

Preventing homelessness before crisis in Portsmouth – Cllr Darren Sanders

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The situation in 2023

- **Too little homelessness being prevented** – just under 200 (23%).
- **No integrated strategy**, only separate ones for (statutory) homelessness and rough sleeping
- **Structural issues:**
 - Living on an island
 - No trust in private rented sector
 - Problems in building council homes

WHAT CHANGED?

1. A unified homelessness strategy

- Detailed systems review of provision and why prevention was so low
- Strategic aims
 1. Prevent homelessness
 2. End rough-sleeping
 3. Provide the right accommodation
 4. Provide the right support
 5. Strengthen collaboration ('making homelessness everybody's business')

2. Change the governance

- Single rough sleeping group replaced by model based on BCP Council
- Multi-agency Homelessness Partnership Board overseeing strategy (inc director-level membership from Adults', Children's, Public Health and suppliers). Link to Health and Wellbeing Board, housing portfolio holder and main Cabinet
- Theme groups for each strategic aim reporting to main Board to ensure holistic approach.
- Autumn 2026: in process of refreshing the action plan for the final 2 years of the current strategy

3. Get to cases earlier

- **Make service easier to reach:**
 - Removed barriers to access
 - Open access; in-person approaches encouraged
 - Improved, welcoming space
 - Initial advice given at point of contact
- **More promotion of and training for duty-to-refer:** to statutory and non-statutory partners
 - Early referrals encouraged
- **More funding for assessment and advice team** to meet demand

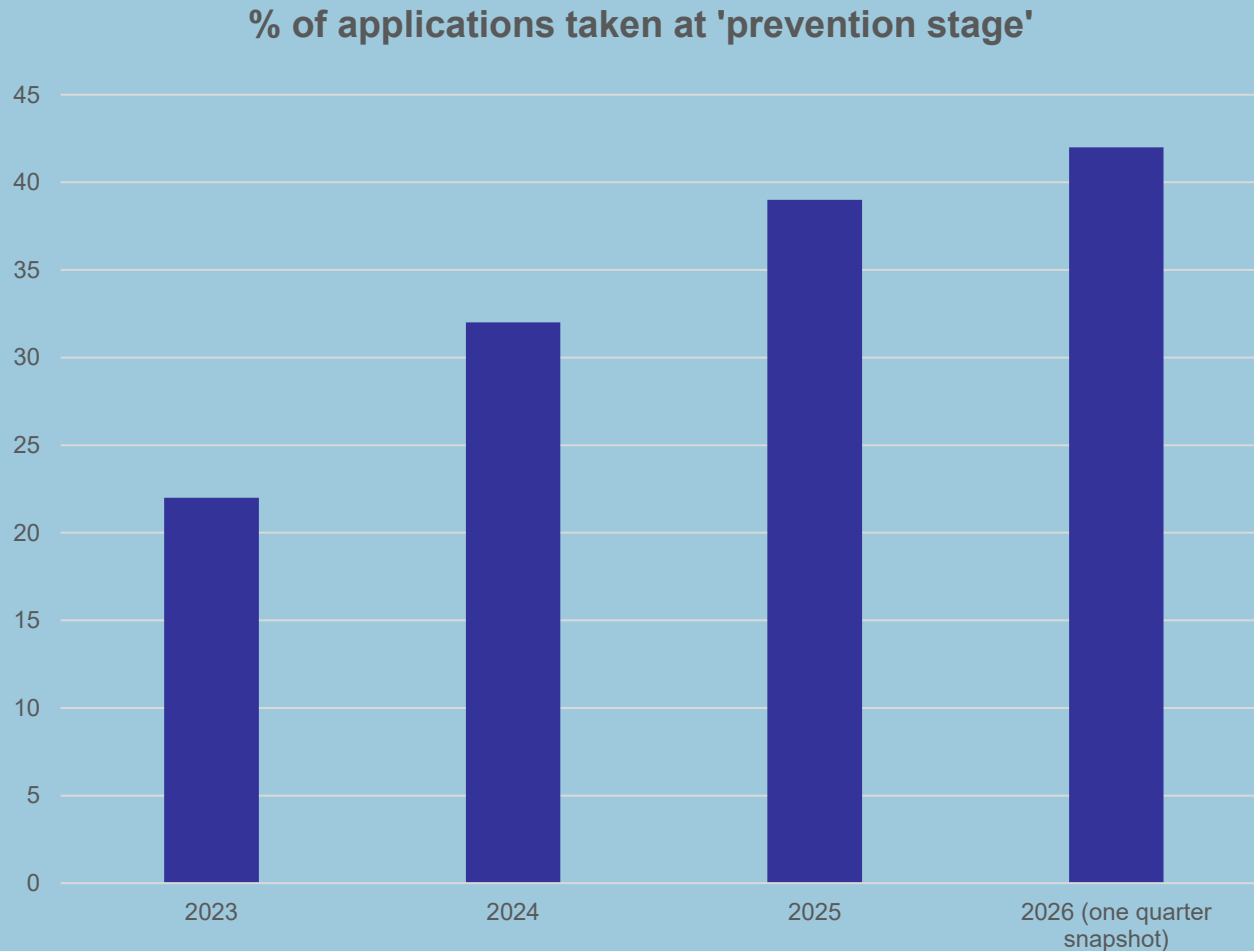
4. Tackle the causes of the causes

- Create **multi-disciplinary roles** that respond to homelessness applications, responding to the most common causes
 - Money advisers
 - Domestic abuse housing specialist
 - Accommodation Sustainment Officers
- **Make home visits standard practice for all familial evictions** – great flexibility allowed to understand and respond to the root cause of eviction
- **Built strong relationships with private landlords** = increased access to private rented sector

5. Humanise the system

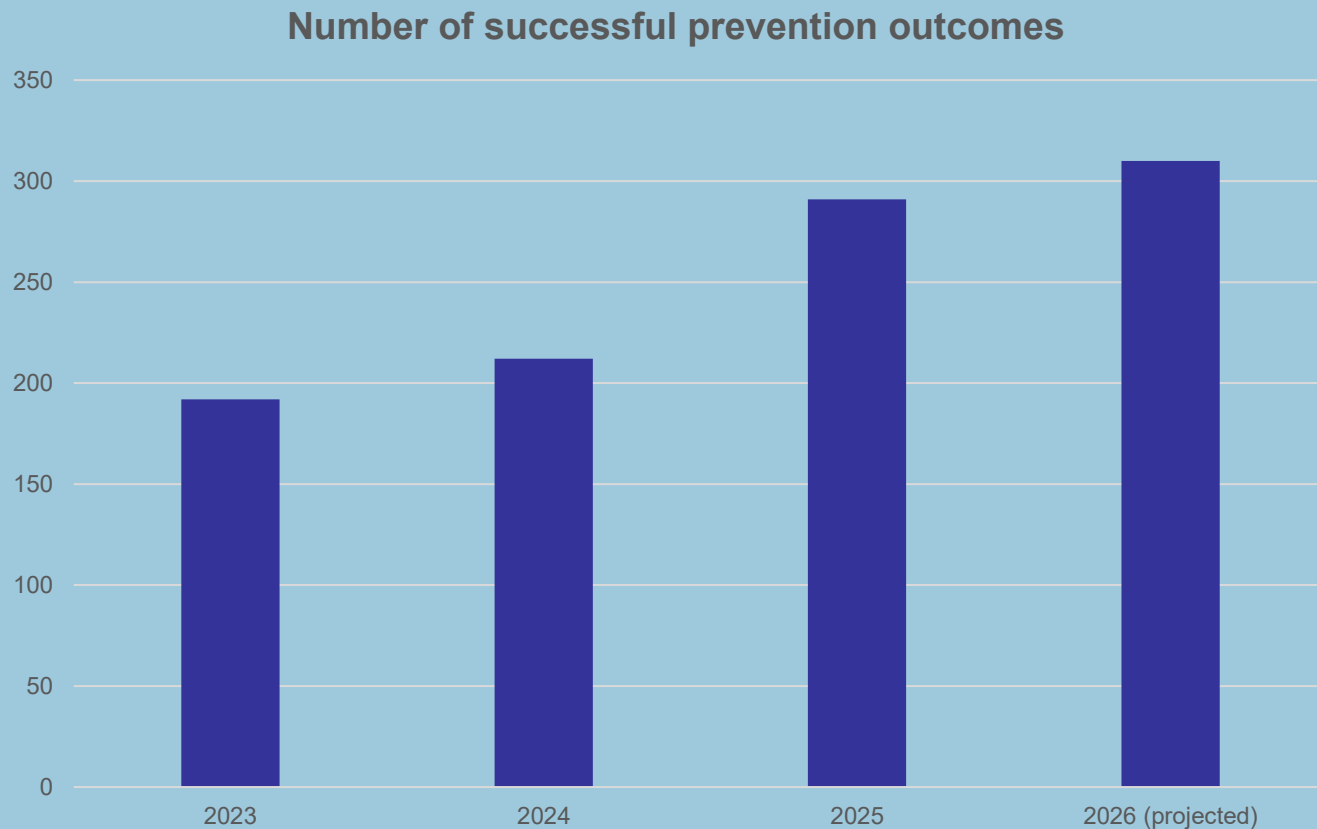
- Better quality of and collaboration for personalised housing plans
- Cut applications being ended due to lost contact – establish a protocol to reduce revolving door of applications
- ‘Pre-eviction protocol’ agreed with providers of supported housing
- Promote alternatives for those who experienced domestic abuse but do not want to leave the home (e.g. court options to exclude perpetrator, target-hardening)
- Allocation policy changes = more lets to households who are not homeless without reducing allocations to homeless households

Outcome 1: More applications at prevention stage



Outcome 2: More homelessness prevented

- This runs alongside an increase in the overall number of allocations



CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS

1. Costs

- Portsmouth housing market remains unaffordable for many: relatively low wages, high private rents, low LHA
- Local and national housing crisis, homelessness continues to rise – TA figures rising
- True prevention - remaining in the same property - is often impossible and not preventable. Alternative accommodation is needed, but in Portsmouth, we have a problem of....

2. Living on an island (i)

- Not enough land spare for future developments
- Grant funding for affordable housing delivery historically limited
- Age of current HRA assets means significant money to maintain and improve them
- New housing supply across RP's has failed to keep pace with housing need and homelessness pressures

3. Living on an island (ii)

- Allocations up – but more than 3000 households across Portsmouth and Havant on remain on waiting list.
- Private rented sector remains inaccessible for many and sustainable for others only with intervention / financial assistance
- PCC allocated £131m over six years to buy back homes, including 200 homes for TA 2025-27. More than 800 already bought. Further work on what to do started due to TA demand.

4. Competing priorities

- Overall homelessness levels rising - more than 500 TA households need a permanent home
- Supported housing and existing 100-bed rough sleeping provision regularly at capacity.
- Government wants everything, everywhere, all at once:
 - Give all rough sleepers a home from April – where?
 - Any LGR means disruption and a £67m budget gap – how fill it?
 - Ensure all homes meet building safety standards when regulator takes a year to reply.
 - Let the Mayor sort homelessness – why?