

Colchester's Homelessness Strategy 2014-19

Progress Report 2018

Colchester's Homelessness Strategy 2014-19 was adopted in March 2015. The 5 year Strategy and Delivery Plan set out the way in which Colchester Borough Council and its partner organisations will work together to prevent homelessness in the borough.

Key Priorities were identified for the Homelessness Strategy:

1. Preventing homelessness by sustaining tenancies
2. Mitigating the negative impacts of welfare reform
3. Improving the Health and Wellbeing of homeless people
4. Changing the perception and culture of social housing through education – managing expectations
5. Rough Sleepers

Changes in Legislation

Homelessness Reduction Act 2017

The Homelessness Reduction Act came into force in April 2018. The government 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 now required to draw up personalised 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. Actions to reflect the changes in legislation and the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act were incorporated into the Homelessness Strategy Delivery Plan in 2017. These include:

Provide advice and information about the changes to the Council's Homelessness Service brought about by the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act and the new Homelessness Code of Guidance

Review the Allocations Policy to meet the requirements of the Homelessness Reduction Act to ensure that it is sufficiently geared towards preventing homelessness.

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.

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 to end it for good by 2027. 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 that are being progressed in Colchester's Homelessness Strategy meet the objectives in the government's Rough Sleeping Strategy.

The Homelessness Strategy Progress Report 2018 contains some highlights of the actions in the Strategy that have been achieved or progressed in the final year of the strategy.

The Delivery Plan which sets out the actions to deliver the priorities has also been updated.

Priority 1: Preventing homelessness by sustaining tenancies

Action: *Increase the provision of tenancy support including floating support*

Progress: 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 14.5hrs of drop-ins each week and telephone support through their gateway.

Progress: CBH provides Tenancy sustainment to support its 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 CBC to provide intense intervention and support to families living in temporary accommodation, especially Bed and breakfast which has provided positive outcomes.

Action: Provide services that will support young tenants to maintain their tenancy and prevent unnecessary evictions through Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) and Arrears

Progress: 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 CBH 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 were evicted for rent arrears/ASB from CBC properties in 2017-18.

Action: Increase prevention of homelessness caused by domestic abuse

Progress: 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 groups, victims and their families. The project is being 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.

Priority 2: Mitigating the negative impacts of welfare reform

Action: *Provide advice and support to tenants/residents potentially affected by the welfare reforms.*

Progress: Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) was further utilised to support residents affected by the welfare reforms and to remove the risk of homelessness. The DHP fund of £464,027 (including £50,000 from CBC) was fully spent in 2017/18.

Voluntary sector organisations in Colchester are also providing services to residents to help mitigate some of the impacts of welfare reform. (Details are included in the Delivery Plan).

Priority 3: Improving the Health and Wellbeing of homeless people

Action: *Promote the integration between health and housing to meet the actions identified in the Public Health Outcomes Framework: Improving the wider determinants of Health for homeless acceptances and households in temporary accommodation*

Progress:

The Youth Enquiry Service (y.e.s) have received funding to provide a counselling service specifically for young people aged between 19 and 25 who have presented with a housing issue .

One support continue to provide a patient drop in service at the Lakes Mental health unit and are working with other healthcare providers including the walk in centre.

Beacon House provides a Registered Nurse service in partnership with the Clinical Commissioning Group, to provide primary care, screening and diagnostic treatment for people with no fixed abode who are unable to register with a GP.

Priority 4: Changing the perception and culture of social housing through education – managing expectations

Action: **Provide 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.**

Progress: 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 has taken place to meet the new requirements and additional officers have been recruited to carry out the initial assessment process.

Systems and processes have been reviewed to assist customers to self-serve.

Action: Review the Allocations Policy to meet the requirements of the Homelessness Reduction Act to ensure that it is sufficiently geared towards preventing homelessness.

Progress: The Allocations Policy was reviewed in 2017-18 to meet the requirements of the Homelessness Reduction Act and to ensure that it is sufficiently geared towards preventing homelessness. Two new circumstances where an applicant would be placed in Band C have been added to the policy. These are 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 Sleepers

Action: 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 help engage with different groups

Progress: In December 2016 CBC and Tendring District Council successfully secured the 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 sits within the CBH Housing Solutions Team. Since the project begun, the Co-ordinators have been working with local partner organisations who have the skills and expertise in this field to provide an assertive outreach service to support and help secure accommodation for people living on the street.

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

Action: Establish a multi-agency group of support services for single homeless and rough sleepers.

Progress: Colchester's Homeless Service User Panel (CHASUP) is now chaired by the Early Response Rough Sleeper Coordinator. A matrix has been developed to provide an accommodation and support pathway. CHASUP 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). Every quarter a forum is held to look at innovation and ideas and provide training for all services in Colchester to help address single homelessness and rough sleeping. Two events have been held so far and have been well attended, with learning and good practice taken away from the meetings by those attending.

Action: *Explore the possibility of extending the opening times of agencies to reduce the amount of time that rough sleepers spend on the street.*

Progress: From mid-December 2017 until the end of February 2018, St Peters Guest House, in conjunction with Beacon House, provided 12 bed spaces for rough sleepers in Colchester. During the period, 22 different individuals used the service.

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 weather in 2018 and 24 hour opening was introduced during the extreme bad weather.