Colchester City Council

Housing Strategy Report

Housing & Homelessness Summary

1 April 2025 - 31 March 2026

Colchester is a growing city with an increasing demand for housing driven predominantly by population growth and changing household composition. While housing delivery has continued steadily through recent years, pressures remain across all tenures, with affordability challenges affecting both home ownership and the private rented sector. As a result, demand for housing assistance has increased, alongside greater pressure on homelessness services and temporary accommodation. This summary provides an overview of the local housing system, highlighting key trends in supply, affordability and need, and setting out the wider context in which housing and homelessness pressures are evolving in Colchester.

If any of this information is to be reproduced in any format or used in any publicity, please contact Victoria Hanley (Housing Strategy Team) on: Victoria.hanley@colchester.gov.uk

Information included is the most up to date available at the time of publishing.

This bulletin is published annually.

HOUSING STOCK IN COLCHESTER

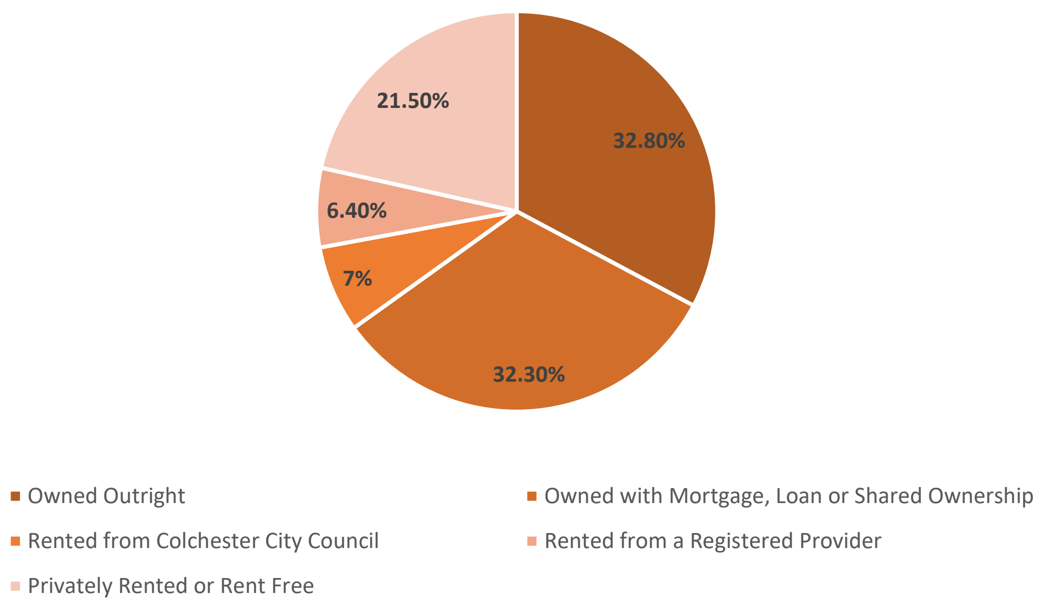
Dwellings In Colchester By Tenure

The number of dwellings in Colchester is challenging to quantify precisely. Although the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) publish dwelling official figures for Colchester (most recently for 2024), these differ from the number of properties registered to pay Council Tax, so the totals presented here should be understood as a best estimate rather than an exact count. There has been a gradual increase in estimated dwelling numbers over the last 10 years (from 78,556 in 2016 to 86,084 in 2026).

	Local Authority	Private Registered Provider	Other Public Sector	Private Sector	Total
April 2026	6,066	5,581	7	74,430	86,084

(Source: GOV.UK (www.gov.uk) - Live tables on Dwelling Stock and CCC Stock Data)

Tenure Profile of Existing Households in Colchester



(Source: GOV.UK - Live tables on Dwelling Stock)

Number of Homes Sold Under the Right to Buy Scheme

During 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026 there were **46** properties sold under the Right to Buy scheme.

In the last five years, a total of 163 properties have been sold from the Council's stock under the Right to Buy scheme.

(Source: CCC Right to Buy Data, Finance Team)

Empty Homes

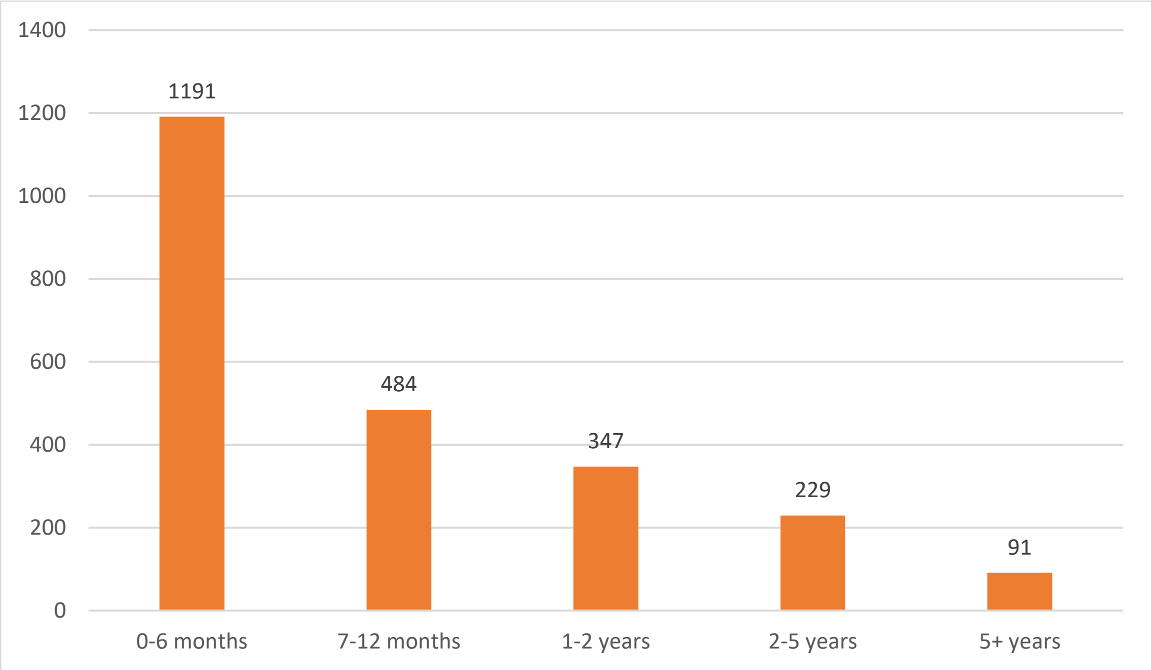
The definition of empty properties is 'Empty, Unoccupied & Unfurnished' which includes short term (possibly vacant between moves) and long term (uninhabitable/subject to Major Works).

On 1 April 2026, the total number of properties registered in Colchester for Council Tax was **87,285**.

Of this, **2,342** homes were classified as empty (an increase of 186 from 1 April 2025).

Of these, **2,251** were privately owned or owned by Registered Providers (an increase of 173 from 1 April 2025) and **91** were owned by Colchester City Council (an increase of 13 from 1 April 2025).

The information below shows the length of time that these properties had been empty:



(Source: CCC Empty Homes Data, Council Tax Team)

DEVELOPMENT OF NEW HOMES

Housing Target for Colchester

Colchester's five-year housing land supply requirement is based on an annual housing target of 920 in accordance with Policy SP4 of the Section 1 Local Plan adopted in February 2021.

The Housing Delivery Test was introduced in 2018 to address issues of persistent under-delivery. Colchester has exceeded the target set and therefore only needs to add a 5% buffer to the target of 920. This results in an annual requirement of 966 units which equates to a five-year supply of 4830.

Delivery of New Homes

Between April 2025 and March 2026, a total of **920** new homes were completed in Colchester (against a target of 920 and compared to **659** new homes completed between April 2024 and March 2025).

Since 2001/2, Colchester has overseen the delivery of over 22,000 new homes at an average rate of 927 new dwellings per year.

(Source: Housing Land Supply Position Statement 2025 and 2026)

Delivery of Affordable Homes

From 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026, a total of **128** new affordable homes were delivered in the City of Colchester. The below table shows affordable homes completed per quarter.

2025-26	Q1 Apr-Jun	Q2 July-Sep	Q3 Oct-Dec	Q4 Jan-Mar	Total for Year
Total	26	29	45	28	128

The below table shows the number of affordable home delivered by type between 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026.

Type of Affordable Housing	**Number of Homes Completed**			
(Year 1st April to 31st March)	**2025-2026**	**2024-2025**	**2023-2024**	**2022-2023**
Registered Provider for Renting	**50**	**51**	**174**	**47**
Shared Ownership	**11**	**18**	**48**	**53**
CCC New Build and Acquisitions	**57**	**59**	**44**	**62**
First Homes	**10**	**0**	**5**	**10**
Total	**128**	**128**	**271**	**172**

(Source: Registered Provider Returns & CCC Housing Strategy Team data)

The developments where these homes were completed during 2025/26 included Barbrook Lane-Tiptree, Dawes Lane-West Mersea, Oaklands-Copford and Elmstead Road-Greenstead.

First Homes

First Homes is a new government initiative where new homes are sold at a discount of at least 30 per cent of market value, up to £250,000. This discount will also apply to any further sale of these homes in the future.

The First Homes scheme is designed for people who want to stay in the communities where they live or work but are struggling to get on the housing ladder. The scheme is only available to first time buyers but local authorities will be able to specify via the S106, criteria for whom the properties will be targeted at initially (within the first 3 months of advertising). This can include key workers who provide an essential service (such as nurses, police officers, teachers, delivery drivers and supermarket staff, as well as serving members and veterans of the armed forces). The definition of a key worker will be determined locally and could be anyone who works in a job that is considered essential for the functioning of an area. Local authorities can also use local connection criteria for the properties to decide which people should have priority.

Colchester City Council is obliged to allow First Homes on new developments but as it was not included in our new Local Plan, do not have to agree to it on every site.

For more information, please follow the link - *First Homes - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)*

THE HOUSING REGISTER

Colchester holds a housing register of people interested in Council or Registered Provider homes. Households eligible to join the register are assessed according to need and ‘banded’ as to their priority for rehousing. There are six bands (Bands A - F), depending on the assessed level of housing need.

Not everyone on the housing register will be offered a property. Last year (1 April 2025 – 31 March 2026) there were **618** lets of affordable housing compared to **2,558** households on the register.

Households on the Register According to Band (31 March 2026)

Banding	Number of Households on the Register
A	72
B	782
C	658
D	265
E	778
F	3
Total	2,558

(Source: Gateway to Homechoice)

Households on the Register According to Number of Bedrooms Required (31 March 2026)

Number of Bedrooms Required	Number of Households on the Register
One	1,264
Two	608
Three	544
Four or more	142
Total	2,558

(Source: Gateway to Homechoice)

Lettings of Affordable Housing

Affordable housing includes both Council owned and Registered Provider homes. The table below shows the number of properties let (1 April 2025 – 31 March 2026). Registered Providers of social housing are independent societies, bodies of trustees or companies established for the purpose of providing low-cost social housing for people in housing need on a non-profit-making basis. They are also known as ‘housing associations’.

Landlord	Number of Homes Let
Colchester City Council	362
Registered Providers	256
Total	618

(Source: Gateway to Homechoice)

Lettings Via Applicant Type (Direct, Transfer, Homeless)

The table below shows the total number of Colchester applicants who were housed via Gateway to Homechoice between 1 April 2025 and 31 March 2026 according to their application type.

Applicant Type	Number of Homes Let	Percentage of Total Homes Let
Accepted Homeless	237	38%
Direct Applicant	154	25%
Homeless Prevention	31	5%
Transfer	188	30%
Homeless Relief	8	1%
Grand Total	**618**	**100%**

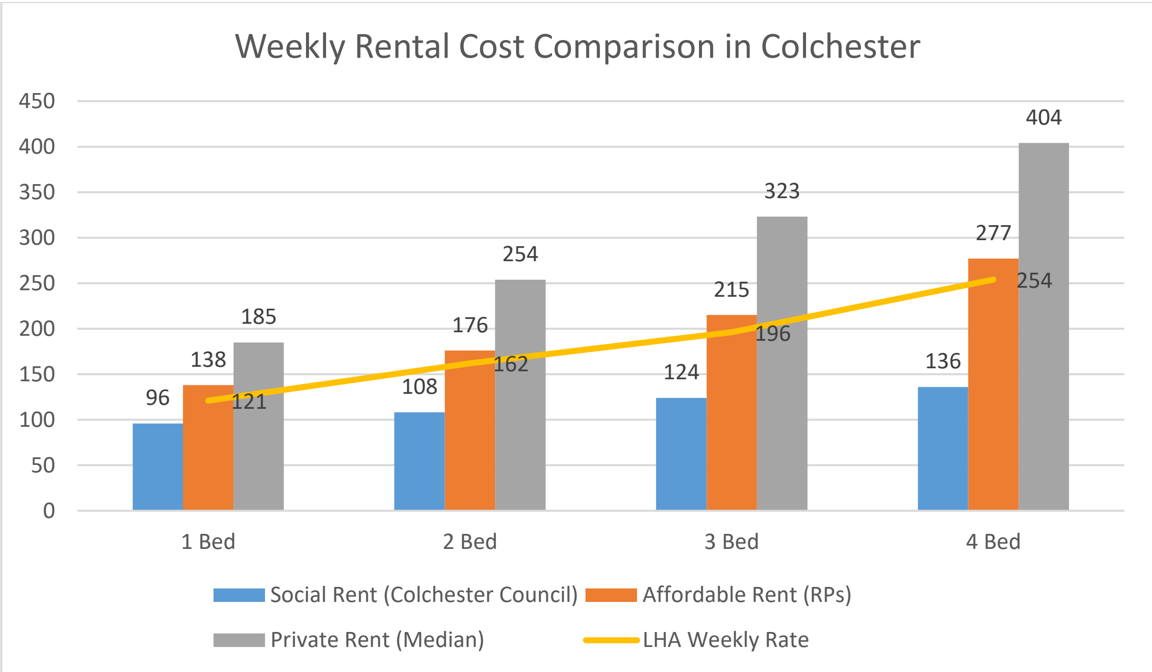
(Source: Gateway to Homechoice)

Please note this does not include households who have moved through mutual exchange. This is where an existing Council or Registered Provider tenant ‘swaps’ their home with another tenant.

COST OF RENTING

The chart below compares weekly rental costs (£) across three tenures: Colchester City Council properties (based on an estimated average for general needs housing), homes let at Affordable Rent levels (typically by Registered Providers), and private rented properties (using median rents; upper quartile rents are significantly higher).

The yellow line indicates the maximum weekly support available through Local Housing Allowance, which falls well below the cost of renting in the private sector.



(Source: Hometrack and GOV.UK Livetables)

Private rents have continued to increase across Colchester, the East of England and nationally over the past year, although the pace of growth is now slowing. In Colchester, average monthly private rents reached around £1,216 in early 2026, representing an annual increase of approximately 6%, which is higher than the East of England average increase of around 4% over the same period. Nationally, rents have also risen, with UK average rents increasing by around 3–4% in the year to early 2026, following much stronger growth of 7–8% during 2024–25. Overall, this indicates that while rental growth in Colchester is broadly in line with wider trends, local increases have been somewhat higher than regional and national averages, contributing to ongoing affordability pressures for residents.

HOMELESSNESS & HOUSING ADVICE

The Housing Solutions Team provides free, expert housing advice to residents of all tenures in the city. The team has a strong focus on preventing homelessness and can advise people with housing problems or assist those people in finding somewhere to live.

In April 2018 a change in homelessness legislation with the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act, brought a significant change in the way the Housing Solutions Team assess homelessness applications and monitor outcomes.

The new Homelessness Reduction Act places two additional statutory duties on local housing authorities:

The prevention duty – requires councils to intervene to prevent homelessness at an earlier stage, when a household is at risk of losing their home in the next 56 days. This is particularly relevant for those living in privately rented homes who are served with notice and provides more opportunity to support people directly into another tenancy.

The relief duty - requires councils to offer more advice and support to anyone who is already homeless, regardless of whether they are in priority need and may involve offering accommodation.

The duties that existed under the previous homelessness legislation, known as the **main duty,** remain in place. A main housing duty is owed where homeless households are eligible (certain persons from abroad are ineligible for housing assistance), have a priority need for accommodation and are not homeless intentionally.

From 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026, the Housing Solutions Team;

- Accepted a full duty under the homelessness legislation for **335** households and helped them into accommodation.
- Prevented homelessness for **226** households and relieved homelessness for **136** households.

During 2025, the Rough Sleeper Team:

- Provided **159** clients with support, advice, and assistance to help them move off the streets
- Helped **72** rough sleepers to reconnect with support networks and return to the local authority area they came from.

Temporary Accommodation (TA)

The Council’s new duties under the Housing Act 1996 Part 7 (as amended) are to Prevent or Relieve homelessness. Interim accommodation may be provided whilst we look to assist people that are homeless into alternative accommodation. If we are unable to relieve their homelessness, we may have a duty to provide them with temporary accommodation until a more permanent solution is found.

On 31 March 2026…

- There were 524 Colchester households in TA.
- 0 families were over the national 6+ week B&B target.
- The number of days households spent in B&B had dropped significantly (34.9 days, compared to 64.4 in April 2025).

THE HOUSING MARKET

National Trends

- Average UK house prices increased by around 2.4% in the 12 months to December 2025 (provisional estimate), indicating a return to modest growth following the declines seen in 2023 and 2024.
- The average UK house price was around £270,000 in December 2025, approximately £8,000 higher than a year earlier.
- Average house prices over the 12 months to late-2025 increased across Great Britain, rising to around £292,000 in England (c.1.4–2.7%), £209,000–£211,000 in Wales (c.1.5–2.0%), and £192,000 in Scotland (around 3.3%).
- Within England, regional variation remains significant: northern regions (for example the North East and North West) saw the strongest growth, while London recorded the weakest growth and, in some periods, small declines.

(Source: ONS UK House Price Index Data)

House Prices in Colchester

The average house price in Colchester is currently £320,000 (based on sales and valuations from up to March 2026), compared to a regional average of £339,000. The lower quartile house price in Colchester is currently £235,000, compared to a regional average of £255,000. The table below compares the changes in both the overall average house price and the average lower quartile house price based on house sales from previous years. The lower quartile house price is the bottom end of the market (usually smaller homes/flats).

Date	Mar 2023	Mar 2024	Mar 2025	Mar 2026
Average price of home	£330,000	£342,500	£330,000	£320,000
Lower quartile price	£248,750	£245,000	£250,750	£235,000

(Source: Hometrack)

The number of bedrooms is a key determinant of price, current average prices in Colchester by bedrooms count and property type are as follows:

Property Type & Size	Average Price
1 bedroom flat	£123,500
2 bedroom flat	£171,000
2 bedroom house	£256,500
3 bedroom house	£332,500
4 bedroom + house	£475,000

Local House Prices

Looking at overall average prices (see table below), we can see that all neighbouring local authorities saw a decrease in price between March 2025 and March 2026, except Tendring which saw a fractional increase. The average across all local authority areas was a decrease of around 5.5%.

Overall Average Prices (Quarter Ending)						
	No. of Sales (Mar 25-Mar 26)	**Mar 25**	**Mar 26**	**Trend**	**Difference**	
Colchester	2,440	£347,000	£320,000	↓	-£27,000	-7.7%
Braintree	2,055	£374,000	£339,000	↓	-£35,000	-9.3%
Ipswich	1,352	£250,000	£245,000	↓	-£5,000	-2%
Maldon	945	£446,000	£440,000	↓	-£6,000	-1.3%
Tendring	2,275	£289,000	£290,000	↑	+£1,000	+0.3%
Chelmsford	2,321	£448,000	£415,000	↓	-£33,000	-7.3%

(Source: Hometrack))

HOUSING IN THE PRIVATE SECTOR

Complaints from Tenants

Tenants who feel that their private or social landlord is not dealing with housing repair or improvement issues can make a complaint to the PSH team. The team will investigate informally at first and seek the compliance of the landlord in resolving the issues identified.

When compliance is not forthcoming, the property will be inspected and any hazards identified assessed using the Housing Health and Safety Rating System. Appropriate enforcement action is taken, including serving legal notices as required to ensure the most serious hazards identified are removed. Action taken is in accordance with the team's published Private Sector Housing and Civil Penalty Notices Enforcement Policy.

76
full property inspections in response to complaints

137
cases with advice given and case closed, no visit required

86
cases with visit made, advice given and case closed

Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs)

Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) include shared houses or bedsit type accommodation, they are the only affordable housing option for many Colchester residents. The PSH team inspects HMOs and licences those HMOs that are required to be licensed (those HMOs that have 5 or more occupiers). A fee is paid for an HMO licence application. All complaints or reports about suspect HMOs, the conditions in an HMO (whether licensable or not) and unlicensed HMOs are investigated and enforcement action taken as appropriate.

150 HMOs inspected.

76 HMO licences issued and those HMOs deemed safe and compliant with standards.

150 HMOs improved in total and made safer by requiring works to remove housing hazards, improve amenities and to provide suitable property management.

11 HMO licences revoked.

£91,791 Income generated from HMO Licensing fees.

Total Enforcement Activity

666
inspections and visits for all purposes

401
serious housing hazards removed through all activity by the team

838
dwellings/homes improved in total and made safer through removal of housing hazards.

The following enforcement notices have been served:

2 X Improvement Notices served requiring works to remove serious housing hazards in properties where the owner failed to cooperate informally.

3 X Notices issued requiring Electrical Safety Certificates to be submitted.

1 X Building Act 1984 Notice requiring works to improve drainage provision.

2 X Civil Penalties for breaches under the Housing Act 2004 generating £10,000 income.

3 X Hazard Awareness Notices served requiring works to remove serious housing hazards in properties where the owner failed to cooperate informally.

1 X Notices issued requiring works to install Smoke and Carbon Monoxide alarms.

£1,290 income generated through the service of enforcement notices.

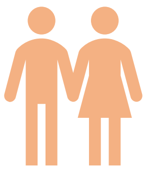
Property checks to ensure suitability for asylum seekers and refugees:

As part of the process for a host to be accepted to host Ukrainian guests under the Government's Homes for Ukraine Scheme and to ensure suitability of properties under other schemes to house refugees, a housing check is required. This is to ensure that the property is suitable and safe with no serious housing hazards and will not be overcrowded.

35
properties inspected and assessed for this purpose

Commercial Paid for advice service and floor plan drawing for landlords

The team offers these commercial services to landlords to assist them in being compliant with their legal obligations.



2
landlords were assisted using this service

£2,645
income generated through commercial services

Partnership Working

The team continues to work closely with a range of colleagues, including social workers and health visitors.

Planning Consultations

The team are not a statutory consultee to planning applications, however a process is in place to enable the team to be consulted on planning applications for residential developments. This enables us to advise the applicant and planning colleagues of any potential hazards being designed into the development/conversion, or of undersized dwellings being created.

- 116 Planning application consultations completed

ASSISTANCE TO HOMEOWNERS

Colchester City Council is committed to creating safe, healthy and active communities and ensuring that disabled people receive the help and support that they need in order to remain safe and independent in their own homes.

Poor housing conditions are known to have a detrimental effect on the health and well-being of occupants. Poor and unsafe housing increases the risk of ill-heath and injury. Certain groups are more vulnerable because they spend more time at home and may be more susceptible to health problems. These groups will include older and disabled people and families with young children.

The Council administers Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) to criteria set out by the Government in the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996. The Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002 provides local authorities with a wide-ranging power to provide assistance based on the principle that repairs are fundamentally the responsibility of the property owner. The Order provides local authorities with a general permissive power to provide discretionary assistance and support for improving living conditions.

In 2025-26, the Council completed 92 applications for both mandatory and discretionary financial assistance:

44 Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG) - Means-tested grant for applicants living with a disability, enabling access to funds to improve and adapt their home, for example: widening doorways, installing a stair lift, adapting a bathroom, converting a downstairs room to a toilet or bathroom, making outside steps easier to use or installing ramps and adapting heating or lighting controls to make them easier to use.

31 Discretionary Stairlift Grants (SLG) - Non-means tested assistance to provide access to essential facilities within the home such as bedroom and bathroom facilities, increasing independence for disabled adults and children.

13 Discretionary Fast-Track Grants (FTG) – Non-means tested assistance to support accelerated hospital discharge and adaptations to prevent an admission.

4 Discretionary Home Repair Loans (HRL) – Means tested assistance to eliminate or reduce significant risks and hazards in owner occupied homes, such as excess cold hazards, unsafe electrics or other identified risks that could cause harm.

In 25-26, **there were no Discretionary Disabled Facilities Assistance Loans (DFA)** (means tested assistance to fund the cost of adaptations that are not covered by the Mandatory DFG, or are over the £30k DFG limit, or where applicants cannot meet their assessed contribution).