

Homeless Prevention Strategy 2019-2024

Foreword

I am pleased to introduce Wiltshire Council's 5 year Homeless Prevention Strategy. The Council aims to work with those who are threatened with homelessness or who are homeless to help them secure and keep a home. This will require creativity, a wide range of services and effective, strong partnership working.

Due to being a large rural County we often find that there is not the right type and size and affordable housing in the right area to meet the needs of homeless families. The private rented sector has an important part to play in offering solutions to homelessness. We will continue to secure more affordable, decent homes and ensuring that the people moving into them have the resources and support to keep their home.

Homelessness can often be the symptom of a complex interaction between a person's specific, history and current situation and a range of structural and social factors that are often beyond their control. If we are to successfully help people avoid homelessness, we need to find new ways of addressing these root causes; poverty and disadvantage, unemployment, poor health, wellbeing and other barriers to securing a home.

We will build on existing services and continue to improve service delivery, forging new relationships with our partners and encouraging all to identify people who may be at risk of homelessness at the earliest opportunity. I would like to thank the many different organisations who have worked with us to develop this shared understanding of the issues we face, the role they can play in tackling homelessness and what our priorities and objectives should be for the future.



Councillor **Richard Clewer**, Chairman of the Housing Board and Cabinet Member for Housing, Corporate Services, Arts, Heritage and Tourism

Introduction

The Homeless Act 2002 places a statutory obligation on local authorities to undertake a review of homelessness in their area and develop and publish a strategy to prevent homelessness, based on the findings of the review

This is Wiltshire Council's first Homeless Prevention Strategy since the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 and takes into account new duties placed on Local Authorities. These new duties represent the biggest changes to homeless legislation in 20 years. The Act, requires a renewed focus on the prevention of homelessness, and effective partnership work with statutory, voluntary and third sector agencies. This ensures households' needs are met and that they are assisted and supported as they engage and work through their personalised plans.

This strategy has been informed by Wiltshire Council's Homelessness Review 2018 and Homeless Health Needs Assessment

This strategy is introduced into a context of unprecedented change, including the recent introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act, public services facing significant financial challenges and social and housing welfare reforms including the introduction of Universal Credit and the freeze of work age benefits

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government formally, the Department for Communities and Local Government Association (DCLG) launched an investigation to examine the root causes behind homelessness, following reports suggesting homelessness was on the rise. In 2016, DCLG produced a report, identifying how roots into homelessness are complex, often associated with numerous factors including the economy, the housing market, as well as personal factors linked to the individual or the family.

The wider determinants associated homelessness such as social displacement, exclusion, criminality and the risk of exploitation offer further understanding of the 'push-pull' factors linked to homelessness. Homeless people are often living with a multitude of issues, which are both 'causes' and an 'effect' of the position that they find themselves in. The report notes that the impact of homelessness has a much wider impact than just housing as many health inequalities can be attributed to those people who have experienced or are homeless.

National context:-

- they are 3.2 times more likely to be admitted to hospitalⁱ
- 41% of homeless people report long term physical ill health compared to 28% of the general populationⁱⁱ
- life expectancy for those living on the streets is significantly lower than the general population, 47 years for men and lower for women.ⁱⁱⁱ
- 40% with mental ill health & substance misuse^{iv}

The financial cost associated with homelessness is substantial and is estimated to cost nationally around £ 1 billion a year, which is an average cost annually for each homeless person to the public purse of £26,000. It is therefore essential that we all work together to reduce homelessness as in Wiltshire it was estimated by the national audit office that the cost of homelessness is an estimated £6.5 million and this was a likely under-estimate due to hidden homelessness so it is important that we do all we can to address the causes and prevent homelessness

Defining Homelessness

The term homelessness is often considered to apply to those people 'sleeping rough'. Crisis defines Homelessness as follows:-

"Homelessness is about more than rooflessness. A home is not just a physical space, it also has a legal and social dimension. A home provides roots, identity, a sense of belonging and a place of emotional wellbeing. Homelessness is about the loss of all these. It is an isolating and destructive experience and homeless people are some of the most vulnerable and socially excluded in our society."

People become homeless for lots of different reasons. There are social causes of homelessness, such as lack of affordable housing, poverty, unemployment and life events that cause individuals to become homeless. For many, life events like a relationship breaking down, losing a job, mental or physical health problems, or substance misuse, can be the trigger. Being homeless can in turn make many of these problems even harder to resolve

In Wiltshire and nationally the main causes of homelessness are:

- Termination of Assured Shorthold tenancies
- Asked to leave by family and friends
- Relationship breakdown

Homelessness includes:

Statutory and threatened with Homeless: If an individual or household is accepted by a local authority as meeting the criteria set out in the Housing Act 1996 we would have a duty to provide suitable accommodation. Being threatened with homelessness applies to those who are at risk of losing their home within 56 days.

Hidden homelessness: These are individuals or households who do not have access to suitable housing, but who may be staying with friends or family and are often not known to services. This can also include those who have no recourse to public funds

Rough Sleeping: Rough sleeping are those who sleep or live on the streets and is the most visible form of homelessness. Many people who sleep rough will suffer from multiple health conditions, such as mental health problems and substance misuse and they are also in greater danger of violence than the general population

Local context

In Wiltshire we have a significant number of households who remain at risk of becoming homeless. As well as the traditional drivers of homelessness, the on-going impact of Welfare Reform, particularly the restriction in financial support for housing costs, has affected the ability of low income families to maintain their tenancies or source alternative accommodation within the County.

- Termination of private rented accommodation was the most common cause of homelessness in both Wiltshire (31%) and England (27%) (% of total accepted homeless cases)
- 77% of households in 2018 were in priority need due to having dependent children or expecting a child.
- 16% were accepted as homeless due to physical or mental health difficulties

- A decline in the number of families in temporary accommodation from 200 households in 2015 to 189 in 2018
- Homeless prevention and relief cases have increased in Wiltshire by 14% since 2014, when nationally they have noted a decline of 6%, which has led to a 45% reduction in homeless applications across the same period.
- 42% of social lettings were made to homeless applicants
- Our social housing sector is larger than many others in the south west at 14%
- 284 supported housing bed spaces were re commissioned during 2018
- Following implementation of our Rough Sleepers initiatives rough sleeping has reduced from 42 to 22 in 2018.
- We have a small private rented sector and rents are amongst the highest in the region. Local Housing Allowance levels (2 bed in Salisbury £623) are much lower than the median rent (£725) which makes finding affordable private rented accommodation difficult
- Our owner-occupied sector is larger than average and house prices are high. Average house price in Wiltshire in June 17 was £277,813.

Wiltshire's Strategic Vision

Wiltshire is a place where we all work together to strengthen our communities, to prevent and relieve homelessness and rough sleeping

Our Aims:

Homelessness: Working together to help prevent homelessness and where homelessness cannot be avoided help people secure and keep a suitable home

Rough Sleeping: Working together to help reduce the number of people who are rough sleeping

This strategy sets out how Wiltshire Council and our partners will address the challenges identified through preventing homelessness and assisting homeless households to find affordable and sustainable housing solutions

In order to achieve these aims the strategy will be delivered through five priorities

- To reduce rough sleeping
- To identify and prevent homelessness at the earliest possible stage
- To ensure services are designed to prevent homelessness and support those who are homeless.
- To ensure those who are threatened with homelessness or who are homeless can secure and keep a suitable home.
- To maintain effective strategic direction and partnership working

Each priority is supported by actions to enable the priorities to be achieved. Monitoring this action plan regularly will make it easier to update, in the light of potential changes in national, regional and local policy and means we will be able to respond appropriately. We will review these actions through a multi-agency forum who will take joint responsibility for the success of this strategy.

To reduce rough sleeping					
Headline Indicator: Number of people rough sleeping					
Action	Outcome	Responsibility	Update	Timescale	
1 Promote street link to help identify those rough sleeping, including a digital video campaign www.streetlink.org.uk	Rough sleepers identified in real time and engaged with more quickly. Community made aware of services available to rough sleepers	Rough Sleeping Team Leader & (Public Protection)		On-going Nov 19	
2 Increase street outreach and develop a resettlement support service to provide on-going support to the most vulnerable	People get help quicker, before their problems escalate and creates an early warning service for those experiencing difficulties. Everyone will have a clear personal housing plan	Homeless Prevention and Advice Manager		Dec 19	
3 Work with our partners to increase access to health services and support rough sleepers to access those health services including GP referrals for mental health support. Potential creation of health drop in services. Ensuring that all rough sleepers will have the opportunity to access to health services	All rough sleepers will be provided with access to health care which will reduce the health risks of rough sleepers and improve health and well-being leading to increased resilience and ability to recover from rough sleeping	Public Health Consultant	Potential GP Salisbury, is exploring opportunities to join up health-related support/advice to this community and will meet with the RS operational group.		
4 Develop appropriate person-centred support to address substance misuse as well as public health initiatives -e.g. smoking cessation, diet, exercise screening vaccinations etc	People are empowered to build their self-sufficiency and reduce their reliance on services Rough sleepers take up appropriate support packages to help improve their health	Public Health Consultant			

5 Develop a co-ordinated approach to tackling street Anti Social Behaviour activity associated with rough sleeping, such as begging, street drinking and drug taking, supporting as required but as a last resort taking enforcement action against individuals or groups who persist in such behaviour.	Well co-ordinated interventions minimise the risk that a vulnerable person may disengage from existing support, as a result of enforcement action Reduction in concentrated anti-social behaviour on the streets which is often wrongly associated with rough sleeping	Public Health Director, Housing Director and Wiltshire Police			
6 Produce wallet sized information leaflet for community and agencies giving advice on what to do if they meet rough sleepers	Agencies have better knowledge of what services are available and how to access them	Rough Sleeping Partnership		Oct 2019	
7 Produce wallet sized information leaflet for rough sleepers on services available to them	Rough sleepers will have information on services and support directly available	Rough Sleeping Partnership	Information is currently being pulled together to assist with the development of this leaflet	Sept 2019	
8 Asset mapping to better understand community resources and build relationships	All those working together to prevent and address homelessness better able to coordinate activity and avoid duplication	Service Development and Strategy Manager	Information starting to be collected.	April 2020	
9 Explore the potential to develop a Housing first model	Accommodation will be available in advance of support packages to enable support to be more effective	Director of Housing / Head of Operational Housing		April 2020	
10 Review long term funding model for services currently utilising RSI funding	High priority services for rough sleeping to continue	Head of Operational Housing		April 2020	

11 Develop an accommodation pathway for rough sleepers based on move on provision or shared accommodation across the county.	To provide an increase in accommodation options for rough sleepers to help them regain their independence and a suitable home.	Homeless Prevention and Advice Manager		Dec 2020	
12 To work with our supported housing providers on issues such as removing barriers to housing, such as debt, lack of engagement & tenancy management as well as being tenancy ready	Rough sleepers are able to move into their own home and be able to manage their home long term, ensuring a robust process to remove barriers for re housing and create positive move on plans	Rough Sleeping Team Leader		June 2020	
13 Increase our help and support to help known prolific rough sleepers off the streets by tailoring our approach and fully engaging to make available the support they need. For those who do not want to accept our help we will work with the police and other agencies to manage these individuals.	Reduce rough sleeping and an improved offer for prolific rough sleepers Not accepting rough sleeping as a choice	Head of Operational Housing		Feb 2020	
14 Deliver Severe Weather Emergency Provision (SWEP) in line with MHCLG guidelines	Ensure rough sleepers have accommodation during extreme cold weather, and that nobody will sleep out rough during these periods	Homeless Prevention and Advice Manager		April 2019	
15 Organise and report quarterly counts of rough sleepers as well as the annual rough sleepers count	Improve intelligence on known rough sleepers	Homeless Prevention and Advice Manager		Nov 2019	

16 To produce annual communication to the public late Autumn to confirm what they can do to assist Rough Sleepers	Prevent excessive collection of bedding and other items. Create targeted requests for public support Engage and strengthen the support provided by communities in Wiltshire to help rough sleepers	Rough Sleeping Team Leader		Oct 2019	
17 To consider the long term use of The Haven (8 bed winter provision) and how this can be funded	Increase provision of move on or temporary accommodation, ensuring it is provided in the right localities in Wiltshire	Head of Operational Housing		May 2020	

To identify and prevent homelessness at the earliest possible stage					
Headline Indicator: Increase in homeless prevention and relief figures					
Action	Outcome	Responsibility	Update	Timescale	
1 Early identification of suitable private lets through improved workings with Local Landlords and letting agents	More private rented housing available to help people avoid homelessness	Accommodation Options Officer		Dec 2019	
2 Provide coordinated financial skills and financial advice and debt advice services, with a focus on up skilling single young people in budgeting and maximising income following sign up to a Wiltshire Council property	Young people taking a tenancy will have received advice on maximising their income and advice in managing their finances	Housing Income Manager		June 2020	

3 Promote affordable savings and low cost finance by promoting the credit union	Customers will be able to draw upon affordable loan arrangements to help at times of crisis or financial difficulty as well as people being encouraged to save to provide the up-front costs they face to avoid homelessness or have access to low cost finance	Housing Income Manager		June 2020	
4 Provide tailored support to prevent homelessness and sustain accommodation, including joint working with the Children Services FACT project and Council tax and benefit services to ensure services are designed around the needs of families	Multi agency pathway models will be established, so that those threatened with homelessness will receive a one council service to meet their needs	Homeless Prevention and Advice Manager/ Julian House / Director of Adult Care/ Director of Children Services		April 2020	
5 Review and improve our webpages to ensure effective on-line advice is provided	Create independence for applicants to try and resolve problems at an early opportunity by accessing help at the right time	Housing Options Team Leaders		Dec 2019	

To ensure services are designed to prevent homelessness or support those who are homeless					
Headline Indicator: Reduction in statutory homeless decisions and increase in preventions					
Action	Outcome	Responsibility	Update	Timescale	
1 Improve the identification of the needs of vulnerable people through a personalised multi agency approach, embedding homeless prevention into the work plans of social care,	Assessment of vulnerable adults would be improved, particularly those with complex needs. Creating a secure passage for homeless people following hospital or prison discharge	Head of Operational Housing		April 2021	

health, criminal justice and housing partners					
2 Research to better understand customer journey to inform service design	Services will be designed around customers' needs	Head of Operational Housing		April 2021	
3 Create new protocols with housing providers to ensure referrals are made at an early stage for those at risk of homelessness	Those threatened with homelessness are identified and helped at the earliest opportunity	Homeless Prevention and Advice Manager		April 2020	
4 Refresh hospital discharge procedures to ensure early identification of housing need upon admission	Nobody is made homeless when discharged from hospital	Homeless Prevention and Advice Manager / Housing Options Team Leader Head of Service – Hospitals ASC		Dec 2019	
5 Adopt a more collaborative approach to ensure agencies are able to provide effective information on prevention services and adhere to the new duty to refer those who may be at risk of homelessness	Early intervention and prevention of homelessness, to ensure that households threatened with homelessness are referred by agencies as soon as possible.	Housing Options Team Leader		Oct 2019	
6 Work closely with partners in the criminal justice sector through Multi agency risk assessment conference	Those people who are supported by the criminal justice system are adequately assessed and helped into an appropriate home	Homeless Prevention and Advice Manager and Housing		April 2020	

(MARAC), and Multi agency public protection arrangement (MAPPA), Through the Gate, ^y Integrated Offender Management (IOM) and National Probation Service to provide appropriate support		Options Team Leader			
7 To develop an on-line directory of services and easy to understand pathways to ensure all agencies that may come into contact with an individual who is at risk of homelessness are able to signpost confidently and effectively to prevent homelessness occurring	Homeless or those threatened with homeless are helped to find the most appropriate and best advice and support as soon as possible and receive consistent and constant support.	Homeless Prevention and Advice Manager		May 2020	
8 To deliver a multi agency approach to safeguarding vulnerable households who approach as homeless	Maintain and improve the safety of vulnerable clients	Housing Options Team Leader		April 2021	
9 To agree a referral process to Wiltshire' Fire Service for a safe and well check when any client is referred to temporary or supported accommodation	Improve customer safety	Homeless Prevention and Advice Manager / Wiltshire fire and Rescue		April 2020	
10 To introduce a form of mystery shopping to better understand the experiences	Improved learning and better understanding of customer experience and service quality improved	Homeless Prevention and Advice Manager		July 2020	

of customers who approach for housing assistance					
11.To seek a peer review of services and consider applying for NHAS gold standard	Delivery of best possible service for customer who are homeless or threatened with homelessness.	Homeless prevention and advice manager		March 2021	

To ensure those who are threatened with homelessness or who are homeless can secure and keep a suitable home					
Headline Indicator: Increase in affordable homes across Wiltshire					
Action	Outcome	Responsibility	Update	Timescale	
1 Increasing supply of sub market private rented housing via the Council's local housing company and local development company	More affordable private rented sector properties available for homeless households with better support arrangements for homeless	Director of Housing	LHC approved at cabinet Jan 19	April 2021	
2 Explore options with local lettings agency to advertise private rented sector property via Home4wilts	Cost effective solution for small landlords to let their properties through the Council	Homeless Prevention and Advice Manager / Homes4Wiltshire Manager		April 2021	
3 Maximise opportunities on the delivery of affordable housing through planning opportunities	Increase the number of new affordable homes delivered across Wiltshire in line with Core Strategy targets	Service Development and Enabling Manager / Housing Assets Manager	Currently on course to achieve Core Strategy targets for 2018/19.	April 2021	
4 Identify the incentives that agents and landlords will require to offer homes to households who are threatened with homelessness	More households threatened with homelessness are able to secure a home in the private rented sector.	Accommodation Options Officer and Homeless Prevention and Advice Manager		May 2020	

5 Provide move on accommodation from emergency accommodation using a 3 bed property owned by Wiltshire Council	More move on accommodation for people who had been rough sleeping	Head of Operational Housing		April 2019	
6 Develop the temporary accommodation offer by reviewing the Council's leased accommodation	Best possible temporary accommodation provided for households who are homeless.	Head of Operational Housing and Homeless Prevention and Advice Manager		June 2020	
7 Review the shared care leaver accommodation pilot and determine need to expand with other providers by developing an appropriate framework for this service	Achieve positive outcomes for young care leavers and improve move on into independent accommodation Increase the range of suitable housing for care leavers who may have been homeless.	Head of Operational Housing		Oct 2019	
8 Review the use and access to discretionary housing payments to ensure these are able to be quickly deployed and support homeless prevention and the duties contained in the homeless reduction act	Maximise the use of DHP to help prevent homelessness Maximise customers income to help them avoid homelessness	Accommodation Options Officer and Head of Housing Benefit		Dec 2019	

To maintain effective strategic direction and partnership working					
Headline Indicator: Homeless forum meetings					
Action	Outcome	Responsibility	Update	Timescale	

1 Establish multi-agency forum to manage strategy action plan delivery	<p>Effective multi-agency forum to hold each other to account in the delivery of the homeless strategy and action plan</p> <p>All organisations in Wiltshire working to address homelessness supporting and delivering the homeless prevention strategy</p>	Head of Operational Housing		Nov 2019	
2 Provision of training for volunteer organisations	Free training packages for voluntary organisations that are members of the homeless forum that provide services to people who are threatened with homelessness or who are homeless. Voluntary organisations are able to expand the services they provide to homeless customers in a safe way.	Housing Options Team Leader		May 2020	
3 Support for external funding bids to deliver the strategy	External charitable funding secured for services provided by voluntary organisations, ensuring that services are maintained or expanded.	Homeless Prevention and Advice Manager			
4 Making sure there is an agreed approach to assessing housing needs and homelessness with Children Services and Adult Social Care	To ensure where no housing duty is owed that applicants are dealt with under social services legislation supported by housing.	Head of Operational Housing		April 2021	
5 Continue to monitor, review and provide joint training where necessary on the 16/17 joint protocol between housing and children services	Improved joint working and positive experience for 16/17 year olds	Homeless Prevention and Advice Manager		Dec 2019	

6 Promote more joined up working with health, prison and probation services to prevent homelessness on discharge or release	Reduce approaches following an unplanned discharge from prisons, approved premises and hospitals	Housing Options Team Leader		June 2020	
7 Establish regional homeless service best practice group with Neighbouring local authorities	Shared good practice	Head of operational housing		April 2021	

ⁱ DOH 2012,

ⁱⁱ Leng G LGA Audit

ⁱⁱⁱ Thomas 2012

^{iv} DCLG 2012

^v 'Through the Gate' services are resettlement services for offenders who have served sentences of 12 months or more