Stoke-on-Trent City Council

Homelessness Strategy
2016 - 2020

Putting people’s dignity and respect at the heart of all homelessness prevention and support services
Stoke-on-Trent City Council and its partners have achieved a great deal in relation to the prevention of homelessness over the last few years, but there is still a great deal more to do. Stoke-on-Trent City Council is pleased to present our new Homelessness Strategy, which has been developed using the findings of a comprehensive review of homelessness and through consultation with partner agencies and local communities across the city.

In recent years, the global economic downturn has created extremely difficult financial circumstances for many households within the city and many of our local communities still face unprecedented problems related to poverty and deprivation.

Homelessness is the most extreme form of housing need and it is proven to have a profoundly negative impact on people’s lives. Episodes of homelessness often place greater demand on health services and undermine educational achievement for many people. At its worst, it can create such a level of social isolation and exclusion that people become entrenched in a cycle of severe disadvantage involving not only homelessness, but substance misuse, mental ill-health and involvement with the criminal justice system.

The vision of this citywide Homelessness Strategy over the next 5 years is to place people’s dignity and respect at the heart of all homelessness prevention and support provision delivered across the city. This Strategy considers the wider challenges facing Stoke-on-Trent in the coming years and strives to reduce homelessness through several key strategic priorities.

Part of the homelessness solution is to build on the solid foundation that we already have well established in the city. Achieving our vision for the Homelessness Strategy will require the collective strength of all of our partner agencies working together to take greater responsibility for supporting our most vulnerable communities.
Ambition

Stoke-on-Trent has a good supply of support provision and services available across both the public and the voluntary sector. This Homelessness Strategy aims to prevent homelessness in Stoke-on-Trent and to ensure that if people do experience homelessness, there continues to be effective and accessible support available to them.

Stoke-on-Trent City Council’s ‘Stronger Together Strategic Plan’ sets out the vision for the Council over the next four years; to work as ‘One Team, with One Vision’ to deliver the best possible outcomes for residents and the city. Extending and cementing partnerships with agencies and groups across the city is at the heart of this approach and holds the key to ensuring that all vulnerable households in the city are able to fulfil their potential. The following key objectives have a direct link to homelessness and supporting vulnerable people.

- Protect and improve mental and physical health and wellbeing
- Support our residents to fulfil their potential

- Improve quality of life, independence and choice for vulnerable adults
- Improve the health and wellbeing of vulnerable groups
- Support vulnerable people in our communities to live their lives well

This Homelessness Strategy sets out how the Council needs to work in partnership with the wide range of agencies providing services to homeless people and those threatened with homelessness in the city, to make the best use of financial and community assets that exist. The priorities identified form the basis of an action plan (Appendix A), which aims to deliver solutions to resolve and prevent homelessness. The Homelessness Strategy Action Plan will be owned, monitored and reviewed on a regular basis by the Council and its partners through the Citywide Homelessness Forum for Stoke-on-Trent.
1. People and communities are prepared for the changes to Welfare Benefits

2. Health, Housing and Criminal Justice services each contribute to the prevention of homelessness

3. Appropriate services are in place to support young people

4. Effective support through homelessness is available and accessible for everybody

5. Health, Housing and Social Care Services are available and accessible for everybody

6. Advice and support agencies in the city operate flexibly
Priorities

1. People and communities are prepared for the changes to Welfare Benefits:
   To equip people to deal with and manage the impact of welfare reform by linking the Homelessness Strategy Action plan to the Council’s Wider Welfare Reform Group Action Plan.

2. Health, Housing and Criminal Justice services each contribute to the prevention of homelessness:
   To improve communication and partnership approaches within Health, Housing and Criminal Justice services to ensure that effective working relationships exist. In particular to ensure that hospital discharge and prison release is co-ordinated to ensure positive prevention measures are implemented.

3. Appropriate services are in place to support young people:
   To meet the needs of increasing numbers of young people and children in the care of the Local Authority through the development of appropriate housing options, including single bedroom and affordable accommodation, as young people currently account for almost ¼ of all people on the Housing Register.

4. Effective support through homelessness is available and accessible for everybody:
   To explore the extent of hidden homelessness in the city and understand the underlying causes for people in the city who have no secure accommodation available to them and who stay with their family or friends or in other insecure accommodation on a short-term basis. It is essential that effective solutions are sought to reduce the triggers and turning points in a person’s life that can often lead to homelessness and eventually more complex needs through the provision of meaningful advice and assistance to those most in need.

5. Health, Housing and Social Care Services are available and accessible for everybody:
   Analysis of the Public Health England (PHE) health profile for Stoke-on-Trent shows that Stoke-on-Trent is significantly worse than most of the England averages. Poor housing is recognised as definitely linked to poor health and unhealthy lifestyles. Therefore it is a critical to work with health to resolve these issues. This includes the need for improved access to Social Care and health services such as GP and nursing care, to reduce barriers and improve accessibility issues that can exist for homeless people presenting often with the most complex needs.

6. Advice and support agencies in the city operate flexibly:
   There is a requirement for increased flexibility required from both statutory and voluntary agencies to meet the needs of the growing number of people in the city with multiple and complex needs. These people’s experience of homelessness is often rooted in a series of stressful events in their lives, rather than a single act

Governance - Delivery of the Strategy:

The consultation process has produced some important feedback and the comments received have helped to shape this final version of the Homelessness Strategy.

The Homelessness Strategy Action Plan [Appendix A] includes key actions that Stoke-on-Trent City Council and its partners want to achieve throughout the life of the Strategy. The Action Plan will be owned, monitored and reviewed on a regular basis by the Council and its partners through the Citywide Homelessness Forum.

1Membership of the Homelessness Forum includes representatives from each of the voluntary sector providers; Local Authority Housing Services; Public Health; faith groups; Expert Citizens; Voices; Councillors; Homeless Link; Stoke-on-Trent Clinical Commissioning Group; Citizen’s Advice and the Police.
### Development of the Strategy

The last decade has seen a much improved understanding of homelessness amongst professionals across all sectors. Following extensive research, there is a general recognition that homelessness goes beyond simply a housing issue and that in fact, 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.

#### The Homelessness Review

Government legislation requires all local authorities to plan for the needs of the locality, making it critical that spending decisions in Stoke-on-Trent are based on robust evidence of need and demand. With this in mind, the Council carried out a comprehensive review of homelessness to inform the development of this Strategy.

#### Strategic Context

As part of the Homelessness Review, the local impact of key changes in national policy was considered. Since 2010, the Government has produced several papers and introduced many legislative changes in order to try to address some of the issues arising out of the global austerity. There were several reports developed by a cross-departmental Ministerial working group, which included the ‘Vision to end rough sleeping: No Second Night Out Nationwide’ and the ‘Making Every Contact Count’ report. These highlight a need to tackle the broader issues that have led to homelessness in the first place and the significance of joined up working with the person at the centre of any service provision.

In order to encourage local authorities and their partners to deliver the objectives highlighted within the ‘Making Every Contact Count’ report of 2012, the Government set 10 local challenges which, if adopted, would lead to local homeless teams delivering high standards of service. In April 2013, the Government announced a new support and training scheme for homelessness services called the ‘Gold Standard’ and Stoke-on-Trent City Council has made a commitment through its executive leadership team to implement the required measures to achieve the high standard of service provision required for people facing homelessness in the city.

In Stoke-on-Trent, front line housing and homelessness services in general have followed the national steer towards a more robust approach to homelessness prevention and an increased range of housing options for people in the city.

A new Housing Strategy for Stoke-on-Trent is in development. The Housing Strategy will address several high level priorities, including; supporting the growth of a balanced housing market, employment growth with the right type of housing in the right areas and investing in high quality homes, neighbourhoods and services to improve the social and economic wellbeing of our communities. The Housing Strategy will consider the need for new homes to be built and address vacant housing stock, including bringing empty homes back into use in the city.
Homelessness Trends

Existing Issues:
The Homelessness Review summarises the following key issues in Stoke-on-Trent:

- According to Census estimates, the overall population of Stoke-on-Trent is projected to increase over coming years, with figures expected to reach approximately 266,000 by the year 2037.
- Census projections also indicate that there is likely to be a greater proportion of young people and those aged over 65 years old than working age adults.
- Local studies into Multiple and Complex Needs have suggested that many people, who become entrenched in a cycle of homelessness and destitution, offending, mental ill-health and substance misuse commonly begin their journey before their 16th birthday.
- The Hardship Commission report from 2015 stated that people who are already in acute poverty are predicted to be at risk of greater hardship as a result of further welfare benefit changes. Despite reports that the local economy is recovering well since the recession, just over a quarter of Stoke-on-Trent’s population falls within a low socio-economic classification, with higher than average UK numbers of people claiming out of work benefits and people earning low wages.
- The Homelessness Review draws the high level conclusion that international migration into the city has increased significantly over the last 10 years. Census data reveals that the number of non-UK born residents in the city more than doubled during the decade following the 2001 Census, rising from 3.7% of the total population in 2001 to around 8% by 2011.
Emerging Issues:

- The Homelessness Review suggests that official declines in statutory homelessness statistics across all age groups may actually be offset by increases in other forms of homelessness.
- The true extent of homelessness in Stoke-on-Trent is likely to include a substantial number of people in the city who have no secure housing and stay with their family or friends or in other insecure accommodation, known as the ‘Hidden Homeless’.
- Young people form a large part of the hidden homeless group, and are at risk of hardship and becoming homeless in light of welfare benefit changes.
- Research conducted by Shelter suggests that in general, people from Black and Minority Ethnic backgrounds are more than twice as likely to become homeless than White British households. However, the Homelessness Review shows that in Stoke-on-Trent the proportion of White people presenting to the local authority as homeless is far greater than any other ethnic background.
- Demand for single bedroom accommodation is increasing in the city, with young people accounting for almost ¼ of all applicants on the Housing Register.
- Housing stock within the social rented sector has reduced.
- The private rented sector is emerging as an option for many households, despite its historic reputation as expensive and insecure.
- In general, the quality of private rented accommodation is poorest within the inner urban core of the city. However as quality varies significantly depending on which area of the city you choose to live and inevitably, so does the cost. This means that people facing homelessness, who are often already struggling financially, have far less choice and frequently end up in poor quality accommodation.
- The termination of a private rented sector tenancy has become a key driver behind homelessness locally.
- Other significant reasons for homelessness cited in official statistics include people being asked to leave Home Office accommodation and incidents of domestic violence, which accounted for 13% of all local statutory homeless acceptances during 2014/15.
- Public Health England’s ‘Health Profile of Stoke-on-Trent’, published in June 2015, concludes that the health of people in the city is generally very poor, with substantial inequalities in life expectancy between the more deprived areas of the city and the more affluent areas.
- The majority of indicators on the Public Health England report mark Stoke-on-Trent as significantly worse than the England averages.
- Multiple exclusion homelessness is a severe form of disadvantage involving not only homelessness, but also substance misuse, mental ill-health, involvement with the criminal justice system and ‘street culture’ activities such as begging or street drinking.
- The Homelessness Review reveals that between 2012 and 2015, there were at least 557 admissions to the University Hospital North Midlands for people with either nowhere to live or were living in a hostel.
- 41% of the 557 homeless people admissions were admitted more than once, amassing almost 1,200 hospital admissions between them. Of these hospital admissions, almost half were related to mental ill-health, behavioural issues or through substance misuse.
- Between 2012 and 2015 there were a reported 405 attendances at Accident & Emergency by people with nowhere to live and around half of those people attended more than once.
- Almost half of all Accident and Emergency attendances were due to psychiatric or social problems. Homelessness has a direct impact on poor mental and physical health.

Further information and detail around homelessness in Stoke-on-Trent is detailed within the Homelessness Review, which can be found on Stoke-on-Trent City Council’s website.
Consultation
In line with the legislative requirements there have been two rounds of consultation to shape the Homelessness Strategy. Firstly, in order to validate the key findings of the Homelessness Review, Stoke-on-Trent City Council carried out extensive consultation with partner agencies and local communities on the review of homelessness. The second phase of consultation followed the production of the Draft Homelessness Strategy and asked the same group of people for their feedback on the specific priorities identified within the document. The consultation feedback is set out in the Consultation report, which can be found on Stoke-on-Trent City Council’s website.

1. Service accessibility / Partnership working
   - Improve the hospital and prison discharge processes.
   - Improve support for people where a dual diagnosis for mental health and substance misuse is present.
   - Improve working relationships between voluntary and statutory agencies such as health, social care and the police, to improve perceptions and reduce barriers.
   - Improve access health and care services to improve the health and well-being of homeless people.
   - Improve in-reach provision from agencies such as Probation, Housing, social care and from services for addictions and mental and physical health services.
   - Improve the availability of food for people who are homeless or facing homelessness.
   - Increase employment opportunities for people facing homelessness.
   - Increase opportunities to work with faith groups and voluntary support groups that already exist within the city.
   - Utilise resources such as the Voices project, where £1.1m of funding investment has been secured for system change over the next 6 years to improve partnership working and service engagement across the city.

2. Emergency homelessness provision in the city
   - Enhance and improve emergency provision arrangement.
   - Improve access to hostels where couples and people with pets can be accommodated.
   - Review models of hostel provision to ensure they meet the needs of individuals effectively.
   - Ensure emergency accommodation offers safety and dignity and a consistent approach to house rules, particularly where substance misuse is concerned.
   - Ensure that staff within emergency accommodation are competent and are able to build effective working relationships to deliver an effective person centered service.
   - Ensure that the right level of emergency provision is available in the city and that appropriate provision is in place for young people.
3. **Meaningful use of time**
   - Ensure that homeless people are supported to access positive opportunities to make best use of their time, with support providers constructively challenging anyone who wishes to maintain an unsustainable and unfulfilling lifestyle.
   - Maximise resources and opportunities available within homeless services for engagement with homeless people, for example using the kitchen facilities to teach cookery and basic life skills and to explore ideas, such as customer councils, to give people greater ownership and control of their environment.
   - Tackle the stigma associated with experiencing homelessness and perceptions of some, for example creation of more volunteering opportunities.

4. **Young People**
   - Ensure appropriate and tailored support is continues to be developed and enhanced for young people in the city, including alternatives to mainstream adult accommodation.
   - Develop of flexible accommodation options to meet the needs of all young people, including Care Leavers.
   - Develop opportunities in the private sector, for example use of space above shops and the development of a Social Lettings Agency.
   - Link the Accommodation Review being carried out by Children’s Social Care to the action plan for the Homelessness Strategy.
   - Improve awareness of mental health issues affecting young homeless people.
   - Change perceptions of young people who reported that they are seen by the local authority as a ‘statistic’ rather than a real person and they are not listened to. They feel that the ‘system’ has failed them in some way.
   - Explore future development of a relationship counselling service for broken families, as feedback suggested poor parenting skills can be a significant cause of homelessness due to unnecessary stress within the family home.

5. **What did we miss?**
   - There is a need to consider the increase in homelessness due to domestic abuse and amongst ex-service men and women, as well as the ageing homeless population.
   - The council should explore housing opportunities across all sectors in order to maximize the potential to meet housing need in the city.
General comments

- Ensure that people are put at the heart of the Homelessness Strategy in order to understand the true complexities around homelessness. The vision for the strategy was considered appropriate by the vast majority of people.
- Where people do not wish to engage with traditional support services, such as people who wish to remain rough sleeping, there is a need to implement harm reduction practices including 'safe and well' checks, in order to minimise the risk of danger to those people and also reduce the impact on communities. Suggestions included the use of single person 'pods' and low level rapid access facilities. Harm reduction, as a much lower level of support, could act as a gateway to future engagement.
- Develop and increase move on opportunities from supported accommodation in the city to reduce blockages in services causing fewer vacancies within services, increased waiting lists and potentially more rough sleepers.
- Provide more educational courses to help people improve their ability to manage money.
- Provide meaningful information and advice for people around homelessness issues including welfare benefits, housing advice to prevent homelessness and help people to make appropriate decisions.
- Help improve the public perception of homelessness to increase community responsibility and support.