

Colchester's Homelessness Strategy 2014-19

Progress Report 2016

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

The Homelessness Strategy Progress Report 2016 contains some highlights of the actions in the Strategy that have been achieved or have moved forward in the second year of the strategy.

A Delivery Plan set out the actions to deliver the priorities and this has been updated along with the Evidence base.

Priority 1: Preventing homelessness by sustaining tenancies
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Action: *Increase the provision of tenancy support including floating support*

Progress:

- One Support has increased the number of referring agencies to the service. Additional drop in services have been created at the Job Centre and the Library – there are approximately 260 referrals per month to the service.

Action: *Provide support and advice to tenants on managing debt and welfare benefits including organisations working with single homeless.*

Progress:

- During 2015-16 the Financial Inclusion Officer visited 152 Colchester Borough Council tenants to provide support and debt advice including; opening bank accounts, applying for welfare benefits and preventing homelessness, evictions and court action.
- Open Road are developing money and work mentors to assist service users to maintain accommodation.

- Beacon House – has set up ‘Bridging a gap’ to help clients with getting valid evidence of their identity, moving support, financial support and skills to maintain tenancies

Action: *Develop early intervention programmes for young people under 25 including pre eviction panels/pre tenancy workshops.*

Progress:

- The Youth Enquiry Service (y.e.s.) continues to run pre tenancy workshops with young people in supported housing. The focus for the workshops is on dealing with priority debts to help prevent homelessness by maintaining move – on accommodation.

Action: *Set up a system to monitor and analyse the demand for TA, repeat homelessness applications and the reasons for homelessness including where tenancies have broken down.*

Progress:

- The Temporary accommodation (TA) position statement has been reviewed and updated. The demand for TA is being monitored including the use of Bed and Breakfast.

Priority 2: Mitigating the negative impacts of welfare reform
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Action: *Provide advice and support to tenants/residents potentially affected by the welfare reforms.*

Progress:

- Colchester Borough Council has responded to the next stage of welfare reform by forming a specialist team to provide proactive intervention to support residents affected by various welfare reforms. The team will be based within Customer Services but will collaborate with various services across CBC and CBH and with external partners.
- Voluntary sector organisations in Colchester are also providing services to residents to help mitigate some of the impacts of welfare reform, these include:
 - Colchester Emergency Night Shelter (CENS) is assisting clients with welfare benefits claims.
 - y.e.s. are based at the Job Centre once a fortnight to advise young people who have been subject to a benefits sanction to help prevent rent arrears getting out of control and leading to homelessness.
 - The y.e.s. pre tenancy workshops include mitigating the impact of Universal Credit for young people.

- Beacon House provides food parcels for rough sleepers/single homeless people and provides financial support including helping homeless clients to open bank accounts.

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:

- A new role in Private Sector Housing - Public Health Improvement Coordinator, will help to build links between health and housing.
- Projects have been established to improve the health and wellbeing of homeless households including:
 - y.e.s now offer a counselling service for clients up to the age of 25.
 - y.e.s. Teenage Pregnancy Midwife, has a new role as the Vulnerable Women's Midwife so as well as providing a service to teenage mums it also opens up the service to women in need who are pregnant and considered vulnerable.
 - Beacon House has received a grant from Reaching Communities to provide aspirational activities for their clients including Kayaking, Climbing and Coracle (small roundish lightweight boat) making.
 - Beacon House has 2 barbers and also provides podiatry services and occupational therapy support.
 - One Support now has a mental health crisis team. The team also have a weekly drop in at Beacon House.

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

Action: *Provide wider communication of Colchester Borough Council's Housing and Homelessness services*

Progress:

- Successful Homelessness Information event held in March 2016 – 45 people attended excluding organisers – very good feedback.
- CBC and CBH websites are being updated to improve information provided on housing and homelessness.
- In May 2016 the Housing Options Team achieved the DCLG Silver Standard award for their housing and homelessness service.

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

Progress:

- y.e.s. are working in partnership with Social Care to prevent homelessness for 16/17 year olds.

Action: *Identify, support and promote alternative housing options.*

Progress:

- y.e.s. are exploring private rented options with young people to promote the idea that social housing is not the only housing route available to them.

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:

- Due to the closure of the April Centre the street outreach project (grant funding provided by CBH for the project) is now being run by Beacon House. The project signpost rough sleepers to services and is 'catching' people that are new to the streets. The project also helps to move people on from a street lifestyle once they are housed and feeds into the Colchester Homelessness Agencies Service Users Panel (CHASUP).
- Open Road are providing a street based worker to support rough sleepers and street drinkers and drop in activities for those with alcohol or drug issues.
- CENS – "Meaningful use of time" programme offers volunteering opportunities including Mersea conservation.

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:

- CENS now provide longer daytime opening hours to ensure that their service users are engaging with support. Clients who have been rehoused but were previously at the Night Shelter can benefit from the service. (50+ a week use the service).
- During the winter months, St Peters Guest House in conjunction with Beacon House provided shelter and food. The service was run by a paid Co-ordinator

and volunteers. Between 14th December 2015 – end of February 2016 (Over 66 nights) the centre provided for 26 guests and received donations from local businesses.

Action: *Identify move-on opportunities for rough sleepers to help with transition from living on the street*

Progress:

- Anglia Care Trust (ACT) was awarded funding by the group of local authorities who secured the money under the DCLG's Help for Single Homeless funding. 70 referrals to the intensive brokerage part of the service have been made to ACT since it began. Referrals have been made from CBH, Open Road, One Support, Beacon House, Community Rehabilitation Centre (CRC) and the National Prison Service (NPS).
- Open Road are working with Dimensions (an organisation which provides personalised social care services for people with learning disabilities and autism, including challenging behavior and complex needs) to help support single homeless people with drug & alcohol issues into settled accommodation.
- CBH, CBC and partner agencies conducted a rough sleepers count in November 2015 and 9 rough sleepers were identified. 5 were referred to supported accommodation or Anglia Care Trust for assistance into private rented accommodation. The remaining 5 were referred to CHASUP and the Outreach Worker at Beacon House to help them engage with services.