



City of
Stoke-on-Trent



Stoke-on-Trent City Council

Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020 – 2025

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1. FOREWORD



Councillor Randolph Conteh
Cabinet Member for Housing,
Communities and Safer City

There are many reasons that people become homeless or are at risk of becoming homeless in the city but homelessness can frequently be predicted and should never be inevitable. Nobody should be forced to leave their home or an institution such as prison or hospital with no accommodation options available to them.

Homelessness usually goes beyond simply a housing issue and people who experience homelessness often have very poor health outcomes and are excluded from society, the effects of which often combine and escalate over time.

Evidence suggests that simply having appropriate long-term accommodation can have a profound impact on those with multiple/complex needs, who are often the most socially isolated and excluded people within our communities, however, they will often need ongoing support to access and sustain tenancies

The impact of homelessness and rough sleeping is felt across public and voluntary sectors and within local communities. People who sleep rough over a sustained period of time are more likely to die young and often find themselves the victims of violence, theft and other crime. This has a significant impact on a wide range of local services

Our Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy sets out how we will work with our partners across all sectors to develop an integrated approach to tackling homelessness and rough sleeping. This will include both statutory and non-statutory stakeholders, including those with lived experience of homelessness in order to ensure that services developed meet the needs of those who require them.

Services delivered will aim to provide support that deals with a range of needs together; including housing, social care, health – physical and mental and support with substance abuse and addictions.

2. SCOPE

This strategy recognises and seeks to address all types of homelessness needs in the city:

- People at risk of losing their home
- People who are sleeping on the streets
- 16 and 17 year olds who don't have a secure home
- People who have no fixed address
- People who need emergency temporary accommodation
- People who need supported accommodation
- People who are recovering from homelessness
- Vulnerable people who need support to get and sustain suitable housing

Vulnerable people includes particularly but not exclusively:

- Young people leaving the care of Stoke-on-Trent City Council
- People leaving the Armed Forces
- People who have experienced domestic abuse
- People with disabilities including mental ill-health
- People adversely affected by welfare reform.

The Strategy sets out how the council and our partners will prevent and relieve homelessness for a wide range of people affected in the city. We will produce an action plan that will draw on the skills of statutory and voluntary agencies in the city in order to improve understanding of the causes of homelessness, how it affects different groups and how we can work in partnership to ensure it is a rare occurrence but where it does happen the response is appropriate, timely and focused on providing long term, sustainable solutions.

3. AIM

The aim of the strategy is to ensure that all agencies in Stoke-on-Trent work together to tackle homelessness and end rough sleeping in the City

4. PRIORITIES



To prevent homelessness through early identification and support for those most at risk



To relieve homelessness and end rough sleeping by ensuring households have prompt access to appropriate accommodation and tailored support where required



To ensure households recovering from homelessness or rough sleeping are supported into long term sustainable accommodation that meets their needs

5. PROGRESS AND ACHIEVEMENTS DELIVERING THE 2016 – 2020 HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY

The strength of partnership working to deliver the Homelessness Strategy Action Plan for 2016 -2020 and the Rough Sleepers Action Plan 2018-2019 has placed the Council among the top performing authorities in the country in terms of preventing and relieving homelessness. Over £1m of Government funding has been awarded over the last two years to help tackle rough sleeping and the Council and our partners have received positive recognition from Government. Boosted by successful applications for funding from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) a range of measures and activities have been developed by the Council and its partners:

- Rough Sleeper Co-ordinator
- Move-on and Supported Lettings to help people move on from the street, hostels and supported housing to maintain and sustain accommodation and prevent repeated homelessness
- Supported Lettings to provide tenancy support including; landlord liaison, improved tenancy sustainment, homeless prevention and increase accessibility into the private rented sector for those moving on from temporary or emergency accommodation or straight from the street
- Peer Mentoring to increase engagement through support from people with lived experience and promotion of positive activity and increased confidence
- Enhanced outreach
- An extended Night Shelter provision on a 7-day a week basis during the winter period to extend the severe winter emergency provision (SWEP) and emergency beds
- Housing First
- Navigators to support those who are homeless on prison release to access accommodation with support to prevent a return to rough sleeping
- Local Lettings Agency to help increase the numbers of properties available in the private rented sector for rough sleepers to move from the streets
- The development of a Homeless Healthcare service to provide a flexible approach to physical health and wellbeing for rough sleepers/vulnerable homeless

Wider measures to reduce homelessness have focussed on the effective implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act, 2017 across services. The Housing Allocations policy was amended in 2018 to include greater priority for rough sleepers.

No 16 and 17 year olds have been placed in unsuitable Bed and Breakfast accommodation in the city since 2013.

Examples of wider prevention, intervention and support measures to reduce homelessness include:

- Reviewing the Bond Scheme.
- Commissioning a Citywide Advice Service from April 2018 to provide housing and debt advice.
- Dedicated Housing Needs Officers for young people (including Care Leavers) and people sleeping rough.
- The development of a Tenancy Relations Officer role to help manage and support relationships between private landlords and their tenants to prevent homelessness and reduce the risks of tenancy breakdown and illegal evictions and harassment. The Tenancy Relations Officer prevented homelessness in 73% of cases during 2018/19.
- The hospital discharge process has been mapped and research has been completed by Voices.
- The development of the Homeless Hub initiative to provide an integrated support and advice approach in the city.
- A new Supported Housing service for Care Leavers has been commissioned in 2019, which will ultimately replace the existing Framework provision for young people.
- A new Supported lodgings service was commissioned and operational from 2017.
- The provision of community housing for victims of domestic abuse in Stoke-on-Trent and Newcastle-under-Lyme.
- The availability of target hardening to protect victims of domestic abuse.



6. THE HOMELESSNESS REVIEW 2019 AND OUR KEY CHALLENGES

The Homelessness Review 2019 is a comprehensive review of the current and likely future state of homelessness within Stoke-on-Trent. The review maps out the challenges around homelessness prevention, including the availability of accommodation and support for those people who may become homeless. The review involved consultation with local stakeholders, strategic partners, City Council Members and people in the city who have experienced homelessness.

There is a general acceptance both nationally and locally that people are facing greater challenges in accessing suitable and secure housing. The Homelessness Review 2019 highlights the complexities associated with homelessness in terms of the associated risks, the range of health and social needs of those experiencing homelessness, the challenging housing market and economy that exists currently and changes to the benefits system, all of which combine to make it increasingly difficult for local authorities to support people.

Overall, there is a good range of service provision available within Stoke-on-Trent that can help vulnerable people and there are a number of positive interventions outlined in the Review, which are promising in terms of reducing and preventing homelessness. However, the Review makes it clear that no single intervention alone will solve the complex issues surrounding all forms of homelessness.

The Council's Homelessness review identifies a range of issues and challenges facing us in Stoke-on-Trent over the next few years.

Meeting these challenges in an environment of continuing financial pressures and uncertain economic circumstances is the focus of this strategy.

6.1 Key Facts from the Homelessness Review 2019:

- The main reasons for homelessness in the city recorded are loss of a privately rented home and family and friends unwilling to accommodate the household any longer. However, the information in the review shows that the cause of a person's homelessness is much broader than the loss of a tenancy. There is evidence to suggest that the true cause of homelessness lies in a complex mix of adverse experiences, including the person's childhood and financial hardship.
- The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 introduced two new duties; to prevent and relieve homelessness. These changes have had a fundamental impact on the number of people owed a homeless duty in the city. The number of duties accepted has risen from 189 in 2017/18 to 1759 in 2018/19.
- A third of households owed a homeless duty said that they have additional support needs. The most common support need was for help with mental health issues.
- The number of people sleeping rough in the city rose significantly in 2018 from an estimate of 18 in 2017 to an estimate of 34. In 2019 the estimate has been revised to 16. Investment in this area following receipt of funding from the Government's Rough sleeping Initiative has resulted in this decrease.
- 86% of local rough sleepers reported some form of mental ill health and 82% were using drugs on a regular basis.

- There are currently (August 2019) 2,663 applications on the council's Housing Register, of which 862 are considered to be in high housing need (bands 1 and 2 on the Housing Register), however, only 1,333 Council homes became available to let during the whole of 2018/19 and there are currently only 139 void properties.
- A total of 1110 people accessed supported housing and hostel services during 2018/19 in Stoke-on-Trent, of which 492 (44%) were under 25.
- 176 prisoners were released to insecure accommodation in the city during 2018 with 12% of people living in supported housing services reported as being involved with the criminal justice system.
- There are 573 units of housing related support commissioned by the Council, of which 501 are accommodation based units and 72 are floating support or resettlement units. Support is provided across these units for single homeless people and homeless families, people with substance misuse issues, people with poor mental health, people fleeing from domestic abuse and vulnerable young people.
- During 2018/19 111 people were evicted from supported housing. Up to 40% of these people went on to sleep rough in the City.
- The findings of an audit into move on from supported accommodation carried out in 2018 estimates that there is likely to be a shortfall of around 230 suitable properties for people looking to move on from supported housing, hostel and refuge services during 2019. The indications regarding the shortfall in suitable move on provision are more severe than predictions from previous years, suggesting that in general services are finding it increasingly difficult to move people on successfully from supported housing, hostels and refuge services than in previous years.
- In 2018/19, 377 people of no fixed abode attended the Accident and Emergency Department at University Hospital of North Midlands a total of 613 times. Of those 377 individuals, 99 of them attended more than once. One person attended 25 times in the year.
- During 2018/19 190 people of no fixed abode were admitted to hospital on a total of 260 occasions, costing the NHS an average of £1915 per person.
- In 2018/19, there were 580 households placed in temporary accommodation, representing a 12% increase on the previous year and a substantial 40% increase since 2015. The majority of those (86%) were initially placed in Bed and Breakfast accommodation.
- During the first three quarters of 2018/19 (the first year following the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act) the council provided support to 1447 households preventing and relieving homelessness for 74% of duties accepted. This places Stoke-on-Trent City Council amongst the top 25% performing local authorities in the country.

7. OUR APPROACH 2020 – 2025

This Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy has 3 key priorities:



To prevent homelessness through early identification and support for those most at risk



To relieve homelessness and end rough sleeping by ensuring households have prompt access to appropriate accommodation and tailored support where required



To ensure households recovering from homelessness or rough sleeping are supported into long term sustainable accommodation that meets their needs



Priority One: To prevent homelessness through early identification and support for those most at risk

The prevention of homelessness is centred around understanding the issues that lead to homelessness and rough sleeping and providing timely support for those at risk. There is a considerable amount of prevention activity already available in the city. We will utilise data reports in relation to why people become homeless in order to develop appropriate prevention services and we will continue to deliver a bespoke service of housing needs advice providing more tailored advice and assistance for vulnerable groups including:

- Care leavers
- Former armed forces
- People leaving custody
- Victims of domestic abuse
- People with mental ill health
- People with Care and Support Needs
- People sleeping rough

Working with partners we will:

- Seek to address the underlying issues that lead to the development of severe and multiple disadvantage in order to ensure that everyone at risk of homelessness has access to information about their rights and entitlements to prevent it happening.
- Ensure that no one becomes homeless as a result of leaving hospital or a state institution such as prison, hospital, the care system or Armed Forces accommodation.
- Prioritise the delivery of appropriate service provision for all young people and Care Leavers in the city and ensure that services are equipped to interrupt cycles of disadvantage before they escalate.
- Continue to develop services to help people obtain and sustain tenancies across all sectors
- Develop a housing pathway to 'design out' homelessness in the city. This will include the provision of appropriate housing related support which meets the requirements of people with complex/multiple needs.
- Strengthen our partnerships to enable a collective approach supported by information sharing protocols and underpinned by the duty to refer implemented through the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.
- Further develop partnership working with the DWP and local jobcentre plus to strengthen referrals and manage the impact of universal credit.
- Continue to offer and develop Housing Options advice and prevention services providing expert support and assistance for people seeking housing and homelessness assistance in the city.
- Work with local Registered Providers to reduce homelessness and rough sleeping promoting active participation in the nominations process. This will include a review of policies and practises to ensure that those most in need of social housing are not unreasonably excluded and support is available to address the causes of exclusion.
- Review exclusions from hostel and supported accommodation to evaluate the impact and reduce occurrences of this.
- Develop approaches to ensure that people are not evicted into homelessness and eviction is not used to resolve other issues that are not associated with the tenancy. Raise awareness of this approach across all statutory agencies.

- Work towards a housing-led system where offering a tenancy is the first step towards recovery.
- Review the family mediation offer to ensure it effectively helps young people remain in their family home wherever possible and to promote safe, sustainable relationships for young people and their families.
- Provide all applicants on the Council's Housing Register with sufficient support to ensure sustainable tenancies.
- Provide universal education about homelessness including awareness raising sessions in schools
- Provide training about homelessness for all front line statutory services - all should be able to identify homelessness and its warning signs.

INTERVENTION



AND SUPPORT

Priority Two: To relieve homelessness and end rough sleeping by ensuring households have prompt access to appropriate accommodation and tailored support where required

Prevention work will help many people to avoid homelessness. Our service will be responsive to meet the needs of those in crisis, providing appropriate timely support leading on to recovery from homelessness.

Working with partners we will:

- Provide support and services so that no one is forced to sleep rough or live in transient or dangerous accommodation such as tents, squats and non-residential buildings in Stoke-on-Trent.
- Develop and embed key principles into service provision – services will focus on the individual and not the service needs.
- Implement emergency intervention to prevent rough sleeping and to resolve rough sleeping as soon as possible when it happens and rapidly help support people away from the street.
- Ensure an adequate supply of move on accommodation is available.
- Work with partners to improve the health and well-being of homeless people seeking to reduce people attending accident and emergency provision and improve our hospital discharge approach.
- Ensure an adequate supply of appropriate temporary accommodation, reduce its use and minimise the length of stay prior to move on to more sustainable options.
- Seek to eradicate the release of prisoners to insecure accommodation in the city and to create planned pathways.
- Continue to work with people with lived experience of homelessness in order to provide a personalised, inclusive approach to services provided.
- Work with those delivering drug and alcohol services in the city to manage the increased complexity of drug uses in supported housing and hostels.
- Develop a 'rapid rehousing' approach to help people into mainstream housing. Support including housing identification services, financial assistance with rent and move in costs, assistance with transport costs to work/find work, case management and a tailored package of assistance.
- Further develop the 'Housing First' approach in the city to prevent homelessness and provide long term housing solutions for people who have been unable to sustain accommodation in the past who may also have complex and/or multiple needs.

- Continue to develop the homeless hub initiative.
- Work with partners to identify tenants at risk of “cuckooing” and ensure rapid interventions are in place to support them.
- Provide/upskill Housing Solutions officers and mental health and social care assessors to support the allocations process for people with dual diagnosis, complex and multiple needs.
- Undertake assertive outreach work with rough sleepers to promote engagement in drug and alcohol services.
- Adopt a more flexible approach to the allocation of social housing in the city.
- Ensure we have robust and effective cold weather support in place.
- Investigate an alternative giving scheme for homeless households the City.



Priority Three: To ensure households recovering from homelessness or rough sleeping are supported into long term sustainable accommodation that meets their needs

RECOVERY

One of the fundamental elements underpinning the reduction of homelessness and rough sleeping is the provision of appropriate and affordable housing. The current Housing Strategy in Stoke-on-Trent recognises the imbalance between demand for housing and the availability of suitable housing options and seeks to drive growth and enhance the housing offer in the area so that a wider demographic can find the home that meets their aspirations. The council has a six year plan to deliver 4,700 new homes in the city by the end of 2024/25. Around 1300 of these will be affordable homes for rent and for sale.

We will:

- Work to ensure that no-one returns to the streets.
- Work with people who have been homeless on a number of occasions or for a longer time to build resilience and capacity, reducing repeat homelessness.
- Ensure that households supported into long term accommodation have the skills and support required to maintain a tenancy.
- Ensure households have access to appropriate permanent, affordable accommodation across all tenures.
- Support those recovering from homelessness and rough sleeping to access employment, education and training.
- Provide a range of services to support households to access to the Private Rented Sector where appropriate.
- Ensure budgets and services are people focused and flexible enough to support individual pathways from homelessness to sustainable accommodation including support into training and employment.
- Explore opportunities to further develop the role of peer mentors and volunteers.

8. RESOURCES TO MEET DEMAND

The Homelessness Review 2019 sets out in detail the resources we have available to meet demand. The Council's Homeless Prevention Fund provides a range of services:

- Housing Advice Support
- Rough Sleepers Outreach Service
- CAB
- Young people's emergency bed space and the Re-building Families project
- Furniture provision
- Hardship Fund
- Winter Provision

In addition, the Housing Solutions Service carries out a wide range of prevention and relief work including;

- Delivery of the Bond Scheme,
- Management of the city council's waiting list and nominations into Registered Provider properties;
- Provision of housing needs and homelessness assessments
- Development of personal housing plans as required within the new Homelessness Reduction Act
- Provision of mediation between people in housing need and their landlords, mortgage lenders, social services or friends and family as appropriate
- Working closely with support agencies and providers across the city to secure more supported accommodation as needed
- This is not an exhaustive list of activities undertaken through this resource. The team is flexible when responding to people's needs, as people's circumstances can vary significantly.

The Council will continue to work with its partners to maximise the resources available to support this policy including bidding for external funding wherever opportunities arise.

9. GOVERNANCE AND DELIVERY OF THE STRATEGY

The recently constituted Homelessness Reduction Board will provide a multi-agency approach to tackling homelessness issues in Stoke-on-Trent. The Board will strengthen partnership working and help us continue to make improvements to homelessness services in the city. The Review helps us to understand the issues that lead to homelessness in the city and the Strategy sets out our approach to meeting the challenges. A whole system approach is required in order to address these issues.

Delivery of the Strategy will be supported by an action plan. The action plan will be monitored quarterly with six monthly updates provided to senior Council Officers and elected members. Performance will be monitored by the Homelessness Reduction Board. Wider stakeholders will be engaged and empowered to contribute to the development, delivery and monitoring of the action plan through the Homelessness Forum.



