

Report of	Assistant Director of Policy and Corporate	Author	Karen Paton ☎ 282275
Title	Colchester's Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy (2020 - 2025)		
Wards affected	All wards		

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 A new Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy has been developed for Colchester. The strategy has been produced in line with the Council's legal duty to carry out a homelessness review, develop a Homelessness Strategy for their area to prevent homelessness, and provide accommodation and/or support for people who are or may become homeless, including rough sleepers.
- 1.2 The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 fundamentally changed the way local authorities work to support homeless people in their areas, giving them new duties to prevent homelessness for more people. Colchester Borough Council has worked collaboratively with its partners to build on this approach to produce the new Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy for Colchester.
- 1.3 The involvement of key stakeholders and a project group have been fundamental in the development of the strategy. An overarching vision has been identified for Colchester's new Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy:

To build collaborative partnerships to Increase early intervention and prevention of homelessness in Colchester. This vision also reflects Colchester's Homelessness Prevention Charter which was launched in 2019.

To achieve the vision 4 key aims for the strategy were agreed:

- Increasing access to accommodation and providing settled homes.
- Helping people to sustain their accommodation.
- Improving the health and wellbeing of people that experience homelessness.
- Improving communication and challenging the perception and culture of homelessness.

The Strategy will achieve its aims and objectives through the implementation of a 5-year Plan that will tackle homelessness in the borough, by working closely with partner organisations and focusing on early interventions that prevent homelessness.

2. Recommended Decision

- 2.1 To adopt a new Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy for Colchester for 2020 to 2025
- 2.2 To recommend to full Council that the strategy be adopted as part of the Council's Policy Framework.

3. Reason for Recommended Decision

- 3.1 The Council has a statutory responsibility to produce and publish a Homelessness Strategy based on a homelessness review every five years.
- 3.2 The new Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy for Colchester takes account of national guidance and local priorities arising from the homelessness review and consultation responses. A corporate commitment to preventing homelessness is fundamental to achieving the main objectives of the Strategy.

4. Alternative Options

- 4.1 To not adopt the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy. However, it is a legal requirement to have a Homelessness Strategy and no alternatives exist to a review of homelessness and the development of a new strategy and delivery plan. The Council would not be fulfilling its legal duty if it did not produce a strategy.

5. Background Information

- 5.1 The Homelessness Act 2002 required all local authorities to carry out a homelessness review, develop a Homelessness Strategy for their area to prevent homelessness, and provide accommodation and/or support for people who are or may become homeless.

The new Homelessness Code of Guidance published in February 2018, states that local authorities with rough sleepers ought to consider provision for rough sleepers within their homelessness strategy. In line with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government's National Rough Sleeping Strategy and to satisfy the requirements for the Rough Sleeping Initiative funding which Colchester Borough Council received, it was agreed that rough sleeping be included in Colchester's strategy.

- 5.2 The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 fundamentally changed the way local authorities work to support homeless people in their areas, giving them new duties to prevent homelessness for more people. Colchester Borough Council has worked collaboratively with its partners to build on this approach to produce a new Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy for Colchester. Colchester's Homelessness Strategy has been reviewed and a new strategy developed for the next 5 years.

5.3 Developing the new Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy for Colchester

A Consultation event was held in January led by Homeless Link (a national homelessness charity) to review homelessness in Colchester and identify key principles and aims for the new strategy. Representatives from partner organisations and teams from Colchester Borough Council and Colchester Borough Homes who work with and for homeless people were invited to attend.

- 5.4 The event provided the opportunity to take a fresh approach to reducing and preventing homelessness in Colchester by reviewing the current challenges facing both services and clients and identifying the key priorities that we need to focus on to do this.

The event focused on 4 main questions to prompt discussion:

- How do we build collaborative partnerships in Colchester?
- How do we make prevention of homelessness everyone's responsibility?
- How do we foster a person-centred approach?
- How can we create environments where people thrive?

- 5.5 Following the consultation event, a project group was set up with some of the key organisations that attended the event, to develop the new Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy for Colchester.

The project group reviewed the feedback from the event, identified the gaps in homelessness prevention and agreed the main aims for the strategy to meet the challenges. In addition, the group agreed that further consultation with people that were or had been homeless was necessary to shape the new strategy.

- 5.6 Consultation and the gathering of qualitative data with people who have experienced homelessness were set up in the form of Focus groups/drop in sessions which were held over 2 days in April 2019. The sessions took place at the Youth Enquiry Service (y.e.s), Colchester Emergency Night Shelter (CENS), Beacon House and Sanctuary Housing.

- 5.7 12 people that had or were experiencing homelessness were interviewed informally about their experiences: The interviewees were asked about the main reasons that they became homeless, whether homelessness could have been prevented earlier, what

organisations or services are or were particularly helpful to them and what other support or service could have helped or prevented them from becoming homeless. All the anonymised case studies are available at Appendix 2 of the strategy document.

- 5.8 Using all the information gathered from the Homelessness event and consultation with people that have been or are currently homeless, the project group identified an overarching vision for the Strategy: *to build collaborative partnerships to Increase early intervention and prevention of homelessness in Colchester*. This also reflects Colchester's Homelessness Prevention Charter.
- 5.9 To achieve the vision 4 key aims for the strategy were agreed:
- Increasing access to accommodation and providing settled homes.
 - Helping people to sustain their accommodation.
 - Improving the health and wellbeing of people that experience homelessness.
 - Improving communication and challenging the perception and culture of homelessness.
- 5.10 A Delivery Plan has also been developed which sets out actions to meet the key aims identified for the strategy. The Delivery Plan will be monitored and progress on the actions updated annually and reviewed by the Portfolio Holder. A progress report will be published on the Council's website and shared with stakeholders.
- 5.11 The Draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy and Delivery Plan went out for consultation with all key stakeholders in July and August. All comments and suggestions have been incorporated into the document.

6. Equality, Diversity and Human Rights implications

- 6.1 An Equality Impact Assessment on the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy has been completed and a link to the document can be found by following the link below:

<https://cbccrmdata.blob.core.windows.net/noteattachment/Homelessness%20and%20Rough%20Sleeping%20Strategy%20EqIA%20.pdf>

7. Strategic Plan References

- 7.1 The new Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy links with the Council's Strategic Plan under:
Wellbeing - Making Colchester an even better place to live and supporting those who need most help by targeting support to the most disadvantaged residents and communities

8. Consultation

- 8.1 A Consultation event was held for all key stakeholders and partners led by Homeless Link (a national homelessness charity) to review homelessness in Colchester and identify key principles and aims for the new strategy.
- 8.2 Consultation with people who have experienced homelessness were set up in the form of Focus groups/drop in sessions. The sessions took place at Youth Enquiry Service (y.e.s), Colchester Emergency Night Shelter (CENS), Beacon House and Sanctuary Housing.

- 8.3 Feed back from the Consultation event and Focus groups has been shared with the project group and partners and are included as appendices to the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy document.
- 8.4 The draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy and Delivery Plan was circulated for consultation with all key stakeholders and comments and suggestions have been incorporated into the Strategy documents.

9. Publicity Considerations

- 9.1 Colchester's Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy documents will be published on the Council's website. A communications plan has been developed to publicise the Strategy and generate interest and commitment to the Delivery Plan.

10. Financial implications

- 10.1 Any resources required to implement the actions in the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy will be delivered from existing budgets. The Council will work to encourage its partners to commit their resources to meeting the priorities set out in the strategy. As many of the organisations are members of the Homelessness Strategy Project Group, they have already helped to shape the strategy and shown their commitment to its delivery.
- 10.2 Colchester Borough Council receives a grant annually from the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government which is administered by Colchester Borough Homes. Part of the funding is used to work with partner organisations to prevent homelessness in the borough. This will help towards the implementation of some of the actions identified in the strategy.
- 10.3 Since 2017 Colchester Borough Council in conjunction with Colchester Borough Homes have secured £605,583.00 from government funding streams to prevent and reduce rough sleeping. This funding has provided a Rough Sleeping Co-ordinator and Outreach workers within Colchester Borough Homes and initiatives with partner organisations to help rough sleepers access accommodation and support. Details are included in the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy.

11. Health, Wellbeing and Community Safety Implications

- 11.1 Research has shown that Homelessness and Rough Sleeping can have a detrimental impact on people's health and wellbeing and this was also highlighted in the review of homelessness in Colchester. The new Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy has acknowledged these factors and identified actions that can help to improve the health of people that are or have experienced homelessness.
- 11.2 It is anticipated that with the implementation of the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy Delivery Plan there will be a positive benefit for Community Safety.

12. Health and Safety Implications

- 12.1 There are no Health and Safety implications

13. Risk Management Implications

- 13.1 There are no Risk Management implications

Appendices

Appendix 1: Colchester's Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020-2025

Appendix 2. Delivery Plan 2020-2025

Background Papers

Housing and Homelessness Strategy Evidence Base update

Link to document on the Council's website below:

<https://cbccrmdata.blob.core.windows.net/noteattachment/CBC-Housing-Colchester%27s-Housing-and-Homelessness-Strategy-Housing%20and%20Homelessness%20and%20Rough%20Sleeping%20Strategy%20Evidence%20Base%202019%20.pdf>