

Progress Report 2022

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 (formerly Colchester Borough 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 2022 contains some highlights of the actions in the Strategy that have been achieved or progressed during 2022.

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

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

A new service for young people aged 16-21 was commissioned and the contract awarded to Nacro, commencing 1st June 2022. The NEST (Nacro Education Support Transition) service will be delivered in partnership with Peabody for the next 5-7 years.

Challenge

Identify accommodation opportunities for rough sleepers to help with transition from living on the street

Action

Work with local landlords to increase accommodation opportunities for this group.

Use positive outcomes from 'Housing First' approach to encourage other organisations to adopt a similar scheme.

Progress

Funding secured by Colchester City Council (CCC) from Homes England to provide 6 one-bed self-contained flats (via acquisition of ex LA properties) to be used as move on accommodation (up to 2-yr tenancy) for clients as part of the Rough Sleeper Accommodation Pathway. Revenue funding from DLUHC secured to fund a Support Worker for the clients. All 6 properties are now ready to let.

Challenge

Increase and support housing options for people moving on from supported housing to reduce the reliance on social housing.

Action

Identify, support and promote access to alternative housing options in the private rented sector including shared houses.

Progress

Due to the lack of available properties in the social rented sector, CBH continue to work with supported housing providers and promote the use of move on into the Private Rented Sector (PRS).

Aim 2: Helping people to sustain their accommodation.

Challenge

Ensure tenants in the social rented sector at risk of homelessness are provided with more intensive tenancy support including that provided by floating support.

Action

Encourage the take up of tenancy support including floating support to vulnerable tenants moving into accommodation including temporary accommodation

Progress

During 2021/2022:

- 5 tenants evicted for rent arrears and 4 for ASB.
- Inequalities funding has paid for additional hours for the tenancy sustainment team supporting vulnerable tenants at risk of eviction.
- Colchester Borough Homes (CBH) have continued to use partial closure orders to enable tenants to remain in their home and address breaches of tenancy.
- CCC/CBH have continued to fund Catch22 & Open Road to fasttrack CBH tenants for support to sustain tenancies.
- Continued partnership working with Citizens Advice, Christians Against Poverty and Colchester Credit Union to offer support to tenants to sustain their tenancies.
- Officers continued to make referrals to Peabody for floating support.
- CBH working with Community Mental Health to support a Community Psychiatric Nurse working alongside the teams to help tenants with mental health issues access services to enable them to sustain tenancies.

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 2021/2022 CBH's Financial Inclusion Team (FIT):

- Supported 12 CCC tenants to open bank accounts.
- Reduced benefit cap cases to 8.
- Supported 163 tenants to receive Discretionary Housing payments (DHP) totalling £115,032.
- Reduced Under Occupation cases to 185 (a record low).
- Made 1,298 person contacts.
- Managed 1,793 Universal Credit (UC) cases.
- Managed 79 Welfare Rights cases.
- Assessed 2039 Housing Benefit cases.
- Processed £32,239 Housing Benefit overlaps
- 631 tenants have their rent paid directly to CBH.

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

Challenge

Statutory services need 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.

Action

Proactively encourage joint working and shared budgets as part of the recommissioning process - to be considered as part of the new contract.
Help to provide a better understanding between organisations of mental health services.

Progress

Mental Health Recommissioning - the current contracts for “Intensive Enablement” and “Supported to Independence” has expired. The new service commenced from October 2022, taking a phased approach.
The Mental Health Nurse secondment from Essex Partnership University foundation NHS Trust (EPUT) to CBH has been agreed for an additional year. They continue to work with the Rough Sleeper Team and other partners to provide better access and support for single homeless clients (whether rough sleeping or housed in temporary accommodation).
They continue to offer training across CBH to educate the wider teams.
The Mental Health Nurse attends Colchester Homeless Action Panel.

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 in keeping perpetrators away from vulnerable tenants and enabling victims of cuckooing to remain in their homes.
Security Reviews, close liaison with the police during tasking meetings and disruption panels plus referrals to supportive agencies have allowed tenancies to be sustained and perpetrators to be disrupted.
Tenants that are affected by drugs that do engage are also considered for management moves to assist in the sustainment of their tenancies.

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 2022, CCC hosted a Homelessness Strategy Forum. Over 20 partner organisations attended to discuss their achievements against the Strategy's key aims for 2021-2022, and to consider the challenges and opportunities for 2023. The event allowed an opportunity for those providing services related to homelessness to network and share information and to identify opportunities to work together and increase/develop the support provision available to homeless people and those at risk of homelessness.

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

In 2021-22, the Youth Enquiry Service (y.e.s) Family Mediator (initially employed in 2021) worked with 45 families across Colchester to prevent parental eviction. The Family Mediator completed a series of sessions (4 to 5 per family) as well as follow up reviews, to support and engage the family and avoid eviction.

There were positive outcomes for 40 families (e.g. working together to create a safe plan for the young person within the household or agreed housing plan around divorcing families and/or additional support for the young person such as counselling or mentoring etc).

5 families were unable to agree a plan and were referred to another service (Family Solutions and/or Social Care) and other agency partners. The Family Mediator continued to work with referring agencies around the young person such as schools, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and other partners such as The Outhouse etc.

This has meant that around 90% of the families engaged have either not evicted the young person or have supported them into alternative accommodation.

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.

Progress

During 2021-2022, there were 7 referrals to the Housing Led scheme (provided by Sanctuary Housing) via the Rough Sleeper Team.

1 client was successfully moved to the sister scheme, in a one bedroom self-contained flat where they receive a lower level of support and have settled in well.

No clients have returned to rough sleeping in this period.

Sanctuary have developed different strategies for clients to enable them to access support, such as walk-and-talk style meetings to develop rapport and build trust.

Sanctuary have continued to work with Peabody around both the Rough Sleeper Accommodation Pathway (RSAP) and Next Steps Accommodation Pathway (NSAP) properties, to provide a joined up approach and move-on pathway with support for their clients.

Sanctuary have been supporting referrals who are waiting to move in, completing regular meetings with them to ensure they are accustomed to engaging in support offered, and to build positive working relationships.

Alongside this, Sanctuary have had drop-in sessions from an NHS Nurse for clients to discuss their mental health and have supported a client to engage in employment.

Challenge

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.

Action

Research the viability of using a system i.e. In-Form to identify and provide information on rough sleepers in Colchester

Progress

The In-Form computer system is in place and being utilised by CBH and the Rough Sleeper team – this allows accurate recording and sharing of information across services. CBH are working with Partners to fund wider usage of In-Form to allow better information sharing across different organisations.