

Colchester's Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020-25

Progress Report 2024

Colchester's Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy was adopted in April 2020.

The strategy was produced in line with the Council's legal duty under the Homelessness Act 2002, which required all local authorities to carry out a homelessness review, develop a Homelessness Strategy for their area to prevent homelessness, and provide accommodation and/or support for people who are or may become homeless, including rough sleepers.

Background and Legislation Change Since the Last Strategy.

The Homelessness Code of Guidance published in February 2018 stated that local authorities with rough sleepers ought to consider provision for rough sleepers within their homelessness strategy. In line with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government's Rough Sleeping Strategy and to satisfy the requirements for the Rough Sleeping Initiative funding, it was agreed that rough sleeping would form part of Colchester's strategy with an Action Plan set out to specifically reduce rough sleeping.

The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 fundamentally changed the way local authorities work to support homeless people in their areas, giving them new duties to prevent homelessness for more people. Colchester City Council worked collaboratively with its partners to build on this approach to produce the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy for Colchester.

Colchester's Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020-25

The overarching vision for the Strategy is:

To build collaborative partnerships to increase early intervention and prevention of homelessness in Colchester.

To achieve this vision 4 key aims were agreed:

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

In addition, a Rough Sleeping Action Plan was agreed.

The Strategy will achieve its aims and objectives through the implementation of a 5-year Delivery Plan that will tackle homelessness in the city, by working closely with partner organisations and focusing on early interventions that prevent homelessness.

The Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy Progress Report 2024 contains some highlights of the actions in the Strategy that have been achieved or progressed during 2023-2024.

The Delivery Plan which sets out the actions to deliver the aims of the Strategy has also been updated.

Aim 1: Increasing access to accommodation and providing settled homes.

Challenge

Evaluate how well the Homelessness Reduction Act is working and what difference it is making to preventing homelessness in Colchester.

Action

Set up a monitoring system to measure the impact of the Homelessness Reduction Act

Progress

For the year 2023-24:

Colchester City Council (CCC) accepted a full homeless duty for 223 households and helped them into accommodation.

Action was taken to prevent homelessness for 239 households and relieved homelessness for 177 households.

Challenge

The current demand for supported accommodation outweighs the supply.

Action

Influence the future commissioning of services to ensure that the need for this type of accommodation is met.

Progress

CCC and Colchester Borough Homes (CBH) represent Colchester at the quarterly Supported Housing Partnership Board. This was set up by ECC to improve partnership working across Essex and to provide a more joined up approach to supported accommodation solutions.

CBH continue to work in partnership with the supported housing providers through the Joint Referral Panel (JRP). Organisations refer clients to the panel to be considered for supported housing that is suited to their needs in Colchester. Clients must have a local connection to the city to be considered.

Aim 2: Helping people to sustain their accommodation.

Challenge

Develop services that will support young tenants to maintain their tenancy and prevent unnecessary evictions through ASB and arrears.

Action

Develop early intervention initiatives for young people under 25 including pre-eviction panels/pre-tenancy workshops with some tailored 1:1's as and when they are identified through New Tenant Visits.

Progress

The Health and Wellbeing Housing Case Worker role is continuing and is proving to be essential at the (Youth Enquiry Service) YES; who have been supporting young people who are in accommodation but could be struggling with rent payments. The Health and Wellbeing Housing Case Worker will promote the benefits of working and support clients to budget for the additional rent needed.

YES also continue to monitor referrals and offer ongoing support to try and prevent eviction from supported housing.

Sanctuary Supported Living continued to work with your own place into 2024 where tenants attended tenancy workshops on a weekly basis.

13 different residents lived at Korban (a supported housing scheme for young people aged 16-25) during 2023-24. 7 of these were new residents. 6 residents moved on during the year and there were no evictions.

Challenge

Ensure the provision of debt and welfare rights advice is targeted at those at risk of losing their accommodation.

Action

Provide support & advice to tenants on managing debt and welfare benefits including organisations working with single homeless

Increase the take up of debt advice in the City and promote existing services.

Work with private rented sector and social landlords to establish new approaches to reduce evictions.

Progress

During 2023/2024 CBH's Financial Inclusion Team (FIT):

- Reduced benefit cap cases to 0.
- Supported 131 tenants to receive Discretionary Housing payments (DHP) totalling £73,248
- Reduced Under Occupation cases from 159 to 117 (a record low).
- Made 1,885 personal contacts with tenants
- Managed 2400 Universal Credit (UC) cases.
- Managed 115 Welfare Rights cases and obtained additional income for tenants of £283,496 per annum.
- Assessed 181 Housing Benefit claims.
- Processed £25,269 Housing Benefit overlaps.

Aim 3: Improving the Health and Wellbeing of people that experience homelessness.

Challenge

Drug use has increased and—drug dealers are more organized. Specific areas where there are vulnerable clients are being targeted.

Action

Continue to work with the Police to identify and support clients that are being targeted.

Progress

Partial Closure Orders have continued to be a success. This reporting period saw two orders applied to properties. A further three Full Closure Orders were also applied to prevent the ongoing drug-related disruptions.

CBH have instigated the introduction of Operation Trespass, which is a county-wide system for identifying the signs of Cuckooing, as well as working alongside Essex Police to routinely share intelligence.

Challenge

Minimise isolation so that single people that have been homeless/rough sleeping have less chance of reverting to their former lifestyle once housed

Action

Encourage organisations to provide outreach tenancy support to their clients once housed. Set up a peer mentoring scheme/navigator roles

Progress

Beacon House has increased the range and depth of their courses/activities for the preparation and maintenance of tenancies. Several courses include, budgeting, personal wellbeing, as well as group work and activities to improve social skills, self-esteem and resilience.

Guest numbers for a weekly feedback group are high and response is positive.

CENS are offering a 6-week programme following move-ons to help tenants build relationships with their new provider. This is often held in the preferred method of the client (in-person meetings, email, phone etc.). Further courses and training are offered for up to 6 months following a successful move-on.

Challenge

Increase in service provision for clients who are entrenched in substance misuse. The referral process to access services needs to be less complicated for clients to navigate.

There is a gap in service provision for clients with Dual Diagnosis

Action

Information needs to be provided to influence commissioners and statutory services.

Commissioners need to have a better understanding of gaps in service provision.

Navigators/Phoenix Futures Horizon Project may help with this

Progress

Open Road, an established Drug and Alcohol Recovery support charity in Essex, continues to provide services to support customers on their journey to recovery from drug and alcohol addiction; offering help to individuals in the Criminal Justice sector and providing Housing Support.

Aim 4: Improving communication and challenging the perception and culture of homelessness.

Challenge

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.

Action

Improve communication of services provided by the Council to statutory and voluntary sector organisations through Information days.

Progress

In November 2024, CCC's Housing Strategy Team hosted a meeting of the Homelessness Strategy Project Group. Representatives from 15 partner organisations attended to discuss their achievements against the Strategy's key aims for 2023-2024, and to consider the challenges and opportunities for 2025.

Each quarter, the Rough Sleeper Outreach Team produces a Homelessness Newsletter featuring updates from the wider Housing Options team and shares with internal and external partners. The team continues drop-in sessions at partner organisations to connect with clients and strengthen collaboration.

Challenge

Promote a person-centred approach to people that are homeless by creating structures which encourage voluntary sector services to work better together and share good practice.

Action

Multi agency working group and promotion of Colchester's Homelessness Charter. Provide better communication to the public and organisations about how they can help to prevent homelessness and support those that are homeless

Progress

CBH continue to host multi-agency networking events for internal and external partners. The Rough Sleeper Team focus on raising awareness of their work and ways to help, such as promoting StreetLink as a tool for reporting individuals sleeping rough.

The team also continue to host and participate in multi-partnership meetings, including the Discharge Huddle, Outreach Forum, JRP, Colchester Homeless Action Panel, North Housing Forum, and the City of Sanctuary meetings.

Challenge

Develop early intervention and prevention options for Young People at risk of becoming homeless in the Borough.

Action

Provide basic strategies and signposting to support families to resolve conflict.

Continue to work in partnership with Schools in the Borough to educate young people and their parents of the risks of leaving home in an unplanned way.

Progress

YES are funding Your Own Place to deliver workshops to help young people sustain their tenancies. These will start at the Colchester Institute, in January 2025, as part of early intervention preventative work

Rough Sleeping Action Plan

Challenge

Accommodation with wraparound support needed for entrenched rough sleepers to help them move from the streets into settled accommodation.

Action

Funding awarded by MHCLG Rough sleeper initiative funding to provide an opportunity to pilot a 'Housing First' Registered Provider that provides supported housing (delivered by Sanctuary Housing).

Progress

The Housing Led scheme (provided by Sanctuary Supported Living) continues to be funded through the government's Rough Sleeper Initiative funding secured by CCC. Throughout 2023-24, Sanctuary have continued to work closely with external providers to address support needs.

Sanctuary identified a gap in services for clients that didn't need such intensive support but still required support to maintain accommodation. To bridge this gap additional funding was provided by CBH for 2 additional flats to be added to the housing led scheme as "move-ons" and can be used prior to clients being referred to Next Steps Accommodation or their own internal pathway. This has helped to increase the number of "entrenched rough sleepers" they are able to support.

During 2023-2024, there were:

- 18 referrals to the Housing Led scheme (provided by Sanctuary Housing) via the Rough Sleeper Team.
- 10 individuals accommodated with a variety of support needs (inc. living skills, self-care, emotional and mental health, managing accommodation, drugs and finances).
- 4 individuals supported to move on to alternative accommodation.

Challenge

During severe weather such as high wind, heavy rain, snow and heatwaves, emergency accommodation with support is needed to ensure that rough sleepers have somewhere to stay

Action

Funding awarded by MHCLG Rough sleeper initiative funding to provide proper continuous Severe Weather Emergency Provision (SWEP) from October - mid March.

Progress

SWEP continues to operate. Hotels are still utilised where appropriate, however the Rough Sleeper Team have also sourced a 7 bedroom house for their core cohort of Rough Sleepers to provide medium term accommodation through winter.

Challenge

Seek to improve the availability of day services for rough sleepers/single homeless by exploring the viability of extending the opening times of agencies

Action

Opening times extended, with more places for rough sleepers to go during the day.

Progress

Beacon House is running afternoon groups four days a week, which all Guests (whether currently engaged with BH or recently housed) are welcome to attend. These are well attended and indicate a need is being met.

Residents can attend Colchester Engagement and Next Steps (CENS) during the day when they offer training sessions.

Challenge

More assertive approach to rough sleepers needed in order to help them access support services and accommodation

Action

Funding awarded by MHCLG Rough sleeper Initiative funding to provide a more assertive street outreach, especially out of hours provision and reconnection. .

Progress

During 2023-24, The Rough Sleeper Team:

Provided 167 clients with support, advice, and assistance to help them move off the streets

Housed 50 rough sleepers into more settled accommodation through friends, the Private Rented Sector, Supported Housing, Social Housing.

Helped 19 rough sleepers to return to the local authority area they came from and where they have support networks.