

Colchester's Homelessness Strategy **2014 – 2019**



Homelessness Strategy and Review to be considered in conjunction with the Delivery Plan and Evidence Base

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



The **April Centre** provides effective help for homeless people and those in priority need. The services provided by the April Centre include; housing advice and guidance, private rented supported accommodation providers, outreach team, welfare benefits, form filling, practical help and support.



Beacon House is a Day Centre based on East Hill. It is a Christian charity that offers healthcare and wellbeing facilities to those who are homeless, in insecure accommodation, or at risk of homelessness. Beacon House provides a person-centred holistic 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 which transferred from Colchester Borough Council to Colchester Borough Homes in November 2013. 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.

Housing Support Services provide a range of services to help manage tenancies effectively. The team has specialist skills which provide a balance of enforcement and support, including: Tenancy Support, Antisocial behaviour officers and managing the Council's temporary accommodation.

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: Allocations and Lettings, Financial Inclusion & Welfare Rights, Garage and Leasehold Management, contract monitoring and Resident Involvement & Communication



Colchester Emergency Night Shelter provides emergency accommodation for homeless people aged 18 and over. The Night Shelter works with its residents to address any support needs and to assist them in finding secure housing.



Colne is a forward-thinking, resident focused housing association, providing, managing and maintaining excellent homes and making a positive difference to the neighbourhoods in which they work.



Family Mosaic provides good quality, affordable homes to rent and buy, as well as care and support services to thousands of people who need extra support. Family Mosaic have around 24,000 homes for rent and serve more than 45,000 people: it is one of the largest housing providers in London, Essex and the Southeast.



Homeless Link is a national homeless Charity supporting people and organisations working directly with homeless people. A toolkit designed by Homeless Link to help support Local Authorities was used in developing the strategy.



One Support provides individual housing related support to people in the community, preventing homelessness, helping them to maintain their tenancies, increase life skills and to live more independently. One Support offer a flexible and responsive service that is sensitive to our customers needs.



The Colchester and Tendring **Youth Enquiry Service (Y.E.S)** offers support to young people between the ages of 16 to 25 who are faced with homelessness or are threatened with homelessness. 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 this strategy.

Foreword



I am proud to introduce this strategy for preventing and addressing homelessness in Colchester.

This is Colchester Borough Council's third Homelessness Strategy and follows the last Strategy which was published in 2008.

Since the publication of the 2008 Strategy significant achievements have been made in the prevention of homelessness in Colchester.

Having successfully reduced the number of households in temporary accommodation and achieved the Government's target in December 2010, we have also improved the accommodation that we offer to homeless households whilst they wait for a permanent home to become available.

By working together with our partner organisations there have been significant improvements in the services that are provided for young people in the borough, including the introduction of the Joint referral panel for 16-25 year olds.

We have increased the supply of available accommodation for people in housing need and have continued to work closely with Landlords in the private rented sector to improve access to accommodation.

Due to the increase in the number of street homeless people in Colchester we have used government funding to increase the provision of resettlement services to help homeless people into accommodation.

Whilst the new Homelessness Strategy looks to build on these successes it has been developed against fresh and bigger challenges that threaten to increase homelessness and make it more difficult for people to meet their housing need. People become and stay homeless for a whole range of complex and overlapping reasons and solving homelessness is now about much more than finding a home for people.

However, by continuing to work in partnership with organisations in Colchester to prevent homelessness, we will focus on our key priorities to; help people sustain their tenancies, mitigate the negative impacts of welfare reform, improve the health and wellbeing of homeless people and manage expectations by changing the perception and culture of social housing through education.

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

Councillor Tina Bourne

Portfolio Holder for Housing

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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.

This is Colchester's third Homelessness Strategy. It has been developed by Colchester Borough Council and its partner organisations, all of whom are strongly committed to reducing and preventing homelessness in the borough.

The new Homelessness Strategy has looked back at the achievements since the last strategy in 2008, reviewed the current homelessness situation in Colchester and based on this, set out the priorities for the next five years.

During the last five years, the emphasis has been on preventing homelessness amongst hard to reach groups, offering advice and support to help people maintain their tenancies, working with partners and housing providers to increase housing options and to ensure an adequate supply of affordable housing.

The aim of the strategy over the next five years is to build on the progress already made in meeting these priorities and set out our plan to work in partnership to meet the new challenges that we face in the future.

The main causes of homelessness predominately remain the same; family and friends no longer willing or able to accommodate, loss of private sector or tied accommodation and relationship breakdown. However, it is recognised that welfare reform and the Localism Act 2011 will also have a significant impact on the way that services are delivered, and options needed to prevent and relieve homelessness.

What we have achieved so far...

Summary of the main achievements from the Homelessness Strategy 2008 – 2013

We have reduced and improved the temporary accommodation we offer:

- ▶ Colchester Borough Council (CBC) achieved the Government target to halve the number of households in temporary accommodation by December 2010. The target for Colchester was 170 and as at the end of December there were 166 households in temporary accommodation.
- ▶ CBC's temporary accommodation scheme Ascott House, has been demolished and new accommodation built in its place to provide self contained supported accommodation. It is now owned and managed by Family Mosaic. The new scheme is called Hargood House. Bardfield House and Friars Court have also been transferred to Family Mosaic from the Council and improvements will be made to the accommodation.

We have improved the services we provide for young people:

- ▶ The Colchester Young Persons Housing Forum has been re-launched and regular information days have been held for agencies and organisations in Colchester on homelessness prevention.
- ▶ A Joint Referral Panel (JRP) for 16 – 25 year olds has been established which has streamlined referrals into supported accommodation units.
- ▶ The Passport to Independence, which is an accredited course for tenants in temporary accommodation and/or supported housing on managing a tenancy, has been rolled out across the Greater Haven Gateway sub – region after the scheme was successfully piloted in Suffolk.

We have increased the supply of available housing for people in housing need:

- ▶ The number of affordable housing units delivered in the last 3 years excluding shared/low cost home ownership schemes was 560.
- ▶ A pilot project on empty homes was completed in January 2012. As a result 14 properties were returned to use.
- ▶ In 2013 a Lodgings Scheme was set up with grant funding from the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) under 'no second night out'. The scheme is being run by Solo Housing, a registered housing charity working across East Anglia.

We have continued to work closely with Landlords in the private rented sector to improve access to accommodation:

- ▶ A Landlords Day was held in May 2011 which replaced the traditional Landlords Forum held annually and was organised with input from three national landlord organisations. The event consisted of trade and council stands and a programme of talks and was attended by 45 to 50 landlords.

- ▶ A Landlords Forum was held in January 2013. The forum was well attended by 80 landlords and offered seminars on Welfare Reform, landlord responsibilities, and the benefits of having tenants that claim Housing Benefit (HB).
- ▶ A landlord learning event held on 29th October 2013 which was attended by 27 landlords and included information on legal matters around possession proceedings and notices seeking possession.
- ▶ The Private Sector Project Board has been established since November 2010 with regular monthly meetings to co-ordinate the Council's action in working with the Private Sector.
- ▶ In September 2013 CBC joined a partnership with six other local authorities across Essex to procure a provider for the Essex Landlord Accreditation Scheme. The scheme is due to be launched in May 2014.

We have increased the provision of resettlement services to help homeless people:

- ▶ The Greater Haven Gateway (GHG) was awarded £40k grant from the DCLG in 2011 to set up outreach and resettlement services for rough sleepers. Colchester BC and Tendring DC were awarded £18,500 for the April Centre to provide an outreach and resettlement programme across both areas. The scheme successfully supported 27 street homeless people in Colchester into accommodation.
- ▶ As part of the roll out of 'no second night out' the DCLG awarded additional funding in February 2012 to the GHG of £362,000. Some of this funding was awarded to the April Centre to continue to provide an Outreach and resettlement service to prevent single homelessness and rough sleeping.



The Strategic Context

To put the Homelessness Strategy in 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'*

National Context

Laying the foundations: a Housing Strategy for England 2011

The strategy set out the government's new approach for housing by giving local communities a greater say over decisions on housing in order to provide a stable, long term increase in housing supply.

The government's vision for social housing outlined in the strategy is to make better use of social housing to support those who need it most.

Laying the foundations sets out a package of reforms to:

- ▶ get the housing market moving again
- ▶ lay the foundations for a more responsive, effective and stable housing market in the future
- ▶ support choice and quality for tenants
- ▶ improve environmental standards and design quality

The main aims of the strategy are to address concerns across the housing market by:

- ▶ Making it easier to secure mortgages on new homes.
- ▶ Improving fairness in social housing.
- ▶ Ensuring homes that have been left empty for years are lived in again.

Vision to end rough sleeping:

No Second Night Out nationwide July 2011

This is the first report produced by the ministerial working group. The group worked with local government and voluntary sector partners to produce the report which focused on ending rough sleeping.

The Ministerial Working Group on Homelessness brought together 8 government departments to tackle the complex causes of homelessness. This included health, work and training as well as housing.

The report, 'No Second Night Out nationwide', set out 6 joint commitments:

- ▶ Helping people off the streets.
- ▶ Helping people access healthcare.
- ▶ Helping people into work.
- ▶ Reducing bureaucratic burdens.
- ▶ Increasing local control over investment in services.
- ▶ Developing responsibility in tackling homelessness.



The commitments set out the aim of the group to work across government to give local people the tools to tackle rough sleeping and put an end to second nights out on the street.

Making Every Contact Count: A joint approach to preventing homelessness August 2012

The second report by the Ministerial Working Group was produced to build on the progress made since 'no second night out' by ensuring that agencies worked together to support those at risk of homelessness.

The report sets out how services can be managed in a way that prevents all households from reaching a crisis point where they are faced with homelessness.

The aim of the report is to ensure that every contact local agencies make with vulnerable people and families really counts.

The report brings together government commitments to:

- ▶ tackle troubled childhoods and adolescence
- ▶ improve health
- ▶ reduce involvement in crime
- ▶ improve skills; employment; and financial
- ▶ pioneer social funding for homelessness

The report poses ten local challenges to the sector which it is hoped will lead to all local homelessness teams delivering a gold standard service.

The ten local challenges are to:

- ▶ adopt a corporate commitment to prevent homelessness which has buy in across all local authority services
- ▶ actively work in partnership with voluntary sector and other local partners to address support, education, employment and training needs
- ▶ offer a Housing Options prevention service, including written advice, to all clients
- ▶ adopt a No Second Night Out model or an effective local alternative
- ▶ have housing pathways agreed or in development with each key partner and client group that includes appropriate accommodation and support
- ▶ develop a suitable private rented sector offer for all client groups, including advice and support to both clients and landlords
- ▶ actively engage in preventing mortgage repossessions including through the Mortgage Rescue Scheme
- ▶ have a homelessness strategy which sets out a proactive approach to preventing homelessness and is reviewed annually so that it is responsive to emerging needs

- ▶ not place any young person aged 16 or 17 in Bed and Breakfast accommodation
- ▶ not place any families in Bed and Breakfast accommodation unless in an emergency and then for no longer than 6 weeks

Improving outcomes and supporting transparency – A Public Health Outcomes Framework for England 2013 – 2016 Part 1 January 2012

The document sets out the new framework for public health and recognises the factors that influence public health over the course of a lifetime including poverty, education, housing, employment, crime and pollution.

The document outlines how the NHS, social care, the voluntary sector and communities will work together to plan and deliver services to improve health inequalities.

The new Public Health Outcomes Framework is in three parts. Part 1 introduces the two overarching outcomes that set the vision for the whole public health system.

These two outcomes are:

- ▶ Increased healthy life expectancy.
- ▶ Reduced differences in life expectancy and healthy life expectancy between communities.

The document recognises the important link between health inequality and homelessness and sets out key indicators under Domain 1 'improving the wider detriments of health' to meet the outcomes.

Local and Sub regional context

Essex Health and Wellbeing Board – Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy for Essex October 2012

The Health and Wellbeing Strategy has been developed and is being implemented by the Health and Wellbeing Board, which brings together key partners to improve the health and wellbeing for the communities of Essex.

The main source of evidence that has fed into the strategy has been the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA). The JSNA has provided information on the health and wellbeing of the population of Essex; the wider determinants of health; and the quality of life in the county. The JSNA has also provided the basis for the key priorities for the strategy. The priorities are:

- ▶ Starting and developing well.
- ▶ Living and working well.
- ▶ Ageing well.

The main focus of the strategy is to reduce health inequalities and tackle the wider determinants of health to increase life expectancy and reduce inequalities between areas and groups.

The strategy acknowledged that one of the main health and wellbeing issues for Colchester was the high level of statutory homelessness. Homeless people are more likely to experience a poorer quality of life across all the wider determinants of ill-health.

The Greater Haven Gateway Housing Strategy 2011

The Greater Haven Gateway (GHG) Housing Strategy sets out the key ideas and plans for strategic housing in the sub region. The partnership works across eight Local Authorities (LAs) in north east Essex and south east Suffolk including; Babergh, Braintree, Colchester, Ipswich, Maldon, Mid Suffolk, Suffolk Coastal and Tendring.

The vision for the strategy *is 'to build on the maturity of the GHG strategic housing partnership to work together on issues that benefit from a collaborative approach'*.

The main 5 objectives of the strategy that were agreed by the Local Authority partnership are to:

- ▶ Enable the development of high quality and sustainable affordable housing.
- ▶ Improve the condition and use of existing housing.
- ▶ Maximise customers' housing choices and mobility.
- ▶ Provide enhanced housing options based on an understanding of the links between health, well being, training, employment and housing to help prevent homelessness and support vulnerable people.
- ▶ Increase the capacity and skills of the GHG partnership.

The Strategic Tenancy Strategy

The Localism Act required Local Housing Authorities in England to prepare and publish a strategic tenancy strategy that set out the principles to which the registered providers of social housing are to have regard when formulating policies that relate to:

- ▶ The types of tenancies that are granted.
- ▶ The circumstances in which a particular tenancy will be granted.
- ▶ Where tenancies are granted for a certain term, the length of the term.

- ▶ Circumstances in which a further tenancy will be granted when an existing tenancy comes to an end.

The Council worked with sub-regional partners to develop a sub-regional Strategic Tenancy Strategy to which all registered providers across the Greater Haven Gateway should have regard to.

The Council's Strategic Plan 2012-15

Colchester Borough Council's Strategic Plan sets out how the Council will play its part in making Colchester a place where people want to live, learn, work and visit.

The Council's priorities are placed under two categories:

- ▶ Leading our communities.
- ▶ Delivering high quality assessable services.

The Homelessness Strategy meets the following key priorities from the strategic plan by:

- ▶ Supporting more vulnerable groups.
- ▶ Providing more affordable homes across the borough.
- ▶ Engaging with the voluntary sector.
- ▶ Working in partnerships to help tackle health and crime issues.

A Housing Strategy for Colchester

Whilst the Homelessness Strategy is a document in its own right, it also forms part of Colchester's overarching Housing Strategy. Therefore to avoid duplication the key priorities proposed in the Homelessness Strategy will not include priorities that have historically been covered by the Housing Strategy.

The current housing strategy was developed in 2008 to cover the five years from July 2008 to June 2013. The housing strategy has an accompanying action plan to direct the work of the council and its partners. The action plan has been refreshed in 2012 and 2013 to:

- ▶ Enable work to build on achievements already made.
- ▶ Reflect changes in the economy and the housing sector.
- ▶ Reflect changes resulting from the Housing Fundamental Service Review.

The current action plan covers the period 2013 –14.

A new five year Housing Strategy for Colchester will be developed in 2014/2015 in conjunction with the Housing Strategy partnership with representatives from Colchester Borough Council, private developers, Colchester Borough Homes and other Registered Providers.



The overall vision for the Council and its partners is to:

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



The Review

Homelessness in Colchester – The Local Picture

Key messages from the evidence base:

- ▶ As at 31st March 2012 there were 75,945 dwellings in Colchester borough of which 6257 are owned by the Local Authority.
- ▶ A total of 1012 homes were built in Colchester between April 2011 and March 2012 of which 366 were recorded affordable housing completions.
- ▶ The average household price across the borough in April 2012 was £214,573.
- ▶ There has been an increase in minority ethnic groups in Colchester from 2001-2011 from 3.8% - 8.0%.
- ▶ 18% of Homeless applications to Colchester Borough Council in 2012-2013 were from minority ethnic groups.
- ▶ During the financial year 2012- 2013 there were 342 homeless decisions made by Colchester Borough Council of which 251 households were accepted as being owed a homelessness duty.
- ▶ A third of all households accepted became homeless because they were asked to leave by a parent, family or friends; 21% had their private sector or tied accommodation brought to an end and 15% were households where a relationship had broken down.
- ▶ Of the households accepted 50% had dependent children, 20% were single vulnerable adults and 11% were 16/17 year olds.
- ▶ As at March 31st 2013 there were 168 households in Temporary Accommodation which was a slight reduction than at the same time the previous year.
- ▶ During 2012-2013 there were 411 households prevented from becoming homeless in Colchester of which 328 cases were prevented by Colchester Borough Council.
- ▶ The number of social housing lettings in Colchester in 2012 - 2013 was 624 of which 29% were let to homeless households.
- ▶ In July 2013 information from the Department of Work and Pensions showed that 98 households in Colchester would potentially be affected by the benefit cap.
- ▶ The number of under occupied households in the social rented sector (by 1 bedroom or more) in Colchester as at July 2013 was 904.
- ▶ Since 2010 the estimated figure for rough sleeping in Colchester has significantly increased from 10 people in 2010 to 25 people in 2012 and 35 people in 2013.

How the strategy was developed

A project Group of Key Stakeholders was set up to look at the ways in which the Council and its partner organisations can work together to prevent and reduce homelessness and provide services that meet the needs of homeless people in the borough.

The project group identified key priorities for the new Homelessness Strategy and developed the Delivery Plan to meet these priorities. In order to fulfil its remit the group:

- ▶ Conducted a review of homelessness in Colchester which included service user consultation, service mapping and identifying resources available to tackle homelessness including; funding advice and support.
- ▶ Looked at the achievements from the current strategy and ways to build on these.
- ▶ Considered the challenges that have impacted on homelessness with the Localism Act and Welfare Reform.
- ▶ Produced an evidence base to include data and commentary on the current and predicted future levels of homelessness and homelessness prevention in the Borough.

The organisations that were represented on the project group are:

Colchester Borough Council – Strategic Housing Team, Housing Options Team and Community Initiatives Team, Customer Service Centre
Colchester Borough Homes
The April Centre
Beacon House
Colchester Emergency Night Shelter
One Support
Family Mosaic
Colne Housing
Essex Probation
Regional representative Homeless Link
The Job Centre Plus

Other groups that meet regularly have also been involved in the development of the strategy and information from these groups has fed into the strategy and delivery plan

These groups include:

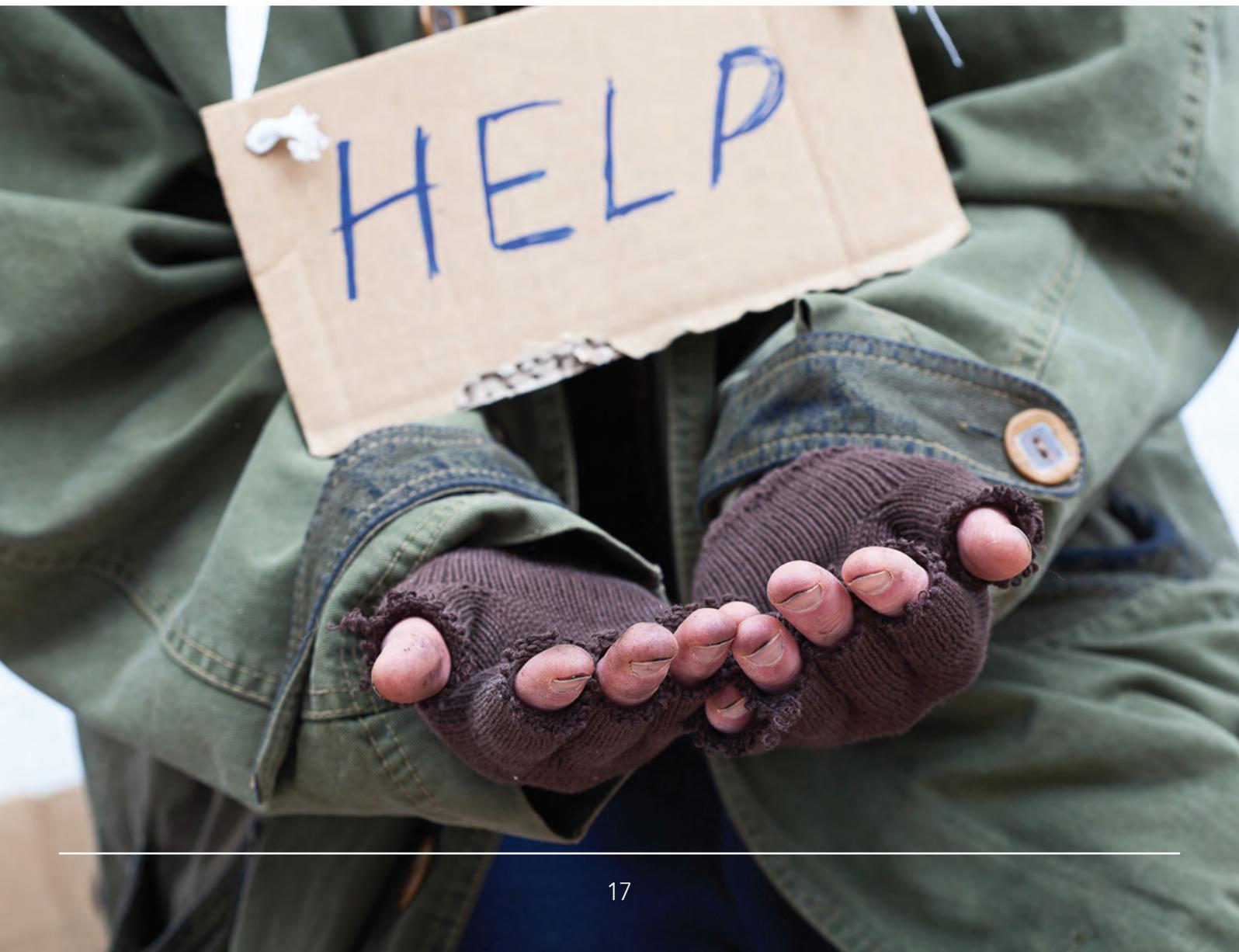
- The Housing Forum
- The Young Persons Housing Forum
- The Supported Housing Network Meeting

The Scope of the Homelessness Strategy

The review of homelessness in Colchester has identified 4 key priorities to reduce and prevent homelessness which will form the basis of the strategy and delivery plan. These are:

- ▶ Preventing homelessness by sustaining tenancies.
- ▶ Mitigating the impacts of welfare reform.
- ▶ Improving the health and wellbeing of homeless people.
- ▶ Changing the culture and perception of social housing through education and managing expectations.

Additionally because of the significant rise in people sleeping rough across the borough since 2010, there is also a section that focuses on Rough Sleepers. This section will also include single homeless people that the Council does not owe a duty to house under homelessness legislation.



Consultation

Service user consultation took place in July and August 2013. It was agreed by the project group that two methods of consultation would be used to capture as much information as possible from people that are currently homeless or have been homeless previously.

Questionnaires were distributed to organisations that provide accommodation, advice and support to homeless people in Colchester who were able to hand out the questionnaires to people that used the service. The questionnaire sought views on the experience of being homeless in Colchester which included; reasons for becoming homeless, use of services, help and support provision and Health. The number of questionnaires completed was 33 out of 200.

The questionnaire was used as the basis for Focus Groups that were held at Beacon House, in the form of a drop in session for over 25's, and at the Youth Enquiry Service for under 25's.

It was agreed by the project group that separate sessions would be held as the experience of homelessness could differ depending on age. The venues were carefully chosen as they were familiar to the relevant service users.

The sessions were well attended and gave a valuable insight into the issues and challenges that homeless people face.

The key messages that came out of the consultation are:

The people that responded to the questionnaire and attended the focus groups were mainly white British and between the age of 36-59 years

The main reason for becoming homeless was friend/family eviction and relationship breakdown

In order to lead a more settled life, people most need help with emotional and mental health problems and managing a tenancy

The main problem for people who do not have a settled home is finding employment

The main health problems are depression and mental health

The help and support provided by the voluntary sector agencies in Colchester was much appreciated by homeless people

There is no where for homeless people to go during a large part of the day

There is a general lack of understanding of welfare benefits and homelessness law

The comments and suggestions provided by service users have been fed into the strategy and delivery plan to help meet the priorities.

The Key Priorities for the Strategy

The review of homelessness in Colchester including the findings from the consultation identified 4 key priorities for the strategy:

- ▶ Preventing homelessness by sustaining tenancies.
- ▶ Mitigating the negative impacts of welfare reform.
- ▶ Improving the Health and Wellbeing of homeless people.
- ▶ Changing the perception and culture of social housing through education – managing expectations.
- ▶ A separate section in the strategy on rough sleepers has also been included.

Priority 1: Preventing homelessness by sustaining tenancies

The review highlighted the need for the Council and its partner organisations to continue to prevent homelessness and help people sustain their tenancies by early intervention and providing good quality advice and support services.

We recognise the importance of a multi agency approach to tenancy sustainment and we will look for new and innovative ways to prevent homelessness and help tenants remain in their homes.

To meet this aim we will need to:

- ▶ Increase provision of tenancy support (including floating support) and debt advice to tenants in the social rented sector.
- ▶ Prevent Homelessness by helping people sustain their tenancies, through the increased provision of debt and welfare rights advice – to include work being done on this by the Night Shelter and the April Centre for single people.
- ▶ Reduce the number of owner occupiers losing their properties through mortgage arrears – to include Mortgage Rescue Schemes and other government initiatives.
- ▶ Provide services that will support young tenants to maintain their tenancy and prevent unnecessary evictions through pre eviction panels – to include temporary accommodation and supported housing schemes.
- ▶ Increase prevention of homelessness caused by domestic violence – including raising awareness and breaking the cycle through generations.
- ▶ Improve release programmes for people leaving Care and Institutions' such as Prison and Armed Forces – including more information needed about people leaving institutions, planned discharge procedures.

Priority 2: Mitigating the negative impacts of welfare reform

The change to the benefit system brought about by welfare reform has already started to impact on the lives of homeless people in Colchester. In 2012 the Council set up a project group of key stakeholders to respond to these changes.

The impacts to housing customers mainly arise from four policy areas:

- The Benefit Cap.
- The removal of the spare room subsidy in the social rented sector – under occupation.
- Introduction of Local Council Tax Support.
- Universal credit.

We have developed a proactive approach to support a number of our residents to ensure that the impact of the changes is minimised.

Colchester Borough Council and Jobcentre Plus have been working in partnership to support claimants potentially affected by the welfare reform. Together we have developed a framework of advice and support to help residents.

A joint Customer Support Team has been formed based in the Customer Service Centre which has been contacting residents to provide advice on housing options, welfare benefits, money management and support in finding employment.

The table below shows the expected impact of the key reforms affecting homelessness and how Colchester Borough Council will work in partnership to mitigate these impacts:

Welfare Reform	Expected Impact	Mitigation	Work already being undertaken
Household Benefit Caps: total maximum benefit of £500pw for couple/ single parent households, £350pw for single people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - More households likely to fall into rent arrears. - Potential for increased levels of homelessness, particularly amongst larger households. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Promote the availability of Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) - Provide advice and support to tenants potentially affected - help to assist tenants into employment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Residents potentially affected by the benefit cap contacted in July 2012 to give support and advice - launch of online DHP applications - Data exchange with Registered Providers (RP's) to share potentially affected customers - mixed media communications to residents and partners

Welfare Reform	Expected Impact	Mitigation	Work already being undertaken
<p>The removal of the spare room subsidy in the social rented sector – under occupation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - More households looking to move to smaller accommodation – increase in demand 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Promote mutual exchange to encourage tenants to move - Review existing policies to encourage tenants to move and make better use of housing stock - help to assist tenants into employment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Two Mutual exchange fairs have taken place in conjunction with other RP's. Numbers of mutual exchanges have increased since January 2013. - targeted advice and support provided to tenants potentially affected - mixed media communications to residents and partners - launch of online DHP applications - Colchester Borough Homes (CBH) have made visits to tenants to offer support in finding employment, applying for benefits and Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) or moving to a smaller property
<p>Council Tax Benefit replaced by Local Council Tax Support scheme (LCTS)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increased demand on finances of low-income households - increase in rent arrears and evictions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Identify and support residents affected especially vulnerable clients 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - targeted advice and support provided to residents potentially affected especially vulnerable clients - To date 2200 customers have been contacted 2200 and 186 face to face interviews conducted - mixed media communications to residents and partners
<p>Universal Credit Single monthly payment, paid in arrears - new claims to Universal Credit are expected in Essex from February 2014</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increase in number of households with rent arrears due to lack of financial management - Fewer PRS landlords willing to rent to households in receipt of benefits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Identify and support tenants with managing budgets 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - CBC and DWP working in partnership to prepare for the change - CBC working with other Local Authorities across Essex - CBH have recruited a Financial Assistance Officer to offer tenants support with budgeting and financial advice

Priority 3: Improving the Health and Wellbeing of homeless people

The review recognised the impact that homelessness is having on health. Homeless people experience some of the poorest health in our communities and without good health it can be difficult for people to move on and secure and maintain accommodation.

Homeless link have highlighted that improving the health of people who are homeless is central to reducing health inequalities and achieving the goal of ending homelessness.

A study of the healthcare of single homeless people by the Department of Health found that because of their higher levels of need, homeless people use acute health services disproportionately to the general population. The study estimated that this group used hospital services at a rate of 4 to 8 times more than the general population.

In Colchester the voluntary sector organisations already support homeless people to access health services and manage their health problems. However, further action is required to improve the suitability, access and take up of health services.

To meet this aim we will need to:

- ▶ Work in partnership with the Public Health Team at Essex County Council (ECC) on the Homelessness Health Needs Audit to gather local information on the health needs of homeless people.
- ▶ Collate the information from the Health Needs Audit to identify services to meet the health needs of homeless people in Colchester. The results will inform ECC's Joint Strategic Needs assessment.
- ▶ Promote the integration between health and housing to meet the actions identified in the Public Health Outcomes Framework.
- ▶ Continue to work on the relationship between the Housing Options Team and the Mental Health Team to improve the hospital discharge process.

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

Due to the increasing demand for social housing and the reduction in the number of properties available through the Council's Housing Register, the review identified the need to manage the expectations of people who apply for social housing.

With more young people becoming homeless in Colchester, educating families on the reality of homelessness is key to changing the perception and culture of social housing.

A multi agency approach is needed to identify and support alternative housing solutions to give young people move-on options.

To meet this aim we will need to:

- ▶ Provide wider communication of Colchester Borough Council's Housing and Homelessness Services.
- ▶ Develop early intervention and prevention options for Young People at risk of becoming homeless in the Borough – to work with the ECC Homeless Youth Specialists to raise awareness of family breakdown and provide basic strategies and signposting to support families to resolve conflict.
- ▶ Increase and support housing options for single people and vulnerable groups including: Solo Housing Scheme, YMCA Supported Lodgings Scheme.

Rough Sleepers

Since 2010 there have been an increasing number of single homeless and rough sleepers in the borough. In 2012 the estimated number of rough sleepers in Colchester was 25. It was agreed by the council and partner organisations in Colchester that an estimate rather than a count would be returned to the Department of Communities and Local Government for 2013. The estimate revealed that there were 35 rough sleepers in Colchester.

In 2011 The Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) made a one off payment of £40,000 to a group of local authorities in Essex and the Greater Haven Gateway. The funding was used for the purposes of supporting work to prevent and tackle rough sleeping.



Colchester and Tendring were awarded £18,750 of the funding which was provided to the April Centre (based in both local authority areas) to carry out outreach work which included making contact with rough sleepers, helping them find and secure accommodation, introducing them to other support agencies and helping to facilitate a more settled lifestyle.

The success of the project highlighted the need to build on the outreach work by statutory and voluntary organisations working together to provide the right help in the right place at the right time.

The consultation identified the issues that single homeless people and rough sleepers face day to day in Colchester and specific actions that are needed to prevent homelessness for this group. These actions include:

- ▶ Establish a multi agency group of support services for single homeless and rough sleepers in Colchester to identify gaps in service provision and to avoid duplication of services.
- ▶ Set up a protocol between voluntary sector organisations to enable data on rough sleepers to be shared.
- ▶ Identify the support needs of different types of rough sleepers including entrenched rough sleepers, young people that are 'new' to the streets, people suffering from mental health to help engage with different groups.
- ▶ Explore the possibility of extending the opening times of agencies to reduce the amount of time that rough sleepers spend on the street.
- ▶ Identify move-on opportunities for rough sleepers to help with transition from living on the street.

How the Homelessness Strategy and Delivery Plan will be monitored

The Homelessness Strategy is intended to be a working document with actions being implemented throughout the life of the strategy. Therefore the Delivery Plan will be updated on a regular basis.

A report on the progress of the Strategy and Delivery Plan will be produced on an annual basis and circulated to the relevant stakeholders.



