



Public Consultation Outcome Report: Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Draft Strategy Proposals

January 2025

1. Background

- 1.1 Section 1(4) of the Homelessness Act 2002 requires local authorities to publish a new Homelessness Strategy, based on the results of a Homelessness Review, every 5 years. The strategy must set out the Council's ambitions for preventing homelessness, securing sufficient accommodation for people who may become homeless, and securing satisfactory provision of support for people who are or may become homeless.
- 1.2 In response to increasing demand for suitable and affordable housing and the existing levels of homelessness, a new strategy is needed to ensure that it reflects current priorities. Spelthorne Borough Council's current Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy was last published in Spring 2020 and is due to be updated by Spring 2025.
- 1.3 The Government's Homelessness Code of Guidance states that the Council must consult public or local authorities, voluntary organisations or other persons as they consider appropriate before adopting a Homelessness Strategy. It also notes that the Council will also wish to consult with service users and specialist agencies that provide support to homeless people in the borough. Additionally, the Local Government Association suggests that it is best practice to consult the public for a minimum of 6 weeks¹.
- 1.4 Following pre-engagement with stakeholders and service users, combined with findings from a Homelessness Review that analysed data from the last 5 years, the Council's new draft strategy proposes 3 key strategic areas:
 - I. Partnership working: a multi-agency approach to tackling homelessness.
 - II. Identifying opportunities to address housing need.
 - III. Proactive homelessness prevention and an effective service response.
- 1.5 These strategic priorities are supported by a draft detailed Action Plan that will act as a working document.

¹ Source: <https://www.local.gov.uk/our-support/leadership-workforce-and-communications/comms-hub-communications-support/resident>

- 1.6 Spelthorne Borough Council held a public consultation on the proposed Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy from Monday 9th December 2024 to Sunday 19th January 2025 via the Council's consultation website (hard copies were also available to residents at all Spelthorne libraries and at the Council Offices). Respondents provided feedback through a short questionnaire which included a mixture of closed and open questions. A copy of the proposed revised strategy, action plan, homelessness review and privacy notice were provided.

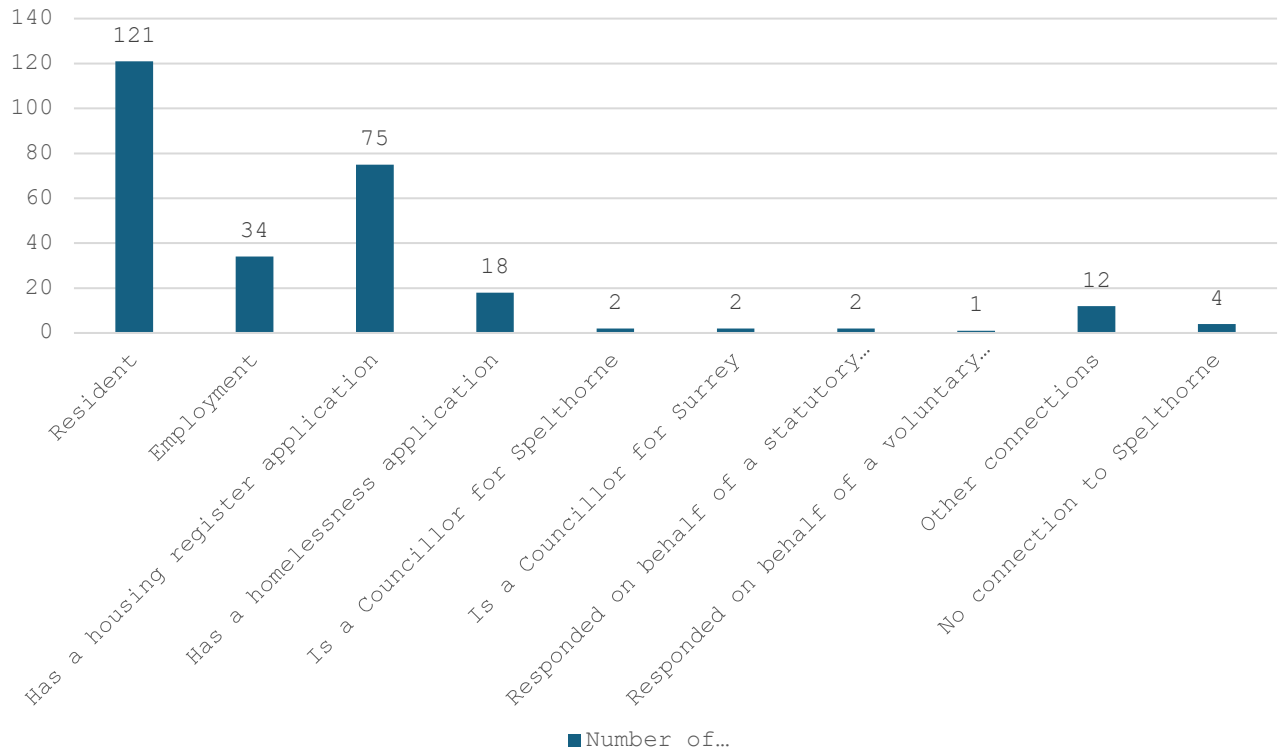
2. How the consultation was promoted

- 2.1 To ensure as many residents as possible had the opportunity to take part in the consultation, the Council used a variety of communication channels. This included the publication of a press release, information on the news and consultation sections of the website, repeated posts on social media channels, an article in the e-newsletter, email alerts, posters on neighbourhood noticeboards and adverts on digital screens in the town centre.
- 2.2 To ensure those most impacted by the strategy were made aware of the consultation, direct emails were sent to all applicants currently on the housing register and applicants who have a homelessness application with the Council.
- 2.3 All councillors were emailed advising them of the consultation details. Furthermore, partners across Surrey were informed of the consultation via Spelthorne's Homelessness Prevention Forum network.

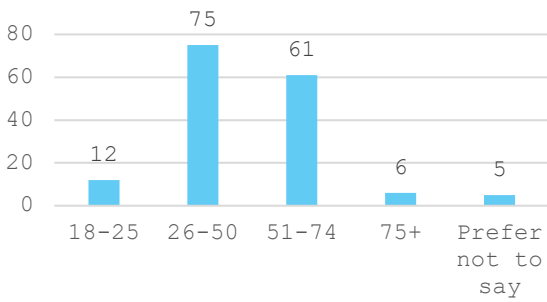
3. Summary of responses

- 3.1 In total, there have been 159 responses to the online public consultation. The majority are Spelthorne residents and/or have an existing application on the Council's housing register. The demographics of respondents are provided below, this includes some equality and diversity monitoring data.

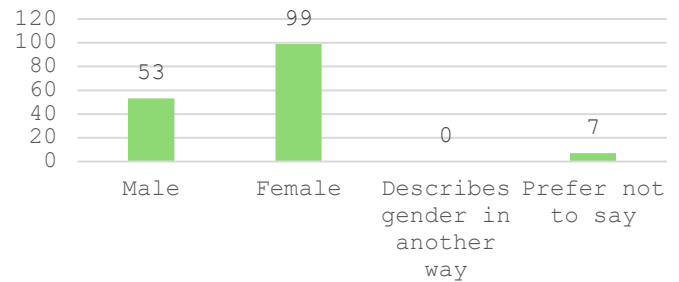
The connections of respondents to Spelthorne



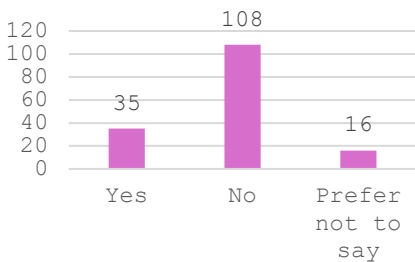
Age of respondents



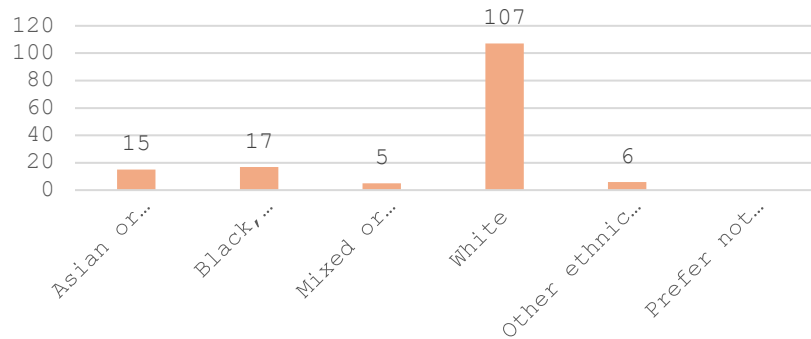
Gender of respondents



Respondents have a disability

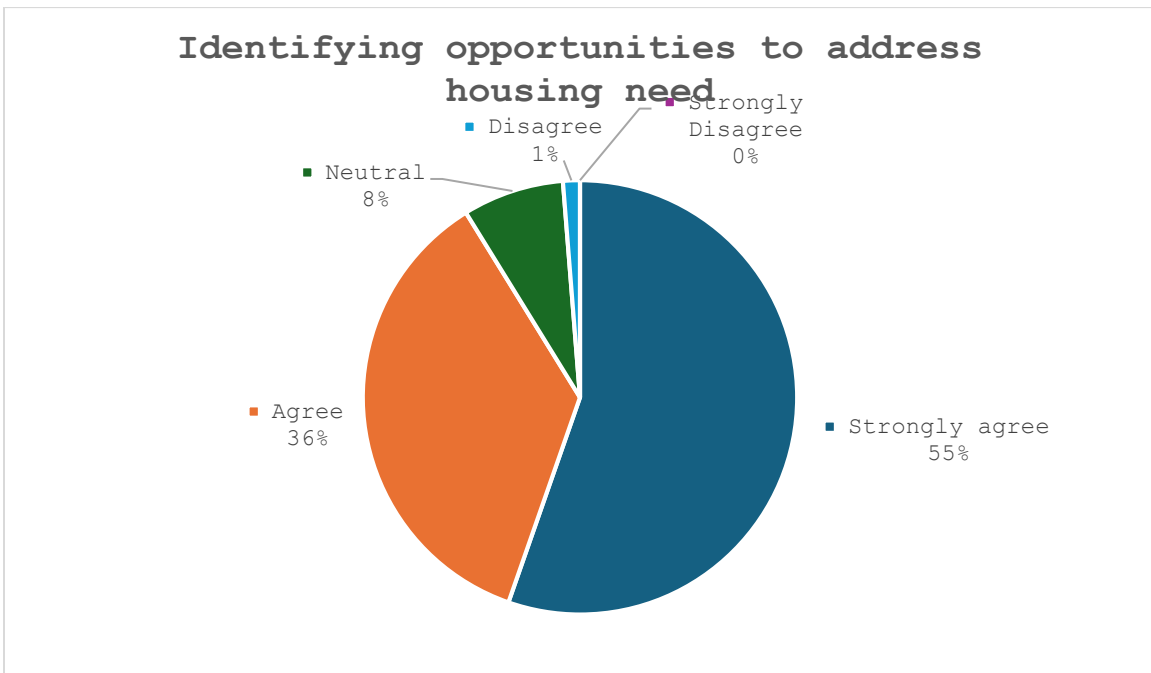
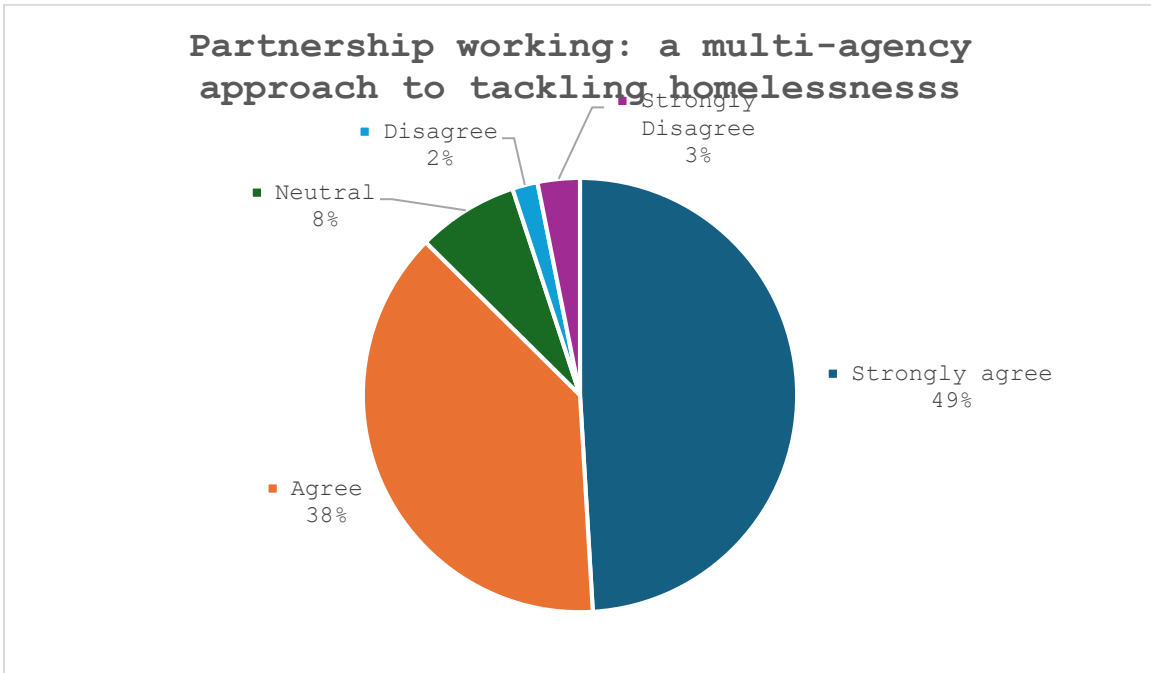


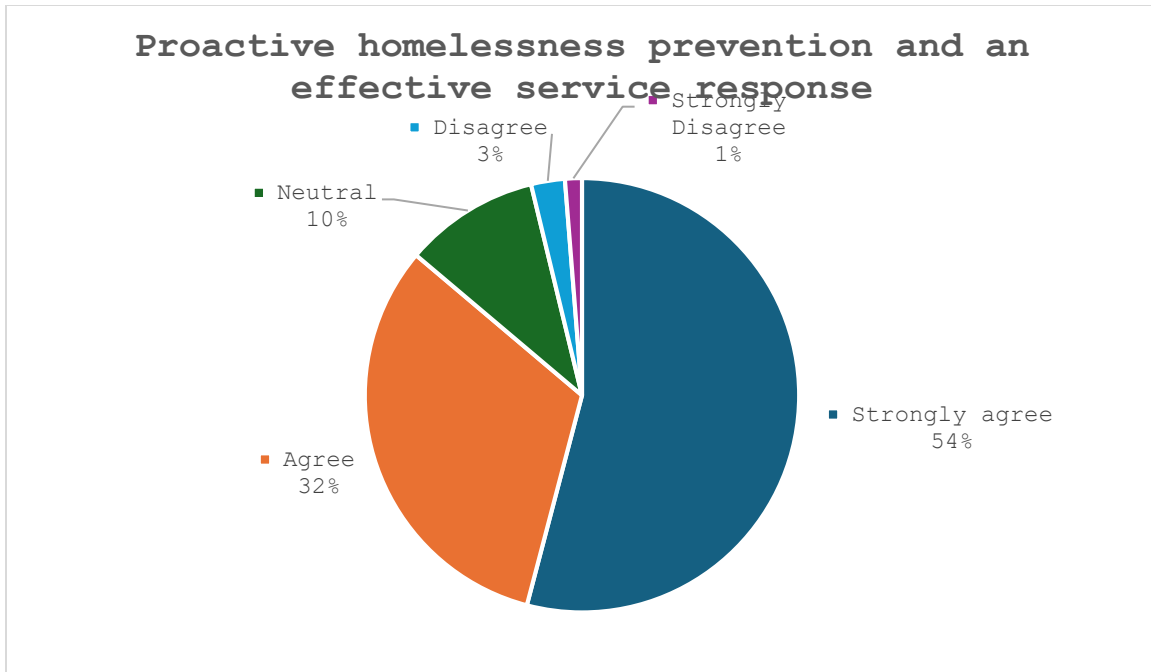
Ethnicity of respondents



3.2 There were four specific questions in relation to the strategy itself. For the three proposed strategic priorities, respondents were asked to what extent they agreed that it should be a key priority. The final question was a free text box that asked respondents if there were any other priorities that they would like to see the Council focus on or if they had any other additional comments to make.

3.3 Each strategic priority was rated as follows:





3.4 A total of 97 respondents used the free text box to provide further comments. Of which, 13 specified they did not have any other comments or agreed with what was already proposed. Of the remaining 84, there were a variety of responses with several themes highlighted.

- 37% varied in opinion but mentioned a specific cohort of people that should be prioritised for local affordable housing. Examples include victims of domestic abuse, families with children, young people, pensioners, people with disabilities, and Spelthorne residents. A couple of comments also noted the importance of housing residents with their pets.
- 17% commented on the housing register process with a difference in opinion on who should and shouldn't be prioritised. Long waiting times were also noted.
- 13% mentioned the need for more affordable housing.
- 7% suggested more housing needs to be built with some comments noting sightings of empty properties and lack of suitable developments locally.

3.5 A selection of sample quotes is provided below.

“Start prioritising new developments and working on them a bit quicker to ensure there is a flow of new homes coming to Spelthorne. There’s a plan with all these future developments but seems none are being built.”

“I would love to see more efforts made in housing people together with their pets and improving the accessibility of pet friendly accommodations to prevent animal abandonment and decline in the individual’s mental health.”

“Specific service provision for LGBTQIA+ people and women fleeing domestic abuse. Safe and suitable emergency accommodation options for trans people.”

Better partnership working with prisons and drug and alcohol services especially.”

“Have a 6 week help for people that get housed to help them set up direct debits and sign up services that they will use. Give them a list of local groups and charities that can help them.”

“When making 'duty to refer' referrals, it would be great to know what the response timescale is so we can help manage expectations with customers and signpost to further support if needed. Have regular multi-agency meets/conferences to discuss priorities.”

“I would like to bring your attention lack of affordable housing options.”

“This is an excellent strategy. The more you can share your work across the other boroughs, the better.”

3.6 As well as those who responded online via the questionnaire, 3 additional respondents sent feedback via email. Some comments included:

- A request for Surrey Crisis Fund to be listed under 1.3 of the Action Plan as a local specialist support service to be retained.
- Frustration around the waiting time for a suitable and affordable home to become available in Spelthorne via the housing register.
- A better understanding of what the Homelessness Prevention Grant is and if it's accessible to partners to use.
- The benefits of circulating a Housing Options contact list to improve communications between partners.
- Concerns about the quality of social housing and privately rented accommodation and the enforcement of repairs and improvement works.
- Feedback that the dedicated Citizens Advice Spelthorne caseworker service is effective in helping residents with maximising income and supporting them with housing and homelessness applications.

4. Closing summary and recommendations

4.1 The overall consultation response has been positive towards the proposed new strategy. There were a few suggestions of further improvements that are not already included in the existing proposals. In light of this, a Working Group has considered all the feedback received and has made several minor changes to the strategy prior to committee approval. These changes include:

- Defining 'Homelessness' and 'Rough Sleeping' in the Strategy glossary to provide clarity.
- Reviewing the Council's position on empty homes. Historically, bringing empty homes back into use requires high resource with little return. However, Officers will review the current picture in Spelthorne and learn

from any good practice shared at the newly formed Surrey empty homes group.

- Look at how the Housing Options service can be more inclusive and review forms to ensure that they are up to date with equality and diversity standards. Staff will also be asked to attend relevant training on inclusion to improve accessibility of the service.

4.2 The key response to this consultation is that whilst the public are supportive of the changes proposed in the new strategy, there is a shared frustration with the lack of affordable housing available in the borough. Residents are disappointed with housing register waiting times and have varied views on who should be prioritised for the limited affordable housing available.