COLCHESTER CITY COUNCIL

Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy 2026-31

Working together to reduce and prevent homelessness in Colchester.



Strategic Housing

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PFH FOREWORD

The national housing crisis has created unprecedented pressures on local government and the communities they serve. A long-term shortage of affordable homes, rapidly increasing housing costs and a widening gap between wages, rents and benefit levels have all contributed to an increase in homelessness.

Decades of under-building have left the UK with an estimated shortfall of over six million homes, forcing many households into overcrowded, insecure or unaffordable accommodation and making it increasingly difficult for councils to access suitable social or private rented housing for those in need.

At the same time, households across England are contending with the effects of high inflation, rising rents, mortgage pressures and the ongoing cost of living crisis, which have intensified housing stress and contributed to a visible rise in rough sleeping and homelessness.

Against this backdrop, Colchester faces a growing demand for affordable homes for households in housing need, including accommodation for residents that need additional support. In response to this, we need to identify ways to prevent homelessness at an earlier stage and support households to find safe and secure affordable housing that meets their needs in both the social and private sectors.

Recognising that people who experience homelessness face significantly poorer health outcomes and higher levels of unmet health need than the wider population, prioritising health and wellbeing is key and will be achieved through embedding positive health outcomes throughout all areas of activity.

The new Homelessness and Rough Sleeping strategy sets out the direction we will take to respond to these challenges, strengthen our work with partners and ensure that residents at risk of homelessness receive timely, targeted and effective support.

Colchester City Council and its Partners have established a clear shared **Vision** for the new Strategy:

Working together to reduce and prevent homelessness in Colchester.

Achieving this vision requires a coordinated, proactive and person-centred approach. Our strategy is therefore underpinned by five **Aims**, which will shape our priorities and actions over the coming years to:

- **Break the cycle of homelessness through prevention and early intervention.**
- **Support people to sustain tenancies.**
- **Strengthen partnership working to deliver a more coordinated, person-centred response to homelessness.**
- **Enable people to access suitable and stable homes.**
- **Reduce the use of unsuitable temporary accommodation.**

Together, these aims provide a framework for preventing homelessness wherever possible, improving outcomes for people that experience homelessness, and building long term housing resilience for our communities.

Irrespective of future decisions on local government reorganisation, this strategy ensures that Colchester is well positioned for the future, with clear priorities and a strong foundation for effective, joined-up working.

Cllr Rhys Smithson, Portfolio Holder Housing

INTRODUCTION

Local Housing Authorities are required to publish a Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy at least every five years. The Strategy must be based on a review of homelessness within the district and should set out the Council's plans for the prevention of homelessness and for ensuring sufficient accommodation and support are available for people who become homeless or who are at risk of homelessness. Since the publication of Colchester's last Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy (2020-2025), there have been a number of significant changes, in particular:

Cost of Living	Households, especially low-income families, have faced sustained increases in food, energy and fuel prices since 2021. These pressures have left many unable to meet essential bills, forcing households into rent arrears and debt, both major triggers for homelessness.
Temporary Accommodation	On 31 March 2025, 131,140 households were in temporary accommodation in England, the highest number on record. In Colchester on the same date, 443 households were in temporary accommodation, a rise of 184% in 5 years.
Funding Constraints	Councils pay Housing Benefit for households in Temporary Accommodation (TA) upfront, but DWP reimbursement is capped at 90% of 2011 Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates, which no longer reflect real rents. Councils are therefore losing money on every TA placement, diverting funds away from homelessness prevention.
Private Rented Sector Pressures	Rents have risen faster than wages and benefits, creating widespread unaffordability for low-income renters. Shortfalls between Local Housing Allowance (LHA) and actual rent levels leave many unable to cover their housing costs, putting them at heightened risk of eviction and homelessness. Security of tenure is another major issue. The ending of an Assured Shorthold Tenancy (often through Section 21 "no-fault" evictions), is now the leading cause of statutory homelessness in England.
Limited Move-On and Long-Term Housing Options	A lack of affordable, secure homes, both social and private, means that people who are ready to leave temporary accommodation or supported housing cannot move on. When move-on routes are blocked and long-term homes are scarce, people remain stuck in crisis accommodation, new referrals cannot be supported, costs rise sharply for councils and homelessness becomes longer, more harmful and more entrenched.
Increasing Complexity of Needs	Increasing complexity of needs has made homelessness harder to prevent, longer to resolve and more resource intensive for local authorities and support services. In Colchester, 69% of households owed a duty to prevent or relieve homelessness by the Council between April 2024 and March 2025 had at least one support need (compared to 57% nationally), with 38% having a history of mental health problems (28% nationally) and 21% with physical health and disability (also 21% nationally).
Insufficient Supported Accommodation Supply	National reviews have identified shortages, unmet need and variable quality of supported housing provision. Colchester's supported housing supply, particularly for people with mental health support needs, does not meet current local demand. Therefore, people with support needs are placed in unsuitable temporary accommodation. Lack of move-on options also means that the schemes become 'silted up'.
Covid 19 Pandemic	The Government's Everyone In programme rapidly moved thousands of people sleeping rough into hotels and emergency accommodation. This was widely regarded as a positive public-health intervention however the Covid Inquiry report noted that the widespread use of hotels became normalised, contributing to a long-term surge in expensive temporary accommodation placements that councils have struggled to move away from. In addition, reduced access to mental health, drug and alcohol support, and a shift from face-to-face to online interviews, resulted in some people's needs escalating, making tenancy sustainment harder and contributing to rising demand for homelessness support in subsequent years.
City of Sanctuary	Utilising Home Office funding, and the support of partners such as Refugee, Asylum Seeker and Migrant Action (RAMA) and Essex Integration, Colchester, as a City of Sanctuary, has supported people through the Homes for Ukraine scheme, people under the Afghan resettlement programme and asylum seekers.

ACHIEVEMENTS AGAINST PREVIOUS STRATEGY

Over the course of the previous strategy (2020-2025), the Council and its partners have made steady progress in tackling homelessness and rough sleeping. Key achievements include:

- 789 affordable properties delivered in Colchester between 2020 and 2025.
- The Council was awarded c.£2million of funding through two rounds of the Governments' Local Authority Housing Fund. The funding supported the purchase of 14 family homes, providing permanent housing for 10 Afghan National households, 2 for Ukrainian National households and 2 properties to be used as temporary accommodation for homeless households.
- Between April 2020 and March 2025, Colchester:
    - Accepted a full duty under the homelessness legislation for 1,095 households and helped them into accommodation.
    - Prevented homelessness for 1,085 households
    - Relieved homelessness for 646 households
- 3,277 households were housed in permanent accommodation via Gateway to Homechoice (the Council's choice-based lettings system, where social/affordable housing properties are advertised in the local authority areas).
- Colchester Borough Homes Financial Inclusion team…
    - Supported 57 tenants to open bank accounts.
    - Supported 694 tenants supported to receive Discretionary Housing payments (DHP) totalling £466,000.
    - Reduced Under Occupation cases from 225 (2020) to 62 (2025)
    - Managed 465 Welfare Rights cases (total value awarded to tenants £1,045,000)
- CBH became Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA) members and are going through the process to become accredited. Accreditation is the UK benchmark for how local authorities and housing associations should respond to domestic abuse in the UK.
- In response to the Covid 19 public health emergency, and the government's request to Local Authorities to bring "Everyone In," CBH, on behalf of the Council sourced emergency accommodation at a local hotel, at one of the Council's Sheltered schemes and at some supported accommodation managed by Peabody. The clients were supported at the accommodation by the Rough Sleeper Team, Peabody floating support service (commissioned by Essex County Council) as well as voluntary sector partners and volunteers.
- CCC successfully secured Government funding to provide a Rough Sleeper service since 2018. Between 2022 and 2026, CCC secured £1,067,000 Rough Sleeper Initiative funding to provide a Rough Sleeper Team including Outreach and Counselling services and a Housing Led Scheme.
- In addition, CCC secured Government funding through the Rough Sleeper Accommodation Pathway to acquire 6 self-contained flats as move-on accommodation with support as part of the Rough Sleeper Pathway.
- From 2020 to 2025, the Rough Sleeper Team successfully:
    - Supported 611 rough sleepers with advice and practical help
    - Helped 103 rough sleepers to move into settled accommodation
    - Helped 52 rough sleepers into supported and temporary accommodation
- To reduce the use of unsuitable Bed & Breakfast accommodation, former student housing in Colchester, owned by the private sector, has been utilised to provide temporary accommodation to those in need. This has provided:

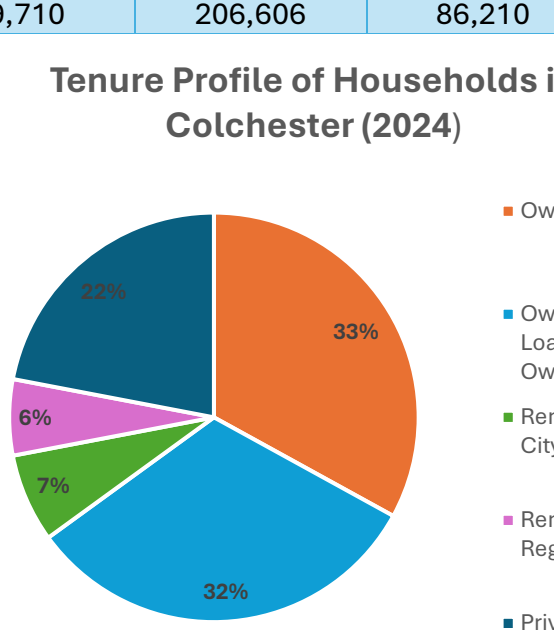
    - Better quality, family accommodation, with families having their own front door, kitchen and bathroom along with separate living and sleeping space.
    - Access to services – the site is close to schools, health and other services (alongside services attending site for additional support and assistance).
    - The accommodation is low rise and easily accessible.
- Essex-wide Homelessness Hospital Discharge Protocol established, providing a formal, structured approach to ensuring patients are not discharged into homelessness and that partners work seamlessly to prevent rough sleeping and improve outcomes.
- Essex-wide Care Leaver Pathway Plan established.
- Refreshed and relaunched an Essex-wide Prison Release Protocol, focused on reducing the number of ex-offenders leaving custody without stable accommodation and avoiding rough sleeping.
- Beacon House increased the range and depth of their courses/activities for the preparation and maintenance of tenancies. Courses include budgeting and personal wellbeing, as well as group work and activities to improve social skills, self-esteem and resilience.
- Funded by the government's Rough Sleeper Initiative (RSI) via the Council, Sanctuary Supported Living implemented a successful Housing-Led Scheme, offering accommodation with intensive, wraparound support for entrenched rough sleepers with complex needs.
- CBH commissioned Your Own Place pre-tenancy training schemes (which support individuals to create sustainable tenancies).
- Youth Enquiry Services (YES) have employed a Health and Wellbeing Housing Case Worker; whose role is to maintain contact with the young people that they have supported into accommodation (including those in supported housing). The Case Worker is there to offer early support to those that are struggling with their tenancies (e.g. support with budgeting or engagement).

A PICTURE OF COLCHESTER

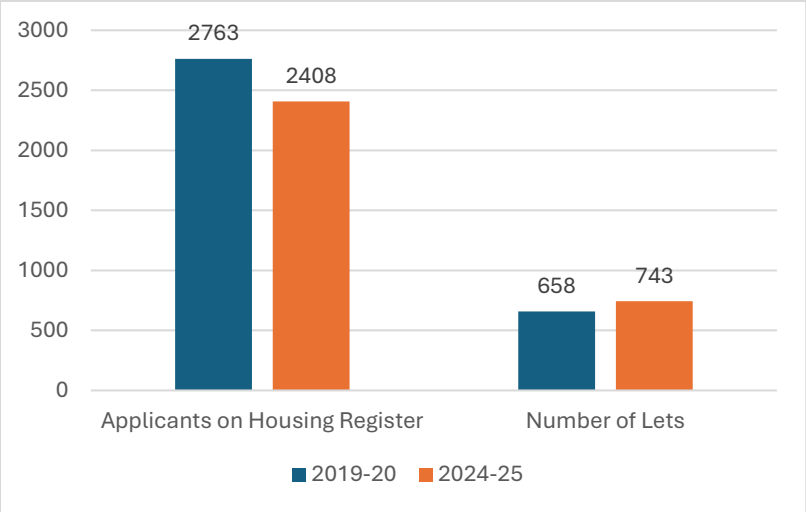
The development of this Strategy has been informed by the data collated for the Housing & Homelessness Evidence Base 2025. A selection of the data has been included here for reference and context.

COLCHESTER'S POPULATION:

2021 (Census)		2026 (ONS Predictions)		2031 (ONS Predictions)	
Population	**Households**	**Population**	**Households**	**Population**	**Households**
192,700	79,710	206,606	86,210	213,900	92,710



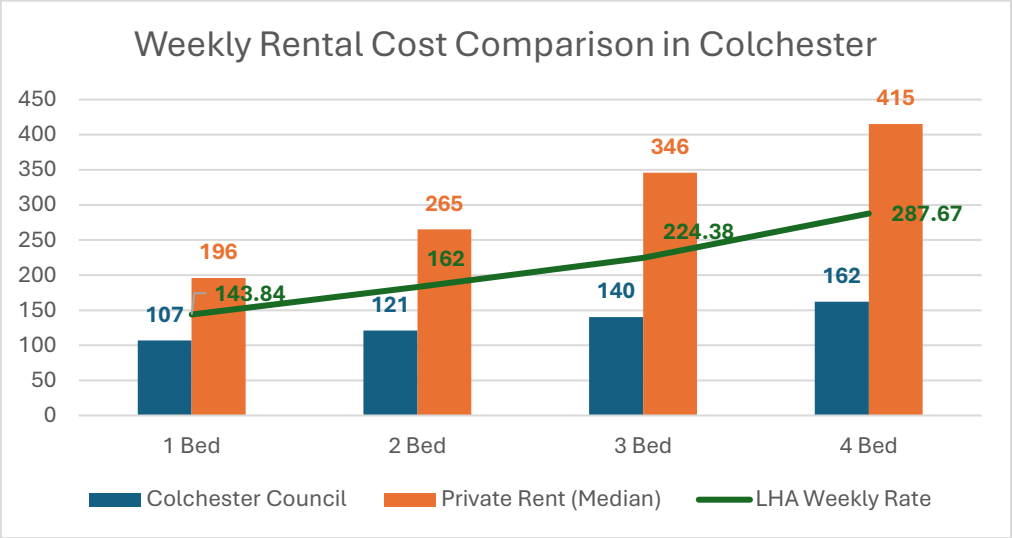
HOUSING NEED & COSTS



Over the last five years, the number of active applications on Colchester's Housing Register has averaged 2,589 households, highlighting consistent and high demand for affordable rented housing.
However, the chart shows that the number of applicants on the housing register has fallen slightly since 2019-2020, while the number of lets has slightly increased from over the same period.

The graph below shows a comparison of the weekly rental costs (in £) for properties owned by Colchester City Council (these are based on an estimated average for general needs properties) and privately rented properties (using the median average private rental costs). Figures reflect costs in March 2025.

The green line shows the maximum weekly contribution that households can receive from Local Housing Allowance (LHA) (which falls significantly below the cost of renting privately)



As shown in the table below, the average prices of purchasing a home and renting privately have risen significantly since 2019–20. However, wages have grown by only 0–3% in real terms, meaning affordability has worsened sharply.

	2019-20	2024-25	Increase
Average price of buying home	296,433	347,119	17%
Lower quartile price	211,000	250,000	18%
Average private rent	847	1,140	35%
Wage Increase	Between 0% and 3% when adjusted for inflation.		

In the past, the private rented sector helped bridge the gap between demand and supply, however, escalating rental costs have effectively closed off this tenure for those on lower incomes.

HOMELESSNESS

The Homelessness Reduction Act strengthened and formalised the prevention work already carried out by the Council. Under the Act:

- Prevention means helping someone avoid homelessness altogether, either by enabling them to stay in their current home or by supporting them to secure alternative accommodation before they have to leave.
- Relief applies when a person has already become homeless; it focuses on helping them quickly find somewhere else to live, avoiding the need for the Council to provide temporary accommodation or assess whether a long-term housing duty is owed.
- A main housing duty applies when the Council is legally required to secure suitable accommodation for a homeless household.

Prevention & Relief Activity			
	2019-20	**2024-25**	**Change**
Total households assessed	992	1,083	+9%
Main duty	230 households accepted	420 households accepted	+83%
Prevented homelessness	285 households	260 households	-9%
Relieved homelessness	146 households	148 households	+1%

Overall, the data above shows a growing demand on homelessness services, with total households assessed rising by 9% between 2019–20 and 2024–25, and acceptances under the main housing duty increasing sharply by 83%. Prevention activity has declined slightly while relief activity has remained broadly stable.

Profile of Households Owed Prevention or Relief Duties		
	2019-20	**2024-25**
Total households assessed	992	1,083
Main duty	230 households accepted	420 households accepted
Prevented homelessness	285 households	260 households
Relieved homelessness	146 households	148 households
Of households owed a prevention duty (top three cohorts)	37% single parent family/female with children 23% single men 19% single female	28% single men 27% single parent family/female with children 22% single female
Of households owed a relief duty	41% single men 23% single women 18% single parent family/female with children	45% single men 25% single women 15% single parent family/female with children
Of households owed prevention or relief duty	45% had a history of mental health problems 28% had physical ill health or disability 13% at risk of/has experienced domestic abuse	38% had a history of mental health problems 21% had physical ill health or disability 13% at risk of/has experienced domestic abuse
Reason for loss of last settled home for households owed a prevention duty:	35% - End of private rented tenancy - assured shorthold 17% - Family or friends no longer willing or able to accommodate 9% - Non-violent relationship breakdown with partner	47% - End of private rented tenancy - assured shorthold 23% - Family or friends no longer willing or able to accommodate 8% - Eviction from supported housing
Reason for loss of last settled home for households owed a relief duty:	21% - Family or friends no longer willing or able to accommodate 20% - Domestic abuse 10% - End of private rented tenancy - assured shorthold However, 26% was not known/recorded.	31% - Family or friends no longer willing or able to accommodate 22% - Domestic abuse 12% - End of private rented tenancy - assured shorthold

The profile of households owed prevention or relief duties has shifted somewhat, with single men becoming a larger share of both groups, and the proportion of households with mental or physical health needs decreasing.
The main reasons for homelessness have also changed: for prevention cases, the ending of private rented tenancies has become even more dominant, while for relief cases, family or friends no longer able to accommodate and domestic abuse remain leading causes, both increasing in share.

ROUGH SLEEPING

	2019-20	2024-25	Change
Number of Rough Sleepers seen to whom help and advice was provided	111	159	+43%
Entrenched rough sleepers	6	8	+33%

TEMPORARY ACCOMODATION

	2019-20	2024-25	Increase
Households in TA	156	443	+184%
Households in B&B	12	76	+533%
Cost of TA	c.£500,000	c.£3.3m	+c.530%

The table shows a dramatic rise in demand and costs for temporary accommodation: the number of households in TA has surged from 156 in 2019–20 to 443 in 2024–25, an 184% increase. The annual cost of TA has escalated from around £500,000 to £3.3 million, a 530% rise, which clearly correlates with the rise in the number of households living in B&B, an expensive and unsuitable form of accommodation.

AIMS

1. Break the cycle of homelessness through targeted prevention and early intervention

National policy emphasises that homelessness must become rare, brief and not repeated.

Recent government announcements also place stronger expectations on councils to invest in early intervention, supported by the government's Homelessness Prevention Grant funding, with at least 49% ring fenced for prevention and relief activities.

Preventing people from becoming homeless at an earlier stage avoids the trauma, cost and long-term harm associated with homelessness and rough sleeping.

Focusing on early intervention and maximising prevention including working with private sector landlords to support households in retaining their accommodation and working collaboratively with partner organisations aligns with national policy, including the Government's National Plan to End Homelessness (2025).

Colchester City Council and its partners will prioritise proactive prevention that stops residents from reaching crisis point.

We will:

- **Invest in early, proactive intervention where households are at risk of losing their home, including mediation in family breakdown, landlord negotiation, legal support and targeted rent arrears schemes.**
- **Develop tailored prevention pathways** for groups known to be at higher risk, including young people, people with support needs, rough sleepers moving into accommodation and people experiencing domestic abuse.
- **Ensure anyone at imminent risk of rough sleeping receives rapid, person-centred support**, including immediate accommodation options.
- **Embed prevention duties across public services** in line with national plans for a new "duty to collaborate" and preventing discharge from hospitals, prisons and other institutions into homelessness.

2. Support people to maintain their accommodation

Assisting people to remain in their homes and preventing them from becoming homeless is the most effective, compassionate and financially sustainable approach for Colchester.

Working with partner organisations to provide access to services to support households to maintain their tenancies in both the private and social sector is crucial to avoid tenancy breakdown at a later stage.

Supported Housing plays a key role in providing specialist accommodation for people with support needs, with the aim of assisting people to move on into either the social or private rented sector, once they are equipped with the skills to maintain a tenancy.

We will:

- **Expand tenancy sustainment services**, ensuring households placed into new homes, whether in private rented, social/affordable or supported housing, receive support to settle, manage rent, access healthcare and employment and avoid repeat homelessness.
- **Expand public awareness and accessibility** of housing advice, ensuring residents know how to access help at the earliest stage.
- **Increase the availability of financial inclusion support**, including debt advice, budget training, benefit maximisation, cost-of-living support and crisis payments, to reduce poverty-related homelessness.
- **Enhance support for private renters**, in line with national commitments to abolish Section 21 'no fault' evictions through the Renters' Rights Bill and empower tenants to challenge unfair rent increases.
- **Map the supply, quality and demand of Supported Housing** in Colchester, in line with the new Supported Housing Act requirements, and identify ways to improve access for people that are homeless and require support.

3. Improve partnership working to deliver a more coordinated, person-centred response to homelessness

Government policy now places a greater emphasis on accountability, lived experience and collaborative working between partners to deliver homelessness prevention services.

We will build stronger, more coordinated system-wide partnerships across statutory, voluntary and community organisations to ensure services are aligned, efficient and responsive to local need.

By improving communication, sharing information effectively and working collaboratively to deliver support services, we aim to reduce duplication, close gaps in provision and create a seamless pathway of help for people at risk of or experiencing homelessness.

This joined up approach will improve outcomes, maximise resources and ensure residents receive timely, consistent support wherever they engage with the system.

In delivering these commitments, we will continue to work collaboratively with neighbouring authorities and wider partners to develop consistent, effective and joined-up approaches to homelessness prevention and supported housing, ensuring we are well placed to respond to any future changes in local government arrangements.

We will:

- **Expand multi-agency case management** to provide wraparound support for people with multiple or complex needs (including mental health or substance misuse needs), making it easier to identify what/if support is being provided and by whom.
- **Co-produce services with people who have lived experience** of homelessness to ensure interventions are compassionate, accessible and effective.
- **Maintain and further develop partnerships** across the voluntary, community and faith sectors, which play a critical role by providing outreach services, advice and support and tenancy sustainment.
- **Strengthen data-sharing and joint working** across health, education, social care, criminal justice, housing associations and voluntary sector partners to identify early warning signs such as rent arrears, domestic abuse, relationship breakdown and mental ill health.
- **Create a strengthened local Homelessness Partnership Board**, including input from people with lived experience to monitor the implementation of the strategy and agree adjustments to the Action Plan where needed.

4. Enable people to access suitable homes

We will provide advice and support to individuals and families to enable them to access homes that are safe, suitable for their needs and provide long term stability.

By identifying ways to increase access to a range of quality housing options and reducing barriers to securing accommodation we aim to help residents to move into homes where they can thrive.

This focus on safe, appropriate housing is essential for preventing homelessness, supporting recovery and building strong resilient communities and links to the aims and objectives of Colchester's Housing Strategy.

We will:

- **Improve access to stable, long-term accommodation**, building on Colchester's strategic aim to increase the availability of settled homes.
- **Work with registered providers** to maximise delivery of new affordable homes.
- **Work with landlords to** promote responsible letting and reduce evictions wherever possible.
- **Support innovative development and acquisition models**, including the Council's housebuilding and acquisition programmes, to provide additional supply of affordable Council housing.
- **Increase efforts to make the best use of the Council's housing stock by encouraging under-occupying households to rightsize**. This will free up larger family homes, helping to reduce waiting lists and ease pressures on temporary accommodation.
- **Work with partners to monitor the supply, quality and sustainability of Supported Housing** to meet the growing demand for this type of accommodation.

5. Reduce the use of unsuitable temporary accommodation (TA)

Through earlier intervention in preventing people from becoming homeless, stronger partnerships, and improving access to suitable housing options, we aim to reduce the financial and social costs of temporary accommodation while ensuring that households receive timely, effective support that promotes stability, wellbeing and independence.

Reducing the use of unsuitable temporary accommodation in Colchester requires a sustained and coordinated approach focused on early prevention of homelessness, creating better access to longer term housing, improving TA quality, strengthening partnerships and operating within the framework of the latest national legislation and guidance.

We will:

- **Maintain enhanced monitoring of TA** including length of stay, reasons for homelessness and move-on outcomes.
- **Identify the current need and demand for TA** to provide insight into the type and size of TA required in the short and medium term.
- **Minimise placements outside the district** except when necessary for safety or specialist support.
- **Eliminate the use of B&Bs for families**, limiting stays to a maximum of six weeks where unavoidable.

DELIVERY & MONITORING

In line with expectations set out in the National Plan to End Homelessness 2025, an Action Plan has been developed which sets out how Colchester City Council and its partners will deliver the new Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy. The Action Plan provides accountability and clear targets for each deliverable.

The Council will use routine data monitoring, regular multi-agency meetings and annual public reporting to track progress against agreed indicators, ensuring that actions remain on track and responsive to emerging needs.

This monitoring process will be overseen by a strategic partnership group. This mirrors the national plan's emphasis on joined-up working and lived-experience involvement, enabling the Council and its partners to adjust delivery, strengthen collaboration and demonstrate progress toward reducing homelessness in a way that is transparent, evidence-led and consistent with national expectations.

STRATEGIC LINKS

During the development of this strategy, a range of strategic links were carefully considered and incorporated. These include national, regional and local priorities, as well as funding frameworks and legal duties. The most significant of these are listed below.

National	Local
Homelessness Code of Guidance (ongoing) Local Authorities must adhere to the code, which sets out statutory duties including prevention, relief, assessments, personalised housing plans, priority need, suitability, the duty to refer and strategy creation.	**Local Government Reorganisation (currently paused)** The process of LGR (in which district and county councils will merge to form new unitary authorities) mean that all Council operations must consider and anticipate potential changes to governance, service, delivery structures and resource allocation to ensure that support for vulnerable residents remains coordinated and uninterrupted.
National Plan to End Homelessness 2025 The national strategy prioritises prevention, cross-service collaboration and locally tailored action plans that support the national goal of making homelessness rare, brief and non-recurring.	**CCC Customer Strategy (25-28)** The strategy ensures services are designed around customer needs, offering accessible, responsive and inclusive support. It adopts a digital-first, evidence-led and customer-focused approach that aims to make it easy for people (including those facing homelessness) to get help at the right time.
Renters Rights Act 2025 The Act strengthens renters' rights, raises housing standards and creates a fairer balance between landlords and tenants. It is designed to reduce housing insecurity, a key driver of homelessness, by ending "no-fault" evictions.	**Colchester City Council's Three-Year Plan 23-26: A City fit for the Future** The plan includes priorities to improve health and wellbeing, to deliver homes for those most in need and to strengthen partnership-led, community-centred services.
NHS "Fit for the Future" 10 Yr Health Plan 25-35 The plan sets out a long term vision to make the NHS "fit for the future." It focuses on shifting towards prevention, community-based care and integrated support between housing and social care partners to address wider determinants of health including homelessness.	**Essex Joint Health & Wellbeing Strategy 22-26** The strategy sets out a shared vision for improving health outcomes and reducing inequalities across Essex. It prioritises improvement in mental health, reduction in health inequalities and support for long-term independence.
Supported Housing Act 2023 The Act requires strong local oversight with new duties to assess current and future supported housing need. Local Authorities must implement a Supported Housing Strategy and work collaboratively with health and social care partners to deliver good-quality, licensed supported accommodation that prevents homelessness and meets national standards.	**CCC Housing Strategy 22-27** The Strategy sets out the Council and its partners' priorities for housing over the next 5 years. The Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy sits within this as one of the 4 key objectives, along with increasing the supply of affordable good-quality homes, building sustainable communities and improving the quality of housing in both the social and private sector
The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 The Act introduced a legal definition of domestic abuse, covering physical, emotional, coercive and economic abuse. It placed a duty on Local Authorities to provide accommodation-based support for victims and their children.	**Essex County Council Housing Strategy 21-25** The strategy's focus is on increasing the supply of suitable and affordable homes, supporting independent living and working in partnership across the wider housing system to ensure consistent, joined-up responses to housing need.
Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 The Act amended the Housing Act 1996, introducing new duties for local authorities to prevent and relieve homelessness, focusing on early intervention and support for all eligible applicants, not just those in priority need.	**The Local Plan** This is the statutory planning document that sets out how land will be used, where new homes will be built and what types of housing are needed. It is the main tool for ensuring there is enough housing land supply and affordable housing provision.

CONSULTATION & ENGAGEMENT

Homelessness Partner Consultation Event

Work on the Homelessness Strategy commenced with a Consultation event (4 November 2025) to review homelessness in Colchester and identify key priorities for the new strategy. Representatives attended from a wide range of partner organisations who provide services to those affected by homelessness, including representatives from Colchester City Council, Colchester Borough Homes and Essex County Council.

The outcomes from the workshop identified key challenges around homelessness and rough sleeping in Colchester and ways in which these challenges could be addressed by individual organisations and collectively. During the event, volunteers were sought to join the Project Group.

Project Group

The Project Group is made up of key stakeholders, including representatives from CCC, CBH, ECC, NHS, Beacon House, Sanctuary Supported Housing, Youth Enquiry Servies and the YMCA. The Project Group undertook a number of duties including:

- Compiling an evidence base bringing together all available data on all aspects of housing in Colchester
- Researching national and local drivers that may impact on the strategy
- Undertaking consultation to identify residents' and organisations' priorities for homelessness and rough sleeping
- Highlighting key issues and determining long term goals and priorities for Colchester
- Identifying a Vision and key Aims for the new strategy and actions that will address the challenges
- Developing an action plan to deliver the priorities

Online Public Consultation

An online survey open to all residents requesting their input on the proposed Aims for the new Strategy was drafted and then reviewed by the Residents' Reading Panel (to ensure it was written in the most accessible way possible). There were also multiple "free text" boxes where people were encouraged to share any feelings, opinions or experiences that they felt we should consider. The consultation was open between 15th December 2025 and 22nd January. Support from the communications team and the Project Group was provided to publicise the consultation as widely as possible.

Feedback strongly endorsed the Strategy Aims and highlighted several themes: the need for a shift from crisis response to early prevention, more affordable and appropriate housing, clearer and more human communication, stronger multi-agency working, improved temporary accommodation standards and more empathetic, person-centred support.

In Person Service User Consultation

In January 2026, Colchester City Council and partners engaged with 29 people with lived experience of homelessness at Beacon House, the YMCA and through follow-up contact with recently-rehoused families. Participants included older single men, young people aged 16–25 in supported accommodation and families with children. Across all groups, homelessness was commonly rooted in instability, trauma and relationship breakdown, with many having experienced multiple episodes of displacement. People described significant impacts on mental and physical health, education, employment and safety and often found it difficult to identify actions that might have prevented their homelessness, particularly where family breakdown, childhood instability or systemic gaps (such as failures in social care or lack of safeguarding) were key drivers.

Feedback highlighted the vital role of support organisations, such as Beacon House, YMCA, Youth Enquiry Service, CENS, CBH and others, which provided food, emotional support, mediation, accommodation, help accessing benefits and move-on support. However, participants also noted barriers including lack of early intervention, limited support when relationships collapsed, affordability challenges in the private rented sector, and insufficient pathways for young people transitioning out of the family home or care. Many described significant mental health challenges, chronic sleep deprivation, exposure to crime, and difficulty finding or keeping employment without stable housing. Overall, the insights emphasise the importance of trauma-informed, coordinated, and preventative approaches to homelessness, with improved early help, clearer guidance and more accessible supported accommodation options for those at risk.

OUR THANKS TO THE PROJECT GROUP

We would like to extend our heartfelt thanks to all members of the Project Group, whose input into the creation of this strategy has been vital. You all work tirelessly to support people facing homelessness in Colchester. Your compassion, dedication and collaborative spirit make a profound difference every day, offering not only practical help, but dignity, hope and a pathway to stability for those who need it most. Our community is stronger, kinder and more resilient because of everything you do.

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