

Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy

2017

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2021

Hull City Council

Hull's Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2017-2021

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Foreword

I am proud to introduce the Preventing Homelessness Strategy on behalf of Hull City Council. Homelessness and how we prevent it is something we should all be concerned with. Anyone can become homeless and it has many different causes.

Homelessness is incredibly harmful. At an individual level it isolates, diminishes wellbeing and perpetuates health inequalities. More generally, it drains resources from across the entire public sector, damages communities and undermines the progress we continue to make as a city by wasting the potential contribution that could otherwise be made by those who find themselves homeless.

And yet, in most cases, we believe that homelessness can be prevented.

These are difficult times, with mounting pressure on households to find and sustain the housing they need to support themselves and their families. We must do all we can to prevent these mounting pressures from becoming further cases of homelessness, working closely with all of our partners will be key to achieving this.

This strategy was developed with the help of a range of partners; many organisations took the opportunity to help to shape this document and, I hope, will continue shape and support our response to homelessness and efforts to prevent it over the next five years. It has formally been endorsed by Hull City Council, which provides strategic leadership on homelessness across the city – I can assure you of the Council's ongoing commitment to preventing homelessness.

There is no place for homelessness in modern Britain, and certainly not in Hull – a city on the up, where *everyone* has a role to play in its future.

I look forward to working with partners over the life of this Strategy and beyond to ensure that homelessness in Hull can become a thing of the past.

Councillor John Black
Portfolio Holder for Housing

Introduction

Hull's overarching Housing Strategy set out, for the Council and the wider housing system in Hull, what needs to be done to improve housing and the city's neighbourhoods. The Preventing Homelessness Strategy supports the delivery of some of the Housing Strategy's key priorities by setting out a framework to prevent, reduce and relieve homelessness for the residents of Hull.

Our long term vision is simple, yet ambitious –

Hull is a city free from homelessness. Every one of our residents has somewhere to call home, regardless of their circumstance, and they receive the support they need to keep it. Where residents are at risk of becoming homeless, the appropriate services intervene early, working with households to prevent it.

With two key priorities which provide the framework for this Strategy –

Improving access to housing and preventing homelessness

Relieving homelessness and tackling rough sleeping

Working with a wide range of partners is critical to realising our long term vision and to delivering and developing actions under each of those priorities.

Tackling homelessness is often about more than simply providing access to a property to live in. Some people require assistance to access a range of services such as health and social care or help with accessing employment, training and employment in order to prevent them from becoming homeless. Others require intensive support to address the underlying issues which have led to entrenched homelessness. To be able to provide this support and assistance effectively, the Council need to work in partnership with other organisations including health services; voluntary and community sector groups; the Police and emergency services, and; prison and probation services.

Our efforts over the lifetime of the previous Preventing Homelessness Strategy (2011 – 2016) have increasingly focused on early intervention and preventative measures. The numbers of homelessness preventions during 2016/17 reported by the Options Team was 4,663, with the Targeted Youth Support Service carrying out prevention work (mediation with family, financial or other advice) with 667 young people to enable them to stay in their current accommodation. The passing of the Homelessness Reduction Act earlier in 2017 sets out additional expectations of local authorities and their partners in respect of homelessness prevention; this Strategy therefore continues to focus on the prevention of homelessness wherever possible.

Of course, not all homelessness will or can be prevented. There will be cases where prevention efforts fail or where homelessness is entrenched and whilst these are fewer in number, the issues facing them are often more severe and their needs usually more complex. For those who find themselves to be homeless, our focus is to ensure that options exist so that no one has to sleep rough and that support is provided to enable a transition to independent living, wherever appropriate, as quickly and efficiently as is possible. Again, we will seek to build on the steps taken as part of the previous Strategy

which saw a 35% *reduction* in the number of rough sleepers in Hull between 2015 and 2016, against a 16% *increase* nationally.

Using this Strategy and its priorities as our framework, and the identified actions as our starting point, we will work with members of the Preventing Homelessness Focus Group to achieve our vision. We will also continue to work with our neighbouring authorities and beyond to share good practice and develop solutions which benefit residents of the wider region e.g. hospital discharge protocols.

Local strategic context and wider homelessness system change

Hull Housing Strategy

The Preventing Homelessness Strategy is designed to support the delivery of Hull's Housing Strategy. The key priorities supported are:

Understand the housing needs of our most vulnerable households and provide housing and support options which meet their needs;

Provide support and develop sustainable housing options for those affected by Welfare Reform, and;

Improve residents' health and wellbeing through the delivery of housing and housing services.

Other plans and strategies

There are a number of plans and strategies which set out the Council and its partners' ambitions for the city and cut across improvement to residents' health, safety and social and economic well-being. For the purposes of this document, the two which provide clear strategic links to preventing homelessness are:

- City Plan
- Health and Wellbeing Strategy

The City Plan sets out a number of ambitions, specifically around increasing economic growth and employment – these two things, as they come to fruition, have as big an impact on homelessness as anything else. When people have a well paying job, they are much less likely to become homeless; employment itself can act as a preventative measure. Low household income increases the risk of homelessness because it reduces the opportunity to access and retain market housing – whether for rent or sale. Average earnings of Hull residents are lower than the regional and national average and around 14% of Hull residents are in receipt of out of work benefits. Increasing individual and household income is therefore crucial to reducing the risk of homelessness.

Equally, the Inclusive Growth element of the City Plan aims to ensure that those who are not yet benefiting from the economic gains seen in the city (i.e. through training and employment) are able to do so – this includes potentially vulnerable groups such as those who are homeless or in a transitional period away from homelessness, towards independent living in secure accommodation.

The Health and Wellbeing Strategy is concerned with improving the health and wellbeing of residents in Hull; the links between health and homelessness are important to reference here. Poor health can be both a cause and consequence of homelessness, although it is not always identified as a trigger of homelessness, e.g. ill health may contribute to job loss or relationship breakdown, which in turn can result in homelessness.

The health and wellbeing of people who experience homelessness is poorer than that of the general population. The longer a person experiences homelessness the more likely their health and wellbeing will be at risk. The UK average age of death of a single homeless man is 30 years lower than the general population at 47 years, and even lower for homeless women, at just 43 years. They are more likely to have trimorbidity (a combination of mental ill health, physical ill health and drug or alcohol misuse) and poor end of life care provision. They are also 8 times more likely to be admitted to hospital with severe life threatening conditions.

Improving the health and wellbeing of the general population acts as a preventative measure for homelessness. Equally, as the health and wellbeing of those who find themselves homeless suffers as a result of their circumstance, access to health services in the broadest sense (incorporating mental, physical and emotional health) therefore forms a large part of this Strategy's second priority – relieving homelessness and tackling rough sleeping.

Achievements under previous Strategy

Over the lifetime of the previous Strategy there have been many achievements; there is much to celebrate and all of these provide a good, solid foundation to build on from 2017.

Some of the notable achievements include –

- The development and delivery of a rough sleeper outreach team; some of the most entrenched rough sleepers in the city are now accessing more secure accommodation as a result.
 - 53 rough sleepers supported to obtain hostel accommodation or housing in the part year (July 2016 – April 2017) during which the service has been in operation.
- The Centre for Assessment and Emergency Accommodation opened, providing emergency accommodation to those with no priority need and those who are unable to access other hostel provision in the city.
 - Assessments completed with 202 different service users during the past year alone.
- The Emmaus scheme opened providing additional bed spaces for single homeless people and a different model of delivery for those who choose not to access traditional hostel provision.
- Gypsy and traveller sites have been improved through the delivery of a capital improvement programme to ensure that kitchen and bathrooms are of a decent standard.

- HumberHelp website launched providing a directory of services for all homelessness services in Hull and giving information on how they can be accessed.
- Launched a repatriation service, enabling foreign nationals to return home, preventing destitution if they become homeless and have no recourse to public funds.
- The Let's Help You Hull website was launched, enabling people to access affordable private rented accommodation – specifically designed to help those in receipt of housing benefit.

Context and change for the homelessness sector

Much continues to change in terms of the immediate environment around the homelessness sector, both locally and nationally. The implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act will take place during the lifetime of this Strategy and ongoing Welfare Reform continues to create huge shifts in the way homelessness services must be delivered.

Locally, key supported housing service contracts (Housing Related Support) come to the end of their agreed timeframes in 2018. The commissioning of these services from 2018 will also need to take account of national plans to change the funding arrangements for supported housing currently funded via 'supported exempt accommodation' housing benefit claims.

All of these things bring both opportunity and challenge for the prevention and relief of homelessness.

Homelessness Reduction Act

The Homelessness Reduction Bill received Royal Assent on 27 April 2017 and is now an Act of Parliament. The Homelessness Reduction Act (HRA) amends Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996. There are 13 clauses which amend many of the existing duties as well as bringing in a substantial number of new duties.

To summarise, the HRA:

- Introduces requirements for local housing authorities to carry out homelessness prevention work with all those who are eligible for help and threatened with homelessness (priority need will no longer be considered when someone initially approaches an Options Team).
- Changes the point at which a person is classed as being threatened with homelessness from 28 days before a person is likely to be homeless, to 56 days.
- Requires local housing authorities to carry out an assessment of the applicant's needs, and that the steps agreed between the local housing authority and the applicant are set out in writing – in the form of a personalised plan.

- Places a new duty on local housing authorities to take steps for 56 days to relieve homelessness by helping any eligible homeless applicant to secure accommodation.
- Specifies that local agencies should refer those who are either homeless or at risk of being homeless to local housing authority housing teams.
- Requires that provision is made for certain care leavers, to make it easier for them to show they have a local connection with both the area of the local authority responsible for them and the area in which they lived while in care if that was different.

As a result, there are a number of changes required of Hull City Council's Options Team - how the team works – and how it interacts with other agencies who, under the HRA, now have a specific duty to refer those who they believe to be homeless/at risk of homelessness.

The new duties are expected to be implemented from April 2018 and, in Hull, it is expected that homelessness applications will increase by up to 60% (950 plus applications from 629 in 2016/17). This projected increase is based on the introduction of similar duties in Wales and the impact of other agencies having additional duties to refer.

Welfare Reform and Universal Credit

Welfare Reform continues to present challenges for many households and due to high levels of benefit claims locally it is anticipated to have a significant local impact.

As at February 2017, the housing benefit under occupancy penalty affects over 3,700 households (around 80% of those are Hull City Council tenants) and results in an average housing benefit reduction of £13 per week per housing benefit claimant affected – though those who are under occupying two or more bedrooms face a significantly higher reduction. Some of these households are supported to make up this shortfall between housing benefit and housing cost in the form of discretionary housing payments which, in the short term at least, prevent these households from becoming homeless. In the medium to long term, the numbers affected suggests the need for an increase in the supply of smaller homes.

The transition from Universal Credit (UC) 'Live Service' to UC 'Full Service' will commence in Hull in September 2018. From that date, all new claimants for means tested working age benefits administered by the DWP will be invited to claim UC. Due to the way UC is paid and administered, it presents a range of potential issues for households in receipt of out of work benefits in Hull; for many, paying housing costs themselves as opposed to the payment being made directly to the landlord will be new and UC payments are made in arrears.

In UC 'Full Service', 18 – 21 year olds will have no automatic entitlement to the housing element of UC. In addition, those who are 22 – 34 are only entitled the shared accommodation rate of Local Housing Allowance (LHA) in the private rented sector. From April 2019, the LHA rules will also apply to social rented sector tenants. This will result in significant reductions in the amount of help with housing costs that single people, in particular, will receive. Therefore any who need assistance to pay for their housing costs will face a shortfall and limit their housing options accordingly.

As at February 2017, the household benefit cap affects 405 households in Hull; the

average reduction in award is around £45 per week with 35 households subject to a reduction of £100 or more. Clearly this will have an impact on those households' ability to cover their housing costs and therefore increases their risk of homelessness.

All of these uncertainties can, if no work takes place to mitigate impact, increase homelessness in the city.

Supported housing and Housing Related Support

The supported housing offer in the city is crucial to the prevention and relief of homelessness – the next couple of years present supported housing providers with a number of opportunities and challenges. Supported housing includes hostel provision for those who are homeless as well as refuges or sheltered housing provision which ensure that residents with additional need get the support they need and so prevent homelessness.

There are around 2,300 units of supported accommodation in the city in receipt of the supported exempt accommodation rate of housing benefit and over 800 units (a mix of floating and accommodation based) of Housing Related Support (HRS), commissioned by the Council. Some of the 800 HRS units are also in receipt of the supported exempt accommodation rate of housing benefit – but not all. Of the HRS units, approximately 250 support single homeless people and homeless families.

The existing HSR contracts will come to an end in 2018 and the funding arrangements for supported housing funded via housing benefit is currently being reviewed by government. This gives us the opportunity to review existing provision and undertake a comprehensive needs assessment to commission HRS services – including provision specifically for households who are homeless.

It is not the purpose of this Strategy to set out what the Housing Related Support offer in the city should be. However, the recommissioning process will take account of what is said here, make use of the consultation which has formed the Strategy and understand the need for temporary and supported accommodation for those who are homeless as per the evidence base which underpins this document.

Housing First

Housing First represents a fundamentally different response to homelessness compared with traditional temporary and hostel accommodation solutions; it is a potential homelessness solution, developed in New York and now is gaining momentum in the UK and further afield. It seeks to relieve homelessness by providing those who are homeless, and have complex needs, with stable housing – in the acknowledgement that this provides a platform to begin recovery and move away from homelessness.

Individuals do not need to prove they are ready for independent housing, or progress through a series of accommodation and treatment services. There are no conditions placed on them, other than a willingness to maintain a tenancy agreement, and Housing First is designed to provide long-term, open-ended support for their on-going needs.

Crisis recently published a feasibility study for Housing First in the Liverpool City Region, indicating that rolling out Housing First to replace traditional provision could save up to circa £4m per year. The study suggested that this approach could be more than five times

more cost effective than some existing services for the most vulnerable and long-term rough sleepers.

The model continues to gain support from various charities and support groups worldwide, with a number of studies claiming successful outcomes as a result of Housing First adoption.

Why do we need to focus on homelessness?

How much and how many?

The number of households accepted as being statutorily homeless is usually the starting point by which local authorities measure homelessness in their area and on average, 400 households are accepted as being statutorily homeless each year in Hull. But this represents only a small piece of the picture in the city...

- Every year between 2,500 and 3,000 people approach the Council's Housing Options Team because they are at risk of becoming, or are, homeless.
- Many others receive advice and assistance from across a range of services which enables them to avoid homelessness. In 2016/17 a range of interventions including tackling disrepair, installing sanctuary scheme measures, adapting properties, resolving anti social behaviour and enabling a move to other secure accommodation resulted in almost 5,000 cases of homelessness being prevented.

The true level of homelessness is higher than the number of people accepted as statutorily homeless and those receiving advice directly from the Council; some people do not seek assistance from the Council and therefore are not represented in the figures given above. For example, levels of outright orders, mortgage repossessions and repossessions of privately rented homes (323 in 2016/17) are far higher than the numbers of homeless households giving this as the reason for the loss of their last settled address (30). Some of these will be households choosing instead to access advice and assistance from elsewhere, e.g. direct access hostels, faith and community groups or friends and family.

In addition, we believe that there are potentially large numbers of people who are 'sofa surfing' in the city primarily, but not exclusively, young people under the age of 25. A Centrepoint report (*Out Of Reach*) found that sofa surfing was very common among young people in the UK, with a third of survey respondents reporting having sofa surfed at some point in the past. This is backed up by anecdotal evidence collected in Hull during the consultation process from young people's focus groups. When young people leave home and have nowhere to go, staying with friends might seem like a good solution but these arrangements are not secure and can often end suddenly. Longer term sofa surfing has been found to have a serious impact on young people's physical and mental wellbeing and their ability to engage in education.

It should be noted that whilst there appears to be a commonly held perception that rough sleeping has increased dramatically in the city in the past few years, this is not reflected in the actual count carried out each year. It would seem that this perception is driven by two factors - seasonal fluctuations in the numbers of people rough sleeping; an increase is usually seen in the warmer, summer months and an increase in begging in the city centre by people who are not homeless.

The case for resolving homelessness

There is a need to focus on preventing and relieving homelessness; the Council is obligated by statute to put in place measures which aim to do that and clearly there is a moral duty on all of us to support these efforts. However, beyond any of this, there is a compelling financial argument for investing in the prevention of homelessness.

Simply put – effective homelessness prevention and relief provides significant value for money to the public purse. In such challenging times, as public resources continue to be reduced, it is more important than ever to focus on the things that really make a difference in the most cost effective way possible.

The ‘*At what cost*’ report produced by Crisis sets out a number illustrative vignettes and explores potential homelessness trajectories and associated financial costs to the public purse. In the first trajectory, homelessness is prevented or resolved quickly, in the second homelessness persists for 12 months. The costs per person for prevention range from £1,426 to £4,726 with the costs associated with homelessness persisting for a 12 month period between £4,668 and £20,128.

The costs incurred because of homelessness extend far beyond that of local authorities and the homelessness sector. For example, homeless people are over four times more likely to attend A&E with an average cost per visit around £150 (*Homeless Link, The unhealthy state of homelessness*) and seven out of ten homeless ex-offenders are reconvicted within one year with the average arrest costing £1,668 (*Homeless Link, Impact of homelessness*).

Local and national evidence suggests accessing health services and appropriate treatment – especially non-hospital based – is difficult for homeless people; routine screening can therefore be missed ultimately leading to higher costs for the NHS and a poorer quality of life for the individual.

There is also a higher risk of offending from people who are roofless as well as higher levels of poor physical and mental health and drug and alcohol use. Being without a settled address makes it more difficult to get a job, whilst losing a job or reduction in income can increase the risk of becoming homeless.

For communities more generally, it affects the overall sustainability of neighbourhoods as it can result in lack of settled neighbourhoods, impact on continuity of schooling and demand for neighbourhood services.

Key points from the evidence base

The homelessness section of the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment, produced by the Council’s Public Health Team, has been updated and includes data and intelligence from the most recent full financial year (2016/17). It provides the evidence base for this Strategy.

Some of the key evidence is as follows:

- The numbers of homelessness applications has remained relatively static over the past four years, with no major increase or decrease over any given 12 month period.

Year	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
Applications	640	597	601	629

- The majority of people are accepted as being in priority need because they have children in their household or are pregnant. This group consistently represents approximately 80% of households found to be in priority need.

- Of those accepted as being homeless and in priority need (436 in 2016/17), the main reasons for people becoming homeless are the termination of an assured short hold tenancy (27%), violent relationship breakdown with partner (23%) and parents no longer willing or able to accommodate (17%). This spread is consistent with previous years.
- The official count of rough sleepers, last undertaken in autumn 2016, showed a decrease in the number of people sleeping rough since the previous year (from 23 in 2015 to 15 in 2016). However, rough sleeping has increased by 114% since 2010 (from 7).
- In 2016/17, the Targeted Youth Support Service received 813 approaches from young people for support with homelessness. This is consistent with previous years, however for 51% of these, young people were prevented from becoming homeless via support and advice being given – this helped to reduce the number of young people needing to access hostel provision or going on to sofa surf by 15% compared with the previous year (2015/16).
- The Centre for Assessment and Emergency Accommodation completed 202 assessments with service users during 2016/17, of those –
 - 76% were male, 23% were female and 1% identified as transgender
 - An 8% increase in female service users since 2015
 - The average age was 36 years
 - Over half of already had some form of contact with other services:
 - 60 had limited contact with services (30%)
 - 42 had regular contact with services (21%)
- Over 600 attendances at Hull's Accident and Emergency Service during 2016/17 were from those who have no fixed abode. However, this does not include all attendees who are in temporary accommodation and so is not representative of all attendees who are homeless; the number of attendees who are homeless is likely to be much higher than that reported here.
- 78 people registered with the Council's Choice Based Lettings (HomeSearch) scheme at July 2017 had a priority because they were statutorily homeless. In addition 353 people have additional HomeSearch points because they are living in a hostel and 125 have additional points because they are homeless but not statutorily homeless – largely because they are single, with no children or health issues.

Consultation and key messages

The consultation exercise carried out to support the development of this Strategy has been comprehensive and the range of stakeholders involved extensive. Most importantly, it incorporates the views of residents with both current and previous first hand experience of homelessness.

Throughout the consultation process a number of key messages and common themes emerged. The following section summarises these and, whilst it represents views from a number of stakeholders, they are not necessarily commonly held by all parties.

1. Mental health

At many points throughout the consultation mental health provision was discussed. There were examples of good practice at an individual level, i.e. hostel provider, mental health teams and the service user working together to agree an individualised plan of action, however it appeared that these were generally reliant on the individuals involved rather than it being the outcome of existing processes and procedure.

“Access to mental health provision or a lack of provision is a barrier which prevents move on into independent/mainstream housing. Mental health services do not seem able to respond to the needs of people who are homeless/living in temporary accommodation.”

“We worked really closely with X and X’s mental health worker before agreeing to a move back into the hostel. X’s mental health worker continues to be involved and is able to provide outreach into the hostel when X’s mental health needs exceed what we are trained and able to deal with.”

“It seems as if crisis point has to be reached before a mental health service can be received”

Mental health professionals expressed that the homelessness and housing ‘system’ seemed to be complex with no clear single point of contact when housing issues became apparent as a result of working with a service user.

Generally, two requests/suggestions for inclusion in this Strategy became apparent:

1. Working relationships between homelessness sector/supported housing providers and mental health services need to be developed – even informal efforts in this area will alleviate some issues currently being experienced.
2. Specific homelessness/mental health specific pathways are required, in both primary and secondary care. The introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act and its duty to refer will act as a catalyst for this.

2. Tenancy training and move on

Many stakeholders stated that the quality and length of move on support post temporary accommodation provision is variable and that landlords should be doing more at the beginning of a tenancy to ensure its sustainment and success. It was suggested that much more work needs to be done with those who have never held an

independent tenancy – particularly young people – prior to and at the beginning of their tenancy.

“Move on support should be provided for as long as is necessary – within reason. Arbitrary timescales for this support only serve to increase the likelihood of tenancy failure and support should be scaled back only when the individual is at a point where they are able to maintain their tenancy.”

“Tenancy readiness training for people is a big gap, but good practice does exist in the city. Some hostel providers do this well.”

“The Targeted Youth Support Service’ Passport to a Property is a good example of a comprehensive tenancy training programme; this could be extended so that it becomes a prerequisite/condition of accessing the Council’s housing for young people/those who have not held a tenancy previously.”

3. Access to health services

Pathways for health services more generally (not just mental health), specifically for those who are homeless, should be developed. Accident and Emergency attendances could be avoided by having a service that is able to more routinely deal with the physical health needs of those who are homeless.

“We need health provision that meets the needs of those who are homeless – especially for rough sleepers – traditional access routes don’t work for this group of people”

Some partners were incredibly positive about the flexibility of primary care provision, but this was not consistent across the city.

4. Practical support and ‘the little things that matter’

Practical solutions to ensure that tenancies can be sustained should be prioritised. E.g. furniture packages/furnished properties, handyman services to help people set up their home (curtain poles, pictures hanging, neutral wall coverings/painting) and provision of white goods – these all have the potential to increase the likelihood of the accommodation being sustained and minimises risk of tenancy failure in the initial weeks.

“How can we expect people to move from a hostel straight into a house when they have no money to buy furniture and there’s no furniture provided? We’re setting people up to fail by not helping people to get their new home set up”

“Sometimes it’s just the little things that help to make a house feel homely. A lick of magnolia paint rather than blown vinyl wallpaper from the previous tenant helps to make it much more likely for the person to want to make a real go of it [independent living] and try to maintain their tenancy”

Many stakeholders felt that giving people the best start, in a good environment with furniture either provided or bought from an affordable source, increases their chances of being able to, and wanting to, maintain their new tenancy.

5. Housing Related Support

Stakeholders suggested that it was important to track the 'journeys' of those becoming homeless in order to understand how people flow through the system i.e. from threatened with homelessness, temporary accommodation/hostel provision, rough sleeping, other hostel provision, mainstream housing. This is important to understand so we can pick out where things go wrong. Too often people are allowed to persistently revolve through the system without anyone trying to break the cycle because of this lack of knowledge.

"Oversight of the entire supported housing provision would be useful – a single point of access or gateway means that people facing homelessness only need to access one point."

"I wouldn't go back into a hostel, they don't work for me – I just want a flat or a house"

Some partners stated the need for smaller hostel provision, dispersed across the city, allowing for increased support for individuals to be considered when commissioning Housing Related Support services in the future.

Partners suggested that allowing people to move back from independence if they begin to experience problems or need supported housing/more intensive support again is important - rather than people needing to get to crisis point before being able to access these services again via a front door.

Strategic priorities

The Preventing Homelessness Strategy 2017 – 2021 is framed by two strategic priorities under which a range of actions will be undertaken. The priorities provide the basis for project development over the next five years in respect of homelessness in Hull.

The two priorities cover two key areas of homelessness – stopping people from becoming homeless in the first place and ensuring people who find themselves homeless are housed in the most appropriate accommodation for them –

Improving access to housing and preventing homelessness

Relieving homelessness and tackling rough sleeping

This section is structured simply, clearly sets out what we will do and provides the indicators used to measure impact and progress.

Improving access to housing and preventing homelessness

Prevention is better than the cure – this is as true for homelessness as it is for anything else. Improving access to housing so that people can help themselves is key and the new duties under the Homelessness Reduction Act emphasise a focus on prevention work.

The supply of affordable accommodation is a prerequisite to improving access to housing – clearly, without the housing there is nothing to improve access to. The supply of housing and how it is delivered is set out in Hull’s Housing Strategy 2017 – 2020, it includes delivery of new build, bringing empty properties back into use and undertaking physical improvement works in existing neighbourhoods.

This section details some of the key actions we need to focus on over the next few years to improve access to housing and prevent homelessness.

What we need to do

- Amend the Housing Options offer to reflect the new duties set out under the Homelessness Reduction Act (HRA) – the Act requires that homelessness advice and assistance services are ‘frontloaded’. This has the potential to make prevention efforts more effective – enabling more people to stay in their homes or facilitating a transition to other housing earlier, thus avoiding crisis.
- Expand the self help offer so that households who are able to have access to information to prevent their own homelessness without the need for more costly support from statutory services i.e. Housing Options Team.
 - Continue to support the Let’s Help You website to improve accessibility to the private rented sector.
- Review the Children, Young People and Families Service and Housing Service joint working protocol – a protocol has previously been developed to ensure that the two Council teams work together when households are receiving a service from both, partly in order to prevent eviction and homelessness. A review is now necessary as

per the duties under the HRA for local agencies to refer those at risk of homelessness to their local housing authority's housing team.

- In addition, we must do more to support Care Leavers as they transition to independent living and the housing offer for Care Leavers will form part of the reviewed protocol.
- Develop an education and communications campaign aimed at sofa surfers – many people who are sofa surfing do not consider themselves to be homeless and therefore do not seek advice; the aim of the communications campaign is to encourage those who are sofa surfing to seek timely advice and plan for independent living in their own accommodation or more formal shared living arrangements.
- Continue work to develop shared tenancies/shared housing options across all tenures – primarily for younger people under the age of 35 who will be subject to the shared accommodation rate Local Housing Allowance cap.
 - Promote the option of householders renting out rooms to lodgers; providing guidance on risks and safeguarding.
- Review the operation of Hull's Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) scheme to ensure best use of this resource – including exploring use of DHP for private rented sector bonds and rent in advance as well as use for those affected by the benefit cap and spare room subsidy removal.
- Continue to work with partners to support a holistic, multi agency response to those affected by domestic abuse. This will include continuing to support the provision of a dedicated Domestic Violence Specialist Housing Officer as well as helping survivors to remain in their own home with the installation of additional security measures or identifying appropriate safe rehousing options (such as access to refuge provision/dispersed properties).
- Explore proposals to address the shortfall in the Gypsy and Traveller accommodation – Gypsies and Travellers who stay on unauthorised encampments because they have nowhere else to stop are homeless under the Housing Act 1996. We will explore opportunities for setting up stopping places/transition pitches.
- Expand the 'Passport to a property' programme which prepares young people and those who have not previously held a tenancy for independent living – 'tenancy readiness' support for young people was identified as a gap in current provision during consultation and a lack of independent living skills can lead to young people's homelessness.
 - Explore use of the programme as a prerequisite for accessing the Council's housing stock and expand the programme's links with training and employment providers.
- Increase awareness of homelessness, and the support available for those at risk of homelessness, amongst education and training providers and the wider Voluntary and Community Sector in Hull.
- Continue to identify households subject to Welfare Reform changes and provide proactive advice and support in respect of access to DHP or a move to more affordable/appropriate accommodation.

- Explore options for the provision of furniture packages or furnished accommodation and decorating services for those moving onto independent living. During consultation many partners and those with first hand experience of homelessness identified lack of furniture or an undecorated/non-neutral property as being a barrier to tenancy sustainment and increasing the likelihood of early tenancy failure.
- Develop an offender housing protocol in partnership with the police, prisons and probation services to ensure that people being released from custody/prison, who do not have a permanent address, are able to access appropriate accommodation.
- Continue to develop the Council’s tenancy sustainment offer in order to provide targeted support to those tenants at risk of losing their tenancy. This approach emphasises the need for tenants to “stay and pay” wherever possible, reducing both the incidence of tenancy failure and reducing the costs associated with it.
 - Work with other housing providers in the city to gather and share best practice in relation to tenancy sustainment.
- Work with the Hull Military Covenant Forum to review housing pathways for veterans and armed forces leavers to ensure there continues to be a clear and appropriate access route to civilian housing.
- Work with health commissioners and providers (including GPs and social prescribing services) to develop an awareness of homelessness and services available to support patients who are homeless.

How we measure change

The actions listed here will form the basis of a Preventing Homelessness action plan, to be monitored by the Preventing Homelessness Focus Group. In addition to measuring progress against individual pieces of work as set out in the action plan, we will measure the change that the Strategy delivers by reviewing the following key performance indicators:

Number of homelessness applications

- Number of applicants who are care leavers
- Number of applicants who are veterans

Number of evictions from HCC properties

Number of repossessions in the private sector

Number of young people accessing tenancy training programmes

Number of unauthorised Gypsy and Traveller encampments

Relieving homelessness and tackling rough sleeping

As acknowledged throughout the majority of this Strategy, most of the focus of this document is on preventing homelessness from happening in the first place. However, for a vast range of reasons, households do become homeless. The needs of those who end up

becoming homeless often have multiple and complex needs which extend well beyond their housing need.

This section sets out what we will focus on to relieve homelessness as quickly as is possible and reduce the numbers of people sleeping rough.

What we need to do

- Work with key partners to review and expand the support offered to people sleeping rough via the rough sleeper outreach service – including access to physical and mental health and substance misuse services. Providing coordinated support for these issues will increase the likelihood of rough sleepers being willing and able to access more secure accommodation.
- Continue to support the reconnection service for those from abroad who find themselves homeless with no recourse to public funds – many people have the right to live in the UK, especially people from the EEA, without being able to access social housing or welfare benefits until they have satisfied a number of criteria which take into account length of previous employment and amount of money earned. For people who cannot access those benefits and do not qualify for assistance, repatriation via this service must continue to be offered.
- Develop a cohesive discharge protocol with health providers and the Housing Options Team to ensure that where people are homeless/have no fixed abode and are admitted to a health facility their housing situation can be addressed alongside their discharge being planned. This has been developed in other cities through the pathway model. This will mean that those who are homeless are not discharged to inappropriate accommodation, or back to the streets in the case of rough sleepers.
- Explore options for developing a day centre in Hull. Day centres are places which people who are homeless can access during the day, separate to their hostel or temporary accommodation – if they have it. They are warm, dry places where people can get help with basic needs such as food, clothing and laundry facilities and showers; most provide advice on benefits, housing, access to drug and alcohol services or drop in sessions with primary health care workers. They often have other practical facilities such as mobile phone charging facilities, a place to receive post and lockers or safe spaces to store valuables and important documentation.
- Undertake a feasibility study for wet house provision. In Hull there are a small group of individuals who are unable to access, and maintain contact, with the hostel provision on offer due to their addiction to drugs or alcohol and therefore often end up sleeping rough. As part of a harm reduction approach, a wet house for this group would prevent them from sleeping rough and reduce calls for service from emergency services as a result with support provided on site if wet house residents are prepared to move to more independent living.
- Adopt a Making Every Adult Matter (MEAM) approach. MEAM coordinates a range of services around people with multiple needs and exclusions who find themselves homeless and unable to engage with services provided 'off the shelf'. A lead worker provides intensive case management for a small group of the most chaotic and 'trapped' individuals in the city, coordinating workers from a range of agencies in order to address their multiple needs.

- Pilot Housing First. As detailed above, Housing First is an internationally evidence-based approach, which uses independent, stable housing as a platform to enable individuals with multiple and complex needs to begin recovery and move away from homelessness. Setting up a pilot will allow us to monitor its effectiveness in Hull before considering implementation of Housing First on a wider scale.
- Review use of Hull City Council properties as temporary accommodation. Some Council properties are already used for this purpose and can be utilised to avoid more expensive bed and breakfast provision or inappropriate use of hostel beds.
- Undertake a comprehensive review of existing Housing Related Support and a needs assessment ahead of HRS recommissioning. This should incorporate the views of those with first hand experience of homelessness.
 - Consider the development of a single point or gateway through which to access the HRS offer and develop a tracking tool to understand how individuals move through homelessness support/HRS provision.
 - Understand the need for more dispersed models of HRS accommodation and provide a clear offer for specific vulnerable groups e.g. young people, survivors of domestic abuse, people with mental health issues and women involved in street prostitution.
- Continue to offer advice to specified exempt accommodation providers, providing advice about location and standards and ensure supported housing providers are prepared for any future funding reform plans.
- Support the development and ongoing improvement of homelessness specific health provision including the primary care inclusive health service, the Pathways model (hospital admission and discharge project) and support an integrated commissioning approach which brings together NHS commissioners and providers, drug and alcohol services and the Council.

How we measure change

The actions listed here will form the basis of a Preventing Homelessness action plan, to be monitored by the Preventing Homelessness Focus Group. In addition to measuring progress against individual pieces of work as set out in the action plan, we will measure the change that the Strategy delivers by reviewing the following key performance indicators:

Number of people giving the following reasons for the loss of their last settled home –

- termination of an assured short hold tenancy
- violent relationship breakdown with partner
- parents no longer willing or able to accommodate

Number of rough sleepers

Number of people temporarily housed in B&B

Number of people who are homeless accessing A&E

- Number of people who are homeless accessing A&E not registered with a GP

Governance and implementation

The Preventing Homelessness Strategy 2017 - 2021 is a Hull City Council document and so the responsibility for coordinating delivery and reporting on progress lies with the Council. However, it has been developed in partnership with a range of organisations from across the city. Moving forward, the Preventing Homelessness Focus Group will drive delivery of the Strategy.

The Focus Group has representation from across the homelessness system in Hull, i.e. hostel and supported housing providers, registered social landlords, outreach teams and advice agencies. In recognition of the importance of the wider issues affecting homelessness as set out in this document, in addition to those more housing/homelessness centric organisations, membership also includes representation from social services, prisons and probation, public health, NHS Hull Clinical Commissioning Group and health providers.

The Focus Group will continue to support the development of the Strategy's action plans and annual reports over the life of the Preventing Homelessness Strategy 2017 - 2021.

Action plan and annual reporting

The Strategy sets out a vision for homelessness in the city and the priorities which the Council and its partners will focus on over the next five years.

While the Strategy describes some key actions that are already in progress or in development, it does not describe everything that will be done to ultimately achieve our vision. In some instances further work needs to be undertaken to develop specific action, in others we will want to develop those actions in partnership. In most cases, we will want to consult further with residents and partners before finalising plans and putting them into action.

To ensure that tangible actions are developed and real outcomes delivered, an action plan with specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time bound actions, will be reviewed and published annually – owned by the Preventing Homelessness Focus Group.

An annual report will also be produced and published alongside the action plan. This will detail the outcomes achieved over the previous 12 months.