or Child Tax Credit will have to apply for Universal Credit.

15.3 If there are issues with tenants on Universal Credit claiming housing costs, there is a risk that there may be more evictions, thus increasing pressure on budgets relating to homelessness due to the additional statutory obligations on strategic housing authorities.