

COLCHESTER'S HOMELESSNESS AND ROUGH SLEEPING STRATEGY



2020 – 2025

Building collaborative partnerships to Increase early intervention and prevention of homelessness in Colchester



Colchester Borough Council would like to thank the following members of the Homelessness Strategy Project Group for their time and expertise in developing the strategy.



Beacon House is primarily a Day Centre based on Crouch Street. It is a Christian charity that offers healthcare and wellbeing facilities to those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. Beacon House provides a person-centred service, to break the cycle of homelessness, to restore those who are temporarily homeless, and to reduce the risk of becoming homeless.



Colchester Borough Homes including:

The **Housing Options** service provides the front-line Housing Service on behalf of Colchester Borough Council. The role of the team includes preventing homelessness, assessment of applications for the housing register, providing advice and assistance regarding a wide range of housing related issues and completing homelessness assessments. The team also manage the Council's temporary accommodation.

The Rough sleeping Team based within Housing Options provides Outreach support and emergency accommodation to people that are rough sleeping and those at risk of sleeping rough. The team also provide ongoing intensive support to chaotic clients to support them into accommodation and to help them to sustain a tenancy.

Tenancy Sustainment Services provide a range of services to help clients manage tenancies effectively. The team has specialist skills which provide a balance of support and enforcement, including: supporting victims of Domestic Abuse, Hoarding, Conditions of Property, supporting victims of antisocial behaviour.

Tenancy Services include the Community Housing Officers, whose principal role is to ensure that tenancies are well maintained. The role of the team also includes: Rent Collection, Allocations and Lettings, Financial Inclusion & Welfare Rights, Garage and Leasehold Management, contract monitoring, Estate management, Resident Involvement & Communication.



Colchester Emergency Night Shelter (CENS) is a 20-bed project providing accommodation for homeless people aged 18 and over. The Night Shelter team works to support people with their recognised needs including Drug and Alcohol Support Groups, Personal Development work and assistance with obtaining secure housing. CENS also offer Tenancy Sustainment support to ensure tenancies are maintained.



Homeless Link is a national homeless Charity supporting people and organisations working directly with homeless people.



Peabody provides good quality, affordable homes to rent and buy, as well as care and support services to thousands of people who need extra support. It is one of the largest housing providers in London, Essex and the South East. Peabody also provides individual housing related support to people in the community, preventing homelessness and helping people to maintain their tenancies



Phoenix Futures are a charity and housing association which has been helping people overcome drug and alcohol problems for 50 years by providing residential, prison, community and specialist services.



Sanctuary Supported Living is part of Sanctuary Group, one of the country's leading social housing providers, with more than 50 years' experience in providing affordable housing, support and care for vulnerable people. They support people on their pathways to independence through supported housing, move-on accommodation, Care Quality Commission (CQC) registered services and community-based floating support.



Colchester and Tendring **Youth Enquiry Service (Y.E.S)** offers early intervention support to young people between the ages of 16 to 25 who are faced with homelessness or are threatened with homelessness. Working creatively and proactively to prevent homelessness and/or source suitable and accessible housing for young clients. Y.E.S also offers counselling, support with debts and benefit eligibility and a teenage pregnancy service offering support to young parents and young parents to be.

We would also like to thank all the residents, staff and representatives we consulted with who gave their time and shared their experiences with us. This help has been invaluable in developing the strategy.

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Forward

Councillor Adam Fox
Portfolio Holder for Housing



Homelessness is often the result of a combination of events such as relationship breakdown, ill health, problems with debt, adverse experiences in childhood or the ending of a tenancy with no prospect of securing another.

We all have a role in tackling these issues together; as Councillors, statutory agencies, the voluntary sector and residents of Colchester.

This is Colchester Borough Council's Fourth Homelessness Strategy which seeks to build on the successes of the last strategy which was published in 2014. Since the publication of the last Strategy significant progress has been made in the prevention of homelessness in Colchester against a backdrop of national and local housing challenges and a major change in legislation with the Introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act in 2017. But there is still more to do.

Colchester Borough Council and its partner organisations continue to adopt a strong approach to preventing and relieving homelessness.

The demand for social housing in Colchester continues to outweigh supply therefore the focus has been on supporting people who are at risk of homelessness or vulnerably housed to find sustainable solutions to meet

their housing and support needs. By working together with our partner organisations we have also been able to provide support to tenants and residents affected by welfare reforms.

Despite our best efforts we saw an increase in the number of homeless people sleeping rough in Colchester over the last five years. Colchester Borough Council in conjunction with Colchester Borough Homes have been successful in securing government funding to develop initiatives with our partner organisations to reduce and prevent rough sleeping in Colchester by supporting people to access services and help them into accommodation.

Whilst the new Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy looks to build on these successes it has been developed against fresh challenges that threaten to increase homelessness and make it more difficult for people to meet their housing need. However, by continuing to work in partnership with organisations in Colchester to prevent homelessness, we will focus on our key aims to: increase access to accommodation and providing settled homes, helping people to sustain their accommodation, improving the health and wellbeing of people who experience homelessness and improving communication and challenging the perception and culture of homelessness.

I would like to thank all our partner organisations that continue to work with us to prevent homelessness in Colchester.

I continue to be impressed by the commitment and energy of everyone who work to prevent homelessness and improve the lives of those that have experienced it.

Introduction

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

A fundamental change to homelessness legislation with the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act in 2017,

places two additional Prevention and Relief duties on the Local Housing Authority and an additional 'duty to refer' on all public authorities specified in the legislation.

The new Homelessness code of Guidance introduced alongside the Act sets out new guidance for local authorities on formulating a strategy for homelessness in their district.

This is Colchester's fourth Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy. It has been developed by Colchester Borough Council and its partner organisations, all of whom are strongly committed to developing initiatives and objectives to prevent and relieve homelessness in the borough.

The new Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy has looked back at the achievements since the last strategy, reviewed the current homelessness situation in Colchester and based on this, set out its aims for the next five years to work collaboratively to meet the new challenges that we face in the future.



Demand for all types of housing in Colchester continues to grow whilst the supply of affordable accommodation is reducing. In order to mitigate this, we continue to focus on innovative ways to prevent homelessness occurring in the first place.

In addition to supporting people facing homelessness, or who are homeless, to meet their housing and support needs, the strategy also focuses on supporting people to have the same opportunities to access training, volunteering, leisure and employment opportunities as the rest of the community.

Colchester Borough Council, Colchester Borough Homes and our partners will also identify, develop and deliver support pathways into accommodation by adopting a person-centered approach in line with the new legislation.



A summary
of the key
achievements
from the
Homelessness
Strategy
2014-19

What we have achieved

1 WE HAVE INCREASED THE PROVISION OF TENANCY SUPPORT INCLUDING FLOATING SUPPORT TO TENANTS

- ▶ **One Support** continue to support people in the community, in their homes and at drop-ins, delivering housing related support. This includes: Homelessness prevention and tenancy sustainment.
In Colchester, **One Support** have a capacity of approximately 150 customers at any one time along with 14.5 hours of drop-ins each week and telephone support.
- ▶ **Colchester Borough Homes (CBH)** provides tenancy sustainment to support CBC tenants who are at risk of eviction and lead a partnership with Catch 22 who provide Intensive family support for social housing tenants in Colchester. A pilot service "**Start well**" has been funded by **Colchester Borough Council (CBC)** to provide intense intervention and support to families living in temporary accommodation, especially Bed and Breakfast, which has provided positive outcomes.

2 WE HAVE PROVIDED SERVICES THAT WILL SUPPORT YOUNG TENANTS TO MAINTAIN THEIR TENANCY AND PREVENT UNNECESSARY EVICTIONS THROUGH ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR (ASB) AND RENT ARREARS

- ▶ The continuation of pre-tenancy workshops by the **Youth Enquiry Service and CBH**. The content of the workshop is continually updated to ensure that young people are fully aware of welfare benefit reforms.
- ▶ All new CBC tenants under 25 years old are visited by the **Support team** to ensure they have the skills to manage their tenancy. Prompt intervention is put in place if the tenancy becomes at risk.
- ▶ No young people have been evicted for rent arrears/ASB from CBC properties since 2017.

3 WE HAVE INCREASED THE PREVENTION OF HOMELESSNESS CAUSED BY DOMESTIC ABUSE

- ▶ **CBC, in partnership with Braintree, Tendring and Maldon Councils,** successfully secured **£263,453 for a 15-month project** to provide specialist services at the refuge and in the community for Gypsy and Roma Travellers and hard to reach victims and their families. The project was delivered by **Colchester and Tendring Women's Refuge**. The service started in May 2017.
- ▶ From May 2017 to the end of March 2018, **181 Colchester households** who were experiencing domestic abuse were referred to the project. Of these, 169 were from hard to reach groups and 12 from the Gypsy and Roma Traveller Community. A total of **24%** of all the referrals were accommodated in the Refuge and **76%** were offered support in the community. An additional **£14,573 of funding** was secured from the **Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government (MHCLG)** to continue the project.
- ▶ In 2018/2019 CBC led on a successful bid and secured **£398,643 of funding** to provide services to women and their families fleeing domestic abuse in Colchester, Tendring, Braintree and Maldon. The bid was made in partnership with Colchester and Tendring Women's Refuge (now called **Next Chapter**).
- ▶ The funding is being used for services including; increasing the number of available spaces at the refuge and provide accommodation for women and their children seeking to live independently after suffering domestic abuse and provide support and accommodation to women with complex needs including substance misuse arising from the abuse they have experienced.

4 WE HAVE PROVIDED ADVICE AND SUPPORT TO TENANTS AND RESIDENTS POTENTIALLY AFFECTED BY THE WELFARE REFORMS.

- ▶ **The CBC Customer Support Team** continues to engage with customers affected by welfare reforms to minimize the effect of the reforms, reduce reliance on discretionary funds and prevent homelessness.
- ▶ **Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP)** were used to support residents affected by **Welfare Reforms** and to remove the risk of homelessness. The DHP fund of **£444,224 (including £50,000 from CBC)** was fully spent in 2018/19.
- ▶ A total of **£71,003.32** was spent to support residents affected by the **Benefit Cap**. A further **£88,219.72** was spent to support residents affected by the removal of the **Spare Room Subsidy**.
- ▶ **Exceptional Hardship Payments** were utilised to support customers in managing their Council Tax accounts – a total of **£15,688** was spent to alleviate this financial pressure.

5 WE HAVE PROVIDED ADVICE AND INFORMATION ABOUT THE CHANGES TO THE COUNCIL'S HOMELESSNESS SERVICE BROUGHT ABOUT BY THE INTRODUCTION OF THE HOMELESSNESS REDUCTION ACT (HRA) AND THE NEW HOMELESSNESS CODE OF GUIDANCE.

- ▶ CBH held a successful Stakeholder event in February 2018 to introduce partners to the changes being made to the service with the implementation of the HRA.
- ▶ Training on the HRA was also carried out for partner organisations by CBH Officers. Upskilling of Housing Solutions Officers took place to meet the new requirements and additional officers were recruited to carry out the initial assessment process. Systems and processes have been reviewed to assist customers to self-serve.
- ▶ CBH Housing Solutions team implemented the Homelessness Reduction Act following significant preparation as detailed above. A significant change implemented in 2018/2019 was the provision of an Enhanced Housing Options website to provide advice and guidance to those who may be homeless or threatened with homelessness and to make appointments online to see an advisor.
- ▶ During the first year; 1344 households approached CBH as homeless or threatened with homelessness and 744 Personal Housing Plans were completed. 115 households were accepted as homeless and in priority need, with the Council accepting a duty to provide permanent accommodation. This is a 37.5% reduction from 2017/2018.
- ▶ Action was taken to prevent and relieve homelessness for another 276 households.



6 WE REVIEWED THE ALLOCATIONS POLICY TO MEET THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE HOMELESSNESS REDUCTION ACT TO ENSURE THAT IT IS SUFFICIENTLY GEARED TOWARDS PREVENTING HOMELESSNESS.

- ▶ The Allocations Policy was reviewed in 2017-18 to meet the requirements of the Homelessness Reduction Act to reflect the new prevention and relief duties placed on local authorities under the new Homelessness prevention Act. The Policy was adopted in February 2018.

Rough sleeping

We have made significant progress to reduce the number of rough sleepers in Colchester by Identifying the support needs of different types of rough sleepers including **entrenched rough sleepers**, young people that are **'new' to the streets** and people **suffering from mental health** to help engage with different groups.



▶ In December 2016 CBC and Tendring District Council successfully secured the then Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) funding of £239,000 for 2 years to provide a **co-ordinated response to rough sleeping** across both local authority areas **to support and prevent homelessness** for this group. Two Early Response Rough Sleeper co-ordinators (one for Colchester and one for Tendring) were in post by November 2017. The Early Response Rough Sleeper Co-ordinator for Colchester works within the CBH Housing Solutions Team.

▶ **The role of the Rough Sleeper Co-ordinator** was initially to work with local organisations who have the skills and expertise in this field, to develop a more targeted and assertive approach to rough sleeping in Colchester and to support and help secure accommodation for people living on the street.

The outcomes from the project fall into 3 main categories:

- Culture change and good practice
- Better joined up working
- Getting rough sleepers into accommodation

The initial **funding** for the Rough Sleeper Co-ordinator will come to an end in October but due to the success of the project the post will continue to be funded as part of the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) Rough Sleeper Initiative funding for 2019-20 (see below).

In Colchester from November 2017 to the end of July 2018, 20 rough sleepers or those at risk of rough sleeping were housed or supported to remain in their homes.

We have established a multi-agency group of support services for single homeless and rough sleepers.

- ▶ **Colchester's Homeless Service User Panel** (CHASUP) was reviewed by the **Rough Sleeper Coordinator** and is now known as **Colchester Homeless Action Panel** (CHAP). A matrix has been developed to provide an accommodation and support pathway. CHAP is currently working with 18 clients to provide support and assist them into accommodation.
- ▶ A **Community of Practice** has been set up in partnership with **Homeless Link** (a national good practice and innovation organisation). A forum is held quarterly to look at innovation and ideas and provide training for all services in Colchester to help address single homelessness and rough sleeping. The Forums are well attended.

We have extended the opening times of agencies to reduce the amount of time that rough sleepers spend on the street.

- ▶ Daytime activities at **Colchester Emergency Night Shelter** (CENS) remain well attended by residents and ex residents. This has created a mentoring and peer support environment which allows residents to see that positive outcomes can be made if engagement is continued. **Emergency bed spaces** at CENS increased during the cold period in 2018- and 24-hour opening was introduced during extreme bad weather.

Additional funding for Rough Sleepers

In May 2018 the **Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government** (MHCLG) identified Colchester as an area eligible to bid for additional funding during 2018/19 to further **reduce rough sleeping**. CBC in conjunction with CBH, were successful in securing **£192,683 of funding**.

4 key interventions were identified for the funding:

- To provide an assertive street outreach service, especially out of hours provision and helping those rough sleepers who have no local connection to Colchester return to the area where they do have a local connection.
- To provide an opportunity to pilot a 'Housing First' approach for 6 months with a Registered Provider that provides supported housing (The concept of Housing First is to provide a stable home and intensive personalised support and case management to homeless people with multiple and complex needs).
- To increase bed spaces and support staff capacity at Colchester Night Shelter, specifically, for Colchester people at risk of rough sleeping.
- To provide continuous Severe Weather Emergency Provision (SWEP) from the end of October - mid March, with specialist support staff to prevent people moving back to the street once the provision ends.



Outcomes from December 2018 to the end of April 2019:

- ▶ 25 rough sleepers have been supported into emergency accommodation
- ▶ 7 rough sleepers have been supported into temporary accommodation
- ▶ 7 rough sleepers have been supported into long term accommodation
- ▶ 10 rough sleepers have been reconnected back to the area from which they came
- ▶ 4 people at risk of rough sleeping were supported into accommodation and prevented from living on the street
- ▶ The Housing First scheme has been successful in supporting 2 people to move on into more permanent accommodation.
- ▶ 21 rough sleepers have been referred and accepted into Colchester Emergency Night Shelter.

Colchester Borough Council were also invited to bid for further funding to continue the interventions for 2019-20. Further funding of **£204,753 has been awarded**. In total **£517,123.50 of funding has been secured** from the three government funding streams to prevent, reduce and support rough sleepers in Colchester.

Colchester's Homelessness Prevention Charter

In March 2019 Colchester Borough Council and Colchester Borough Homes set up the **Homelessness Prevention Charter**.

Under **Colchester's Homelessness Strategy**, the council is committed to tackling homelessness in the borough by working closely with partner organisations and focusing on early interventions that prevent people losing their homes.

The **Homelessness Prevention Charter** encourages residents and businesses to help play their part in supporting this ambition by signing up to the Charter and making a pledge.

Examples of the pledges that can be made include:

- donating to a local homelessness charity or project
- volunteering for a local homelessness organisation
- having a Homeless Support Champion in the workplace to help inform colleagues about homelessness and alternative ways of supporting the homeless
- raising money for a local organisation to help people that are at risk or are experiencing homelessness
- companies offering a person who is or has been homeless training or work experience

Alternatively, residents and businesses will be able to develop their own pledge.



The Strategic Context

To put the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy into perspective, this section focuses on the **legal, national and local context**.

The legal framework

The Housing Act 1996

Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996 continues to be the overarching piece of legislation that relates to homelessness and informs the way in which local authorities respond to homelessness.

The Act has since been amended by the Homelessness Act 2002 and the Localism Act 2011. These subsequent pieces of legislation have placed a requirement on Local Authorities to adopt a strategic approach to managing and preventing homelessness.

The Localism Act 2011

Section 153 of the Localism Act 2011 prescribes the relationship between schemes and strategies that local authorities must have regard to in developing or modifying their local preventing homelessness strategies:

'In formulating or modifying a homelessness strategy, a local housing authority in England shall have regard to —
(a) *its current allocation scheme under section 166A of the Housing Act 1996,*
(b) *its current tenancy strategy under section 150 of the Localism Act 2011'*

The Care Act 2014

The Act came into effect on 1st April 2015 and represents the most significant reform of care and support in more than 60 years. The main purpose of the Act is to put people and their carers in control of their care and support.

The Act combines various existing pieces of legislation which were previously used to shape how social care was arranged in Britain.

Key areas of change from April 2015 included:

- ▶ general responsibilities on local authorities including promoting people's wellbeing, focusing on prevention and providing information and advice
- ▶ the introduction of new national eligibility criteria
- ▶ new rights to support for carers on an equivalent basis to the people they care
- ▶ for a legal right to a personal budget and direct payment
- ▶ the extension of local authority adult social care responsibility to include prisons
- ▶ new responsibilities around transition, provider failure, supporting people who move between local authority areas and safeguarding.

The Welfare Reform and Work Act - 2016

The Welfare Reform and Work Act took forward the government commitment to introduce a duty to report to Parliament on progress made towards achieving full employment and the target of three million apprenticeships in England. In addition, the Act ensured reports on the effect of support for troubled families and provision for social mobility, the benefit cap, social security and tax credits, loans for mortgage interest, and social housing rents.

The key changes in the Welfare Reform and Work Act which impact on homelessness are:

- ▶ Welfare benefits changes; lowering of the Benefit cap, freeze on certain social security benefits, freeze on tax credits, changes to the child element of universal credit, Universal credit: work-related requirements.
- ▶ Reduction in social housing rents.

The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017

The Homelessness Reduction Act came into force in April 2018. The government also published a new code of guidance that set out in more detail how the changes should be implemented.

The Act is the first change to Homelessness Legislation for 16 years although some commentators argue it is the greatest change since the original 1977 Homeless Persons Act.

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.

Councils are also required to draw up personal housing plans for people that are homeless and anyone who is at risk of becoming homeless. Public authorities that are specified in the legislation and that have contact with clients who are homeless or at risk of homelessness will be required to refer them to local authorities, with the persons consent. Clients can choose which local authority they want to be referred.

This is known as a 'duty to refer'.

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. Certain categories of household, such as pregnant women, families with children, and households that are homeless due to an emergency such as a fire or flood, have priority need if homeless.

Other groups may be assessed as having priority need because they are vulnerable as a result of old age, mental ill health, physical disability, having been in prison or care or as a result of becoming homeless due to domestic abuse. This duty is usually ended through the offer of a settled/permanent home.

As a result of the Homelessness Reduction Act processes, procedures, information being collected, and statutory returns have all had to change.

National Context

National Rough Sleeping Strategy

In August 2018 the government published its Rough Sleeping Strategy. The strategy sets out the government's vision to support every person who sleeps rough off the streets and into a home, which will deliver its commitment to halve rough sleeping by 2022 and eliminate it by 2027.

The strategy acknowledges that in order to achieve this will require central and local government, as well as business, communities, faith and voluntary groups and the general public to work together in new ways.

The main focus of the strategy is to put in place new programmes and structures to support people off the streets immediately.

The strategy is based around three core objectives: **Prevention, Intervention and Recovery.**

- ▶ **Prevention** - providing a focus on timely support before someone becomes homeless.
- ▶ **Intervention** - helping people who are already in crisis get swift, targeted support to get them off the streets.
- ▶ **Recovery** – supporting people to find a new home quickly and rebuild their lives via a new rapid rehousing approach.

The actions to deliver the commitment are set out in a delivery plan that was published alongside the strategy.

The document also states that all local authorities will be required to:

- ▶ Update their Homelessness strategies and rebrand them as Homelessness and Rough Sleeping strategies
- ▶ Make strategies available online and submit them to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG)
- ▶ Report progress on delivering these strategies and publish annual action plans.

Local Context

Essex Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy (JHWS) 2018-22

The Strategy sets out the priorities identified through the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) that local government, the NHS and other partners deliver together through the Health and Wellbeing Board. The JHWS identifies 'a small number of key strategic priorities for action', where there is an opportunity for partners working through the Health and Wellbeing Board to 'have a real impact' on improving health and wellbeing outcomes and a reduction in health inequalities.

The JHWS is jointly owned by partners through the Essex Health and Wellbeing Board, the District, Borough and City Council's HWB Partnership Boards, the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner, Safeguarding Boards and the voluntary and community sector.

The strategy sets out a shared vision for health and wellbeing in Essex through key countywide strategic priorities, which address four areas of focus:

- ▶ Improving mental health and wellbeing
- ▶ Addressing obesity, improving diet and increasing physical activity
- ▶ Influencing conditions and behavior's linked to health inequalities
- ▶ Enabling and supporting people with long-term conditions and disabilities.

Essex Vision

The Essex Vision was developed by the top 100 Essex leaders, community groups and businesses in 2017 to promote collaboration and focus public sector organisations on the pursuit of common goals. The Essex Partners agreed on 8 key areas of work. Sponsors and leading organisations were appointed to lead on each key area:

- ▶ **Essex Innovates:** Data analytics to support early intervention strategies
- ▶ **Essex Supports:** Early help to reduce number of crisis mental health incidents
- ▶ **Essex Unites:** Supporting a community in building civic pride and social capital
- ▶ **Essex Communities:** Maximise economic, community and public health potential of new developments
- ▶ **Essex Inspires:** Skills and educational performance
- ▶ **Essex Leads:** Taking a whole-systems approach to promoting physical activity to support physical and mental health
- ▶ **Essex Spirit:** Safer communities
- ▶ **Essex Prevents:** A countywide approach to homelessness reduction

Essex Prevents:

This workstream links with Colchester's Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy and a summary of the key actions are below:

Recognise those groups most at risk of homelessness to develop earlier intervention and prevention.

Improve communication and understanding between partners to reduce risks and improve outcomes for all involved, e.g. multi-agency training, pooling resources and protocols.

- Open, honest, transparent services that enable people to take responsibility, make considered choices and manage expectations
- Improve the flow of information and management of cases, removing duplication and streamlining the way we work between organisations.
- Improve the understanding and prioritisation of the commissioning of support services between organisations that prevent homelessness.
- Tackling the perception and stigma of homelessness and affordable housing by collectively identifying need throughout Essex.
- Using the information, we collate to drive changes to organisational plans and lobby collectively for improvements to wider policy such as welfare reform, social care and local plans.
- What will have changed in six months: Developing a partnership roadmap and generating insight on those groups most at risk of homelessness to develop earlier intervention and prevention.

Our Colchester

The Strategic Plan 2018-21

The Strategic Plan sets out how Colchester Borough Council will play its part in making Colchester a place where people want to live, learn, work and visit. The plan describes the priorities and direction for the borough and sets out the Council's ambitious goals to help make Colchester an even better place to live, work and visit. We will work with many partners to get the best for our residents.

The priorities are set out under four themes:

- **GROWTH** Ensuring all residents benefit from the growth of the borough
- **RESPONSIBILITY** Encouraging everyone to do their bit to make the borough even better
- **OPPORTUNITY** Promoting and improving Colchester and its environment
- **WELLBEING** Making Colchester an even better place to live and supporting those who need most help

The Strategic Plan is accompanied by an **Action Plan**, which sets out specific actions and outcomes for each priority area. The action plan is reported to Cabinet twice a year.

Colchester's Housing Strategy 2015-20

The Housing Strategy 2015-2020 provides an important summary of how the Council and its partners will achieve its vision to:

- ▶ Make Colchester a place where people choose to live in a decent, safe and healthy home which; meets their needs, at a price they can afford and in locations and neighborhoods that are sustainable and desirable.
- ▶ Work to improve the quality of life of residents.

The document sets out the following key priorities for the strategy:

- Maximise the supply of housing to meet local needs
- Work with partners and residents to create mixed communities which are economically, environmentally and socially healthy and resilient
- Prevent homelessness and rough sleeping (Colchester's Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy)
- Improve the life chances of Colchester's residents including their Health and Wellbeing
- Work with customers to help them make informed choices about their housing options
- Make the best use of existing homes
- Work to ensure that existing and new homes are healthy, safe and energy efficient
- Ensure that housing and related services meet a range of specialist needs

These priorities have been translated into a series of actions included in a Delivery Plan which forms part of the strategy document. The plan is updated and reported annually.

Reviewing Homelessness in Colchester

The Local picture

Colchester is the largest district in Essex, with a rapidly growing population and economy. Over the next 15 years Colchester is anticipated to experience one of the fastest growth rates within the county. Colchester has a population of **190,098** (mid-year estimate 2017) and as at 31st March 2019 the number of households in the borough was **82,055**. The population is projected to grow to **216,300** by 2030.

During the year 2018-19

- ▶ A total of **1165** homes were built in Colchester of which **125** were recorded as affordable housing completions.
- ▶ The average household price across the borough in April 2019 was **£291,855**.
- ▶ The number of households on the Council's Housing Register as at 30 April 2019 was **3107**.
- ▶ The number of social housing lettings in Colchester was **658** of which **190** were let to homeless households.
- ▶ The Housing Solutions Team prevented homelessness for **186** households and relieved homelessness for **90** households and
- ▶ Accepted a duty under the homelessness legislation for **115** households and helped them into accommodation.
- ▶ The number of households in temporary accommodation as at 31st March 2019 was **179**.
- ▶ In November 2018 the annual street count was conducted on one night in Colchester and **13** people were found to be sleeping rough as verified by Homeless Link.





Developing the new Strategy

A consultation event was held at the end of January 2019 for the Council's partner organisations that work with people that are or have been homeless in Colchester. The event was led by **Homeless Link** (a national charity who support organisations working directly with people who become homeless) and supported by the **Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government** (MHCLG).

There were 35 attendees from organisations including:

- Colchester Borough Homes
- Essex County Council
- Essex Community Rehabilitation Company
- MHCLG
- y.e.s
- Emmaus
- Peabody
- Beacon House
- Rough Sleepers Group
- Phoenix Futures
- Sanctuary Housing
- YMCA
- DWP
- Nacro
- Open Road

The event provided the opportunity to take a fresh approach to reducing and preventing homelessness in Colchester by reviewing the current challenges facing both services and clients and identifying the key priorities that we need to focus on to do this.

The event focused on 4 main questions to prompt discussion:

- ▶ How do we build collaborative partnerships in Colchester?
- ▶ How do we make prevention of homelessness everyone's responsibility?
- ▶ How do we foster a person-centered approach?
- ▶ How can we create environments where people thrive?



Feedback from the event also provided ideas for consideration to be included within the strategy:

- *It should be central – not simply a ‘one stop shop’ but a centre of excellence that considers the overall infrastructure of sharing information and accessing services correctly that provides a vibrant environment which is creative and demonstrates real and appropriate access and assessment.*
- *It should have realistic aims and objectives which involves all stakeholders including those who are accessing the service.*
- *It should demonstrate realistic pathways for people when accessing support, layout expectation of and for all stakeholders.*
- *It should have positive and ongoing engagement from other statutory services i.e. A&E, adult social care, social services.*
- *It should include positive and focused education opportunities for younger people to enable the development of life skills and identify needs at a younger age – e.g. trauma.*
- *It should include actions for improved information sharing at the right level and right time, making sure people have the information when they need it.*
- *It should identify intervention at an earlier stage.*
- *There should be joint ownership over the strategy, with shared outcomes and shared understanding of the system, everyone’s role within this, and what is trying to be achieved. People should be held account to uphold their part in the process.*

Following the consultation event, a project group was set up with some of the key organisations that attended the event, to develop the **new Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy for Colchester**.

The project group:

- reviewed the feedback from the event
- identified the gaps in homelessness prevention and
- agreed the main aims for the strategy to meet the challenges.

In addition, the group agreed that further consultation with people that were or had been homeless was necessary to shape the new strategy.

Focus group consultation

Focus groups/drop in sessions were held over 2 days in April 2019. The sessions were held at Youth Enquiry Service (y.e.s), Colchester Emergency Night Shelter (CENS), Beacon House and Sanctuary Housing.



12 people that had or were experiencing homelessness were interviewed informally about their situation:

The interviewees were asked about the main **reasons that they became homeless**,

- whether homelessness could have been prevented earlier,
- what organisations or services are or were particularly helpful to them and
- what other support or service could have helped or prevented them from becoming homeless.

11 out of the 12 people interviewed were or had been single and homeless and **one** was a couple. There were **9 men** and **3 women**.

Under half of the people interviewed came from Colchester.

As this is not representative of all homeless households in Colchester there will be an action in the strategy to continue to seek the views of other households (e.g. Families with children) to inform initiatives to prevent homelessness in Colchester.

The case studies are available at appendix 2.



Key aims of the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy

Using the information gathered from the review of homelessness and rough sleeping in Colchester and linking with Colchester's Homelessness Charter, the project group identified an overarching vision for the Strategy:

BUILDING COLLABORATIVE PARTNERSHIPS TO INCREASE EARLY INTERVENTION AND PREVENTION OF HOMELESSNESS IN COLCHESTER.

To achieve this vision **4 key aims** for the strategy were agreed:

- ▶ Increasing access to accommodation and providing settled homes.
- ▶ Helping people to sustain their accommodation.
- ▶ Improving the health and wellbeing of people who experience homelessness
- ▶ Improving communication and challenging the perception and culture of homelessness.



Aim 1:

INCREASING ACCESS TO ACCOMMODATION AND PROVIDING SETTLED HOMES.

To enable the strategy to deliver the vision for preventing homelessness in Colchester the project group agreed that one of the main issues was access to the right type of accommodation at the right time, to provide a settled home.

As the demand for social housing in Colchester continues to grow and the supply of accommodation is reducing, Colchester Borough Council, Colchester Borough Homes and our partner organisations need to focus on alternative ways to access and provide settled accommodation to meet the needs of people that are homeless.

To achieve this aim we will need to undertake the following actions to overcome the challenges identified:

- Create opportunities for accessing housing of the right kind and quality, to prevent people from becoming homeless
- Evaluate how well the Homelessness Reduction Act is working and what difference it is making to preventing homelessness in Colchester
- Influence the commissioning of supported housing to ensure that the supply meets the demand for this type of accommodation
- Ensure people are not discharged from services such as Prisons, Mental Health, leaving Care, armed forces and hospitals in an unplanned way which could result in them ending up on the street
- Increase homelessness prevention for people suffering domestic abuse
- Increase and support housing options for people moving on from supported housing to reduce the reliance on social housing
- Identify accommodation opportunities for rough sleepers to help with the transition from living on the street



Aim 2:

HELPING PEOPLE TO SUSTAIN THEIR ACCOMMODATION.

Some of the main reasons that people become homeless is by losing their accommodation due to rent and mortgage arrears, anti-social behaviour and abandoning their home.

We recognise that to prevent people from losing their homes we need to work with our partner organisations to provide good quality advice and support services for people at an earlier stage to help them to retain and maintain their accommodation.

To achieve this aim we will need to undertake the following actions to overcome the challenges identified:

- Ensure tenants in the social rented sector at risk of homelessness are provided with more intensive tenancy support including that provided by floating support
- Ensure the provision of debt and welfare rights advice is targeted at those at risk of losing their accommodation
- Reduce the number of owner occupiers losing their properties through mortgage arrears
- Develop services that will support young tenants to maintain their tenancy and prevent unnecessary evictions through ASB and arrears
- Provide advice and support to tenants/residents affected by the welfare cap, removal of the spare room subsidy etc
- Develop a strategic approach with Children's services to help meet the housing needs of Care leavers
- Minimise isolation so that single people that have been homeless/rough sleeping have less chance of reverting to their former lifestyle once housed



Aim 3:

IMPROVING THE HEALTH AND WELLBEING OF PEOPLE WHO EXPERIENCE HOMELESSNESS.

The review of homelessness and rough sleeping highlighted the impact that this has on people's health.

Evidence tells us that the health of people experiencing homelessness is significantly worse than that of the general population, and the cost of homelessness experienced by single people to the NHS and social care is considerable. Poor health can impact on a person's ability to move on, secure and maintain settled accommodation.

Building relationships between local professionals to integrate services is key to improving health outcomes for those facing and experiencing homelessness. Therefore, improving the health of people who are homeless and providing better access to healthcare services is central in reducing health inequalities, and preventing and reducing homelessness.

To achieve this aim we will need to undertake the following actions to overcome the challenges identified:

- Improve and simplify referral processes into services which support people with substance misuse
 - Improve access to employment, volunteering and training opportunities for people that are or have experienced homelessness
 - Encourage statutory services to be more joined up when commissioning Mental Health services to make better use of the options available including personal budgets. This would provide a more efficient and cost-effective service
 - Work with the police to identify and support vulnerable clients at risk of exploitation that are being targeted by drug dealers, to reduce evictions due to drug related crime
 - Promote the integration between health and housing to meet the indicator around homelessness in the Public Health Outcomes Framework:
- Improving the wider determinants of Health for homeless acceptances and households in temporary accommodation
 - Identify the support needs of different types of rough sleepers including entrenched rough sleepers, young people that are 'new' to the streets and people suffering from mental health to provide a better understanding of gaps in support services
 - Seek to improve the availability of day services for rough sleepers by exploring the viability of extending the opening times of agencies
 - Ensure that all discharges from hospital, in-patient mental-health services, and drug and alcohol detox treatment are planned, with continuity of support where needed so that no-one is left homeless

Aim 4:

IMPROVING COMMUNICATION AND CHALLENGING THE PERCEPTION AND CULTURE OF HOMELESSNESS.

One of the key themes that was identified during the workshops at the consultation event was the need to have an effective approach to communication and information sharing to ensure that people have access to the right information, at the right time around homelessness prevention.

Additionally, with more young people becoming homeless in Colchester, educating families on the consequences of being homeless is key to challenging the perception and culture of the realities of homelessness.



To achieve this aim we will need to undertake the following actions to overcome the challenges identified:

- Provide advice and information to support people to access services that could prevent them becoming homeless. Raising awareness about realistic housing options and homelessness in Colchester
- Improve access to advice and support around welfare benefits for single clients that are homeless to prevent delays in receiving benefits and to avoid sanctions which cause reductions in the amount of benefit they receive
- Develop early intervention and prevention options for young People at risk of becoming homeless in the Borough to educate them in the reality of leaving home in an unplanned way
- Identify people at risk of homelessness at an earlier stage, and interventions that need to be put in place to prevent them being threatened with or becoming homeless and to fulfill the 'duty to refer' under the Homelessness Reduction Act
- Promote a person-centered approach to people that are homeless by creating structures which encourage voluntary sector services to work better together and share good practice
- Provide better communication to the public and organisations about how they can play their part in helping to prevent homelessness and support those that are homeless
- Enable more robust sharing of information about rough sleepers by setting up a system between the Rough Sleeper Team (CBH) and the voluntary sector organisations
- Educate the public on the difference between rough sleepers and street beggars who are not homeless to discourage them from giving money to people that are begging on the street
- Involve people that have experienced homelessness in designing services to ensure they are relevant and accessible and to continue to inform the development of the strategy

Monitoring the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy

The Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy is intended to be a working document with the actions identified in the Delivery Plan being implemented throughout the life of the strategy. Therefore, the Delivery Plan will be updated on a regular basis and a report on progress will be produced annually and circulated to the relevant stakeholders.



Appendix 1

Feedback from the consultation event

HOW DO WE BUILD COLLABORATIVE PARTNERSHIPS IN COLCHESTER?	HOW DO WE MAKE PREVENTION OF HOMELESSNESS EVERYONE'S RESPONSIBILITY?	HOW DO WE FOSTER A PERSON-CENTRED APPROACH?	HOW CAN WE CREATE ENVIRONMENTS WHERE PEOPLE THRIVE?
<p>How do we bring people together to work effectively?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Inter- disciplinary meeting - Good working partnership with the DWP - Ensure that our approaches to communication and information sharing are effective and the right people know the right information The group talked about ways in which this could be coordinated to be more cost effective - Sign up to common aims - Hold Prevention Charter Forum/ Homelessness Strategy Forum - More accurate data and counts – being shared/ available 	<p>Whose responsibility is it currently?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Statutory sector as they make a lot of the decisions on how services are made - Duty to refer: Prisons, hospitals, probation services (Not: police or voluntary sector) 	<p>Why is it important to foster a person-centred approach?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To provide a 'move on' that makes sense to the person receiving the support - To allow a better understanding of the trauma they have faced and not making people relive this therefore allowing them to see progression and not knock-backs - To enable the building of trusting and meaningful relationships - Enabling an assessment process that is holistic and not focused on one area and accepting contributing factors - Better engagement is needed/Tailoring support - being open and honest and managing expectations. 	<p>What does it mean to thrive? What does this look like?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Some members of the group felt that the word 'thrive' was not appropriate as we all have different understandings of what this word means. The group agreed that for the purpose of the work we would consider this as meaning the removal of stigma and accessing to appropriate support and being valued as an equal member of society. - Being valued and allowing people to be able to be themselves - Being able to access the right support at the right time and when it is needed.

HOW DO WE BUILD COLLABORATIVE PARTNERSHIPS IN COLCHESTER?	HOW DO WE MAKE PREVENTION OF HOMELESSNESS EVERYONE'S RESPONSIBILITY?	HOW DO WE FOSTER A PERSON-CENTRED APPROACH?	HOW CAN WE CREATE ENVIRONMENTS WHERE PEOPLE THRIVE?
<p>What outcomes should we see?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A designated coordinator to oversee sector communications and ensure inclusiveness/ Navigat or role - Access and/or development of tool kits --- Smoother referral methods - One door approach/No Wrong Door 	<p>Who should also be part of the any prevention activity?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - All public services Health care services - All housing providers – including private/ social landlords - Prisons/Probation – many people dealing with being released as NFA or made homeless through short sentences - Current problem with perception: Homelessness is viewed as solely the LAs responsibility - Organisations need to consider impact of homelessness on them and individuals need to take responsibility for their actions - everyone needs to take their part 	<p>How do we gather the views of people using services?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Regular surveys and evaluations – generally this are part of the commissioning process - Consultation events with service users - Commissioners should speak to service users 	<p>What do people need in order to 'thrive'?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Choice – the ability to choose what kind of support they need – an informed choice - Opportunity – work, education, accommodation, security - Confidence, self-worth and acceptance - Need to focus on sustainable solutions.

HOW DO WE BUILD COLLABORATIVE PARTNERSHIPS IN COLCHESTER?	HOW DO WE MAKE PREVENTION OF HOMELESSNESS EVERYONE'S RESPONSIBILITY?	HOW DO WE FOSTER A PERSON-CENTRED APPROACH?	HOW CAN WE CREATE ENVIRONMENTS WHERE PEOPLE THRIVE?
<p>Who should be part of a collaborative partnership?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - All services - voluntary, non-profit, statutory and private sector - Prisons – especially those dealing with prison release directly - Health – particularly mental health 	<p>Where does prevention start from your point of view?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - As soon as risk of homelessness is recognised - As early as school – some people are homeless due to trauma and lack of life and social skills 	<p>How could we implement any recommendations?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ensure that those accessing services are viewed as stakeholders (without them would a service exist?) - Giving service users ownership and input towards planning and how they feel a service could be improved through consultations and attendance at these at all levels - Budgets to use for this and develop more appropriate ways of measuring outcome – what we as front-line workers see as an outcome may be very different to the view of those who are using the service, soft outcome against hard outcomes 	<p>What should services be putting in place to enable this?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Transitional support for those in temporary/ supported housing/prison - Assessing things in the here and now – focus on what is relevant about current and future support needs. This does not mean a total disregard for past events, but we need to make sure they are relevant. - Exploring and developing creative housing solutions e.g. containers, luxury cabins as sustainable low-cost alternatives - Using host families

Additional comments:

Priorities or consideration that should be included within the strategy

- Central – not simply a ‘one stop shop’ but a center of excellence that considers the overall infrastructure of sharing information and accessing services correctly that provides a vibrant environment which is creative and demonstrates real and appropriate access and assessment
- Realistic aims and objectives which involves all stakeholders including those who are accessing the service
- Demonstrate realistic pathways for people when accessing support layout expectation of and for all stakeholders
- Positive and ongoing engagement from other statutory services i.e. A&E, adult social care, social services
- Positive and focused education within younger people to enable the development of life skills and identify needs at a younger age – e.g. trauma
- Improved information sharing at the right level and right time, making sure people have the information when they need it.
- Intervention at an earlier stage.
- Joint ownership over the strategy, with shared outcomes and shared understanding of the system, everyone’s role within this, and what is trying to be achieved. People should be held account to uphold their part in the process.

Appendix 2

Focus group consultation case studies

Focus groups/drop in sessions were held over **2 days in April 2019**.

The sessions were held at Youth Enquiry Service (y.e.s), Colchester Emergency Night Shelter (CENS), Beacon House and Sanctuary Housing.

THE QUESTIONS USED TO PROMPT DISCUSSION WERE:

- **What are the main reasons that you became homeless?** – Think about the chain of events that lead to this, could homelessness have been prevented earlier?
- **What organisations or services are or were particularly helpful to you?** – Describe how the service helped
- **What other support or service could have helped or prevented you from becoming homeless?**

Case Study 1

A is a young girl who was pregnant and staying with parents but was asked to leave. B is a young man who had lost his job and was living in a car.

A and B presented to the Housing Options Service as a couple rather than individuals as they wanted to live together with their baby. Both were supported by the Youth Enquiry Service (y.e.s). B was helped to access accommodation with Korban a supported housing scheme for young people.

As B was housed, they were advised by the Housing Options Service that they could not be longer be considered as a couple and felt they were given contradictory advice, as Korban is only a temporary housing solution. This delayed the process.

Securing Private Sector Accommodation was difficult due to the lack of a guarantor and Landlords not wanting to accept people receiving benefits.

Eventually the couple were provided with emergency temporary accommodation through the Council which the couple considered to be unsuitable for them and a baby due to the condition but was all that was available at the time. A and B are now living in more suitable temporary accommodation awaiting permanent housing.

The couple were very grateful for the support they received through the y.e.s and considered Korban an excellent project that had helped B with budgeting skills.

Newly the mother and baby supported housing project could have helped but access to this is now through Essex County Council and the criteria is for people known to social care therefore the couple would not have met the criteria for the scheme.

Case Study 2

C - Young man left home at 17 under social care 7 years ago (prior to Homelessness Reduction Act). C applied to the council for housing and was provided with temporary accommodation as unable to access supported housing. Once housed in permanent accommodation, benefit issues caused arrears.

C suffered with dyslexia so was unable to read the letters he was sent informing him of the arrears. C considered that he was too young to be able to cope with a tenancy and although his parents paid the arrears, he ended the tenancy and became street homeless.

C considered that supported housing would have been a more appropriate housing solution at that time.

Case Study 3

D escaped a Domestic Abuse situation about 3 years ago with the help of the Police and was brought to Colchester from London directly to Colchester Emergency Night Shelter (CENS). D stayed at CENS for 6 months which helped him to establish a local connection to the area. CENS helped with budgeting, life skills and completing forms and continued to help D once rehoused. CENS helped D to access accommodation in the private rented sector and provided a rent deposit.

D has a physical disability which inhibits his ability to gain employment.

There are some issues with the accommodation due to lack of heating and this is causing D chest infections/problems.

Case Study 4

E was initially homeless at 16 as evicted by parents due to behaviour problems. E was referred to Social Care. During his life E spent time in and out of Prison. After release from Prison E ended up sofa surfing as there was no resettlement programme available at that time. The situation of having no settled accommodation created reoffending. There are problems with support from Probation due to large caseloads and therefore the onus to obtain support and accommodation is put back on the individual.

E re-established a relationship with his mother and family as he had 'grown up' a bit. Relationship breakdown with a partner created his current homelessness situation and E is now at the Colchester Emergency Night Shelter (CENS).

E considers drug and alcohol testing at CENS to be a good thing as although he recognises that people depend on drugs and alcohol as a way of surviving on the street, they need to make a judgement call on whether they want to drink and sleep on the

street or abstain and have a bed for the night. He considers it to be a good way to control drinking and substance misuse.

E was very complimentary about the help and support he had received from CENS.

E recognised that he needed support to maintain accommodation as had problem privately renting due to rent arrears, budgeting etc. E is currently on the waiting list for Sanctuary Housing but can remain at CENS until a place at the scheme becomes available.

Case Study 5

F was living at home with his parents in Colchester but when his father passed away his mother decided to sell up and move away. F was given some money by his mother and use it to secure private rented accommodation.

F became an alcoholic and lost his accommodation as he spent the money on drink. F became homeless and self-referred to Open Road. F managed to get accommodation at CENS and was also able to do some voluntary work with CENS to keep him occupied.

F approached Colchester Borough Council for housing and joined the Gateway to Homechoice Housing Register. F was placed on Band B and has been allocated accommodation which he was moving into the following day.

F recognised that he would need support in his new accommodation to ensure that he maintains his tenancy. He is still attending Open Road but has some concerns about loneliness so intends to continue his voluntary work at CENS or look for other opportunities.

F thinks it would be useful to have a leaflet available about what you need to do when you become homeless, like a step by step guide. This would help people to understand the situation and how to navigate the types of help available.

Case Study 6

G came to Colchester from Southend after his mother passed away. He managed to get a job and a flat but had problems with Universal credit and couldn't pay the rent. G moved out as he knew he was going to be evicted.

G found accommodation on a campsite for 6 months but unfortunately had an accident and broke his arm and hip and ended up in hospital for 2 weeks. The hospital was unable to discharge him due to his living situation. G contacted Colchester Borough Council and was referred to Colchester Emergency Night Shelter, however this was unsuitable due to G's recovery and needing somewhere to go during the day.

G couldn't work and had no benefits so was unable to go back

to the campsite. He managed to get himself a tent and found somewhere out of town to live where he felt relatively safe.

G uses the facilities at Beacon House, which enable him to maintain his health and wellbeing and “not to look like I am homeless”. G managed to get another job but lost it due to alcohol and gambling addiction.

The Outreach Team and Beacon House are currently supporting G to access services to help with his addictions and to find settled accommodation.

Case Study 7

H had been street homeless for 4 months due to a relationship breakdown with his partner. The accommodation was in his partners name, so he left and managed to get a room at CENS, however it meant that he had to leave his job as it cost him too much to stay there. He stayed at CENS for 2 months and then lived in a tent just outside the town for 2 months.

As H had previously been in the armed forces, he was offered help and support from SAFRA. H managed to find a flat with a local landlord. SAFRA provided funding for the rent in advance. H is also receiving support from his Mum.

H believes that during his time as homeless, Beacon House have been a ‘lifeline’ and continue to provide resettlement support once you find accommodation.

H also mentioned that access to clean drinking water is a problem in Colchester for people living on the street and mentioned that the water fountain in Castle Park is no longer working. Although some food outlets do provide water free, street homeless people often find it awkward going into these places to ask.

H suggested that it would be beneficial if there was a service open between 5-7pm as this is the time when people are going home, and homeless people have nowhere to go. Somewhere where people could go especially in the Winter during this time would be good.

Case Study 8

J was released from Prison and had been in custody with a tag for 3 months. Previously J had been an alcoholic which he said was through his Dad. Being an alcoholic had made him violent at times. He was provided with accommodation whilst he was in custody because he had a tag but was due to lose it imminently.

J has a Probation Officer and is known to the Outreach Team who are trying to help find accommodation. J has put in an application for housing through G2H and Emmaus. J is keen to work and get his life back on track. He is in contact with Open Road and appreciates the help he has received by Beacon House.

Case Study 9

K came to Colchester from Margate about 7-8 years ago. He had been evicted from private rented accommodation due to arrears. He was sofa surfing and spent a short time in Suffolk looking after his elderly parents. Since returning to Colchester he has been helped to find supported accommodation through the Outreach Team via the Joint Referral Panel.

With the support of the scheme he is managing to adapt but found moving from a life on the street difficult, especially if you don't have support.

K had previously been at CENS who had helped him access shared accommodation. However, he had left because he felt safer living on the street than in the accommodation due to those around him. K acknowledged that he had felt safe at CENS but that it was difficult to stay there if you are drug or alcohol dependent.

In terms of the other services he had used, K had attended Beacon House but preferred the previous building/location as he felt there was more privacy due to the new building being open plan. K also mentioned that once you are housed you are not supposed to use Beacon House unless its emergency type accommodation like CENS.

K also discussed issues with the Soup Run with people that are housed taking food away from people on the street. He suggested that the food should be allocated per person and that more control should be in place to stop people taking more than they need. K felt that some of the services providing food were being abused and the people that needed it the most were going without.

Case Study 10

L was suffering Domestic Abuse and had to leave. She had children and managed to secure accommodation in the private rented sector. Over a period, the children left to live with their Dad. Due to the abuse that L had suffered she was unable to work and couldn't afford the rent. The landlord wouldn't renew the tenancy and she found herself on the street.

After 6 years the Council offered L temporary accommodation but with no support. L found it difficult in temp due to the other tenants having very chaotic lifestyles and started drinking in order to cope with the situation.

L decided to leave the accommodation as she felt safer living on the street in a tent with her friends that 'looked out for her'. She described it as a little 'community' of support. Due to this support network L believed that there was no difference between Men and Women on the street, they all looked out for each other and felt supported.

After a few years rough sleeping L became tired of this life and with a friend being murdered and people being stabbed this created uncertainty.

The Outreach Team helped L access accommodation with 24/7 support at Sanctuary Housing, which she said gave her confidence to build a new life away from the street. L recognises that although she is now looking forward to moving on and having a new life, she does miss her friends and the comradery they had together. L acknowledges that sometimes it is very lonely being on your own.

The services that L has used during her time being homeless include:

Open Road for alcohol dependency. Phoenix drug and alcohol project offered her counselling when her friend was murdered. There are also counsellors available at Open Road.

L also used the services at Beacon House which she considered were very good.

L believes that living in Supported Housing is a good stepping stone to living independently for people that have been in and out of homelessness and that having a 'weekly plan' really helps.

Case Study 11

M is a young person with severe mental health issues. M was arrested and on bail and couldn't return to her parents. M spent time in the lakes and when discharged M contacted the y.e.s and applied to CBC as homeless. M's support needs were deemed too high for supported housing and she should have been referred to the Mental Health Joint Referral Panel but there were referral issues with the Community Mental Health Team (CMHT) with a 14 week wait for referrals.

M was housed in temporary accommodation by the Housing Options Team. M felt that she was able to understand and work through the system well due to her ability to understand the process and life skills. She also had support from her parents.

M considered that being in temporary accommodation 'opened her eyes' to how people that are homeless struggle without support especially those that have addictions. Many of the other tenants in the temporary accommodation that M was placed in had drug and alcohol issues and M was moved to alternative accommodation as this was deemed to be more appropriate.

M tried to support the other tenants to access the help they needed including accompanying some to apply for benefits. M felt that there was a lack of support provided in temporary accommodation. In addition, she felt that there were problems in accessing Universal credit as this is all online and/or you must phone in to get an appointment and not all homeless people have a phone. Appointments are therefore often missed, and

sanctions are applied which leaves people with nothing to live on. With the support of her parents M was able to find accommodation in the private rented sector and is now living with her partner and continuing her A levels at sixth form college. M was particularly grateful for the help and support she received from the y.e.s and recommends them to her friends who are facing difficulties.

Case Study 12

N became homeless at 16 partly due to smoking cannabis and a family argument. Between the age of 16 and 18 N was mainly sofa surfing, staying with friends. At the age of 18 N went to Colchester Night Shelter but recognised that there was not enough support available at the shelter for mental health.

N approached the y.e.s for support with his homeless problem and was referred to Nacro for supported housing. N felt that the support provided by Nacro was not enough for his needs and that if he wanted to try and better himself and get a job, the accommodation would be too expensive.

N decided to go and live back home with Mum, but this was unsuccessful.

N is now 21 and living in Council temporary accommodation and feels very vulnerable with a lack of support especially due to living in a house with a shared kitchen and living space.

Having been homeless for many years N has some strong ideas about what is needed in Colchester to improve the situation for people that are homeless. N believes that when you become homeless you don't know where to go for help so a 'Hub' where people could go to access different services would help.

N would also like there to be more activities for people with mental health especially outdoors and there needs to be more services including counselling for this group.

The y.e.s have agreed to support N to resolve the issues he is having with his current living situation and help him to access mental health services.