

Report of	Dan Gascoigne Assistant Director Policy and Corporate	Author	Karen Paton ☎ 282275
Title	Homelessness and Rough Sleeping		
Wards affected	All wards		

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 During 2017-18 significant progress has been made in tackling Homelessness and Rough Sleeping in Colchester against a backdrop of national and local housing challenges, and a fundamental change to homelessness legislation with the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.
- 1.2 The Act places two additional Prevention and Relief duties on the Local Housing Authority and an additional 'duty to refer' on all public authorities specified in the legislation.
- 1.3 Demand for Social Housing in Colchester continues to grow whilst the supply of accommodation is reducing. In order to mitigate this Colchester Borough Council, Colchester Borough Homes and partner organisations continue to focus on innovative ways to prevent homelessness occurring in the first instance. Progress in the prevention of homelessness has increased from 648 households in 2016-17 to 869 households in 2017-18.
- 1.4 Colchester's Homelessness Strategy was adopted in March 2014. 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. In order to do this five key Priorities were identified for the Homelessness 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
 - Rough Sleepers – this priority focusses on actions specifically for this group
- 1.5 The Homelessness Strategy continues to be a 'working document' and actions to reflect the changes in legislation and the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act have been incorporated into the Homelessness Strategy Delivery Plan.
- 1.6 The report looks back on the progress that has been made on homelessness and rough sleeping, through the actions identified in the Delivery Plan of the strategy during 2017-18.

2. Action Required

- 2.1 The Panel is asked to review the progress on tackling Homelessness and Rough Sleeping through the implementation of Colchester's Homelessness Strategy 2014-2019

3. Reason for Scrutiny

- 3.1 The Panel has requested to review progress on Homelessness and Rough Sleeping in Colchester. The Panel are invited to comment and provide feedback on the progress made on the actions in the Homelessness Strategy Delivery Plan in the light of challenging national and local housing and welfare reform circumstances.

4. Background Information

Homelessness in Colchester

4.1 In response to the national housing crisis Colchester Borough Council has continued to adopt a strong approach:

- To focus on increasing the supply of permanent homes.
- To adopt imaginative methods to prevent homelessness.
- To put in place innovative measures to improve the experience of households living in temporary accommodation.

4.2 Colchester has achieved its targets for new house building for many years, but nationally housing supply has fallen short of what is needed for decades.

Despite this the demand for social housing in Colchester continues to outweigh the supply. In 2017-18 the number of affordable homes delivered was 134 and in the same year there were 647 lettings to Council and Registered Provider homes, of which 244 were let to homeless households. At the end of March 2018 there were 4989 households on the Council's Housing Register.

4.3. Colchester Borough Council delegates its duties in respect of homelessness, provision of housing advice and maintaining a housing register to Colchester Borough Homes. Together with partners we continue to be successful in preventing homelessness. In 2017-18 the number of households prevented from becoming homeless was 869. There has been a significant decrease in the number of households that the Council owes a duty to rehouse from 325 households in 2016-17 to 184 in 2017-18. The number of households in temporary accommodation has also decreased from 204 households at the end of 2016-17 to 154 at 31st March 2018.

The Housing and Homelessness quarterly summary containing key statistical information from the Housing and Homelessness Strategies is shown at Appendix 1.

4.4 Homelessness Reduction Act 2017

The Homelessness Reduction Act came into force in April 2018. The government published a new code of guidance that set out in more detail how the changes should be implemented.

The Act is the first change to Homelessness Legislation for 16 years although some commentators argue it is the greatest change since the original 1977 Homeless Persons Act.

The new Homelessness Reduction Act places two additional statutory duties on local housing authorities:

The prevention duty – requires councils to intervene to prevent homelessness at an earlier stage, when a household is at risk of losing their home in the next 56 days. This is particularly relevant for those living in privately rented homes who are served with notice, and provides more opportunity to support people directly into another tenancy.

The relief duty - requires councils to offer more advice and support to anyone who is already homeless, regardless of whether they are in priority need and may involve offering accommodation.

- 4.5 Councils are now required to draw up personalised plans for people that are homeless and anyone who is at risk of becoming homeless. Public authorities that are specified in the legislation and that have contact with clients who are homeless or at risk of homelessness will be required to refer them to local authorities, with the persons consent. Clients can choose which local authority they want to be referred. This is known as a 'duty to refer'.
- 4.6 The duties that existed under the previous homelessness legislation, known as the **main duty** remain in place. A main housing duty is owed where homeless households are eligible (certain persons from abroad are ineligible for housing assistance), have a priority need for accommodation and are not homeless intentionally. Certain categories of household, such as pregnant women, families with children, and households that are homeless due to an emergency such as a fire or flood, have priority need if homeless. Other groups may be assessed as having priority need because they are vulnerable as a result of old age, mental ill health, physical disability, having been in prison or care or as a result of becoming homeless due to domestic abuse. This duty is usually ended through the offer of a settled/permanent home.
- 4.7 As a result of the Homelessness Reduction Act processes, procedures, information being collected and statutory returns have all had to change. Colchester Borough Homes (CBH) have detailed elsewhere on this agenda the significant work they undertook to achieve this.
- 4.8 Colchester's Homelessness Strategy 2014-19.

The Homelessness Act 2002 requires 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.

- 4.9 Colchester's Homelessness Strategy was adopted in March 2014. 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.

The strategy is a "partnership" document developed with all the statutory and non-statutory organisations that share the Council's strategic objective to prevent, and reduce homelessness and support those who experience it.

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 – this priority focusses on actions specifically for this group

- 4.10 Actions to reflect the changes in legislation and the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act have been incorporated into the Homelessness Strategy Delivery Plan.

These include:

Provide advice and information about the changes to the Council's Homelessness Service brought about by the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act and the new Homelessness Code of Guidance

Review the Allocations Policy to meet the requirements of the Homelessness Reduction Act to ensure that it is sufficiently geared towards preventing homelessness.

Identify people at risk of homelessness at an earlier stage, and interventions that need to be put in place to prevent them being threatened with or becoming homeless.

- 4.11 There are a significant number of single homeless people, including those that are sleeping rough in Colchester. Colchester Borough Council and Colchester Borough Homes work in partnership with, and support a number of voluntary sector organisations in Colchester that provide valuable advice, support and accommodation for single homeless people. These include:

Beacon House

Colchester Emergency Night Shelter

Open Road

One Support

Phoenix Futures

Youth Enquiry Service

Catch 22

Supported Housing Providers including; Peabody (formally Family Mosaic), Sanctuary Housing, Nacro and the YMCA

Essex Probation.

5. Progress on delivering the Homelessness Strategy.

- 5.1 In order to monitor the actions in the delivery plan of the Homelessness Strategy, a project group was set up which includes representatives from the organisations in 4.11. A report on the progress of the actions is produced on an annual basis and circulated to the relevant stakeholders. It is also published on the Council's website.

A full copy of the Delivery Plan for 2017-2018 is shown at Appendix 2.

- 5.2 Some of the key actions that have been progressed during 2017-18 include:

Action: Increase the provision of tenancy support including floating support to tenants

Progress: One Support continue to support people in the community, in their homes and at drop-ins, delivering housing related support. This includes; Homelessness prevention and tenancy sustainment In Colchester, One Support have a capacity of approximately. 150 customers at any one time along with 14.5hrs of drop-ins each week and telephone support through their gateway.

Progress: CBH provides Tenancy sustainment to support its tenants who are at risk of eviction, and lead a partnership with Catch 22 who provide Intensive family support for Social housing tenants in Colchester. A pilot service "Start well" has been funded by CBC to provide intense intervention and support to families living in temporary accommodation, especially Bed and breakfast which has provided positive outcomes.

Action: Provide services that will support young tenants to maintain their tenancy and prevent unnecessary evictions through Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) and Arrears

Progress: Continuation of pre tenancy workshops by the Youth Enquiry Service and CBH. The content of the workshop is continually updated to ensure that young people are fully aware of welfare benefit reforms.

All new CBH tenants under 25 years old are visited by the Support team to ensure they have the skills to manage their tenancy. Prompt intervention is put in place if the tenancy becomes at risk.

No young people were evicted for rent arrears/ASB from CBC properties in 2017-18.

Action: Increase prevention of homelessness caused by domestic abuse

Progress: CBC, in partnership with Braintree, Tendring and Maldon Councils, successfully secured £263,453 for a 15 month project to provide specialist services at the refuge and in the community for Gypsy and Roma Travellers and hard to reach groups, victims and their families. The project is being delivered by Colchester and Tendring Women's Refuge. The service started in May 2017.

From May 2017 to the end of March 2018, 181 Colchester households who were experiencing domestic abuse were referred to the project. Of these, 169 were from hard to reach groups and 12 from the Gypsy and Roma Traveller Community. A total of 24% of all the referrals were accommodated in the Refuge and 76% were offered support in the community. An additional £14,573 of funding was secured from the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) to continue the project.

Action: Provide advice and support to tenants/residents potentially affected by the welfare reforms.

Progress: Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) was further utilised to support residents affected by the welfare reforms and to remove the risk of homelessness. The DHP fund of £464,027 (including £50,000 from CBC) was fully spent in 2017/18.

Voluntary sector organisations in Colchester are also providing services to residents to help mitigate some of the impacts of welfare reform. (Details are included in the Delivery Plan at Appendix 2).

Action: Provide advice and information about the changes to the Council's Homelessness Service brought about by the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act (HRA) and the new Homelessness Code of Guidance.

Progress: CBH held a successful Stakeholder event in February 2018 to introduce partners to the changes being made to the service with the implementation of the HRA. Training on the HRA was also carried out for partner organisations by CBH Officers. Upskilling of Housing Solutions Officers has taken place to meet the new requirements and additional officers have been recruited to carry out the initial assessment process.

Systems and processes have been reviewed to assist customers to self-serve.

Action: Review the Allocations Policy to meet the requirements of the Homelessness Reduction Act to ensure that it is sufficiently geared towards preventing homelessness.

Progress: The Allocations Policy was reviewed in 2017-18 to meet the requirements of the Homelessness Reduction Act and to ensure that it is sufficiently geared towards preventing homelessness. Two new circumstances where an applicant would be placed in Band C have been added to the policy. These are to reflect the new prevention and relief duties placed on local authorities under the new Homelessness prevention Act. The Policy was adopted in February 2018.

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: In December 2016 CBC and Tendring District Council successfully secured the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) funding of £239,000 for 2 years to provide a co-ordinated response to rough sleeping across both local authority areas to support and prevent homelessness for this group. Two Early Response Rough Sleeper co-ordinators (one for Colchester and one for Tendring) were in post by November 2017. The Early Response Rough Sleeper Co-ordinator for Colchester sits within the CBH Housing Solutions Team.

Since the project begun, the Co-ordinators have been working with local partner organisations who have the skills and expertise in this field to provide an assertive outreach service to support and help secure accommodation for people living on the street.

In Colchester from November 2017 to the end of July 2018, 20 rough sleepers or those at risk of rough sleeping have been housed or supported to remain in their homes.

Action: Establish a multi-agency group of support services for single homeless and rough sleepers.

Progress: Colchester's Homeless Service User Panel (CHASUP) is now chaired by the Early Response Rough Sleeper Coordinator. A matrix has been developed to provide an accommodation and support pathway. CHASUP is currently working with 18 clients to provide support and assist them into accommodation.

A Community of Practice has been set up in partnership with Homeless Link (a national good practice and innovation organisation). Every quarter a forum is held to look at innovation and ideas and provide training for all services in Colchester to help address single homelessness and rough sleeping. Two events have been held so far and have been well attended, with learning and good practice taken away from the meetings by those attending.

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: From mid December 2017 until the end of February 2018, St Peters Guest House in conjunction with Beacon House provided 12 bed spaces for rough sleepers in Colchester. During the period 22 different individuals used the service.

Daytime activities at Colchester Emergency Night Shelter (CENS) remain well attended by residents and ex residents. This in itself has created a mentoring and peer support environment which allows residents to see that positive outcomes can be made if engagement is continued. Emergency bed spaces at CENS increased during the cold period in 2018 and 24 hour opening introduced during extreme bad weather.

5.3 Colchester's current Homelessness Strategy is due to end in March 2019. Therefore over the next few months the project group will be reviewing homelessness in Colchester to inform the next 5 year strategy.

5.4 Rough Sleeper Initiative Funding

5.5 A Rough Sleeper count was conducted in November 2017 and Colchester was found to have 20 rough sleepers on that particular night. Out of this, 16 were UK nationals (4 preferred not to disclose) 5 were women and 11 were over 25 (out of those who disclosed their age).

5.6 In May 2018 the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) identified Colchester as an area eligible to bid for additional funding during 2018/19 to further reduce rough sleeping. CBC in conjunction with CBH, submitted a bid and were successful in securing £192,683 of funding. 4 key interventions were identified for the funding:

- To provide an assertive street outreach service, especially out of hours provision and helping those rough sleepers who have no local connection to Colchester return to the area where they do have a local connection*.
- To provide an opportunity to pilot 'Housing First' for 6 months with a Registered Provider that provides supported housing (The concept of Housing First is to provide a stable home and intensive personalised support and case management to homeless people with multiple and complex needs).
- To Increase bed spaces and support staff capacity at Colchester Night Shelter, specifically for Colchester people at risk of rough sleeping.
- To provide continuous Severe Weather Emergency Provision (SWEP) from the end of October - mid March, with specialist support staff to prevent people moving back to the street once the provision ends.

5.7 Colchester Borough Council were also invited to bid for further funding to continue the interventions for 2019-20. A further bid was submitted and MHCLG have confirmed a provisional funding allocation of £204,753 subject to a number of conditions being met.

5.8 In total **£517,123.50** of funding has been secured from the three government funding streams to prevent, reduce and support rough sleepers.

*a person has a local connection with the district of a housing authority if they have a connection with it because:

(a) they are, or were in the past, normally resident there, and that residence was of their own choice;

or,

(b) they are employed there; or,

(c) they have family associations living there; or,

(d) of any special circumstances.

Under the Local Authority Agreement normal residence is established by:

six months' residence in the area during the past 12 months, or

not less than three years residence during the previous five years.

5.9 National Rough Sleeping Strategy

In August 2018 the government published its Rough Sleeping Strategy. The strategy sets out the government's vision to support every person who sleeps rough off the streets and into a home, which will deliver its commitment to halve rough sleeping by 2022 and to

end it for good by 2027. The strategy is based around three core objectives: Prevention, Intervention and Recovery.

Prevention - providing a focus on timely support before someone becomes homeless.
Intervention - helping people who are already in crisis get swift, targeted support to get them off the streets.

Recovery – supporting people to find a new home quickly and rebuild their lives via a new rapid rehousing approach.

The interventions currently being implemented by Colchester Borough Council and Colchester Borough Homes meet the objectives in the government's Rough Sleeping Strategy.

6 Equality, Diversity and Human Rights implications

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

[Homelessness Strategy EQIA](#)

7 Strategic Plan References

7.1 The Homelessness Strategy links to the Council's Strategic Plan 2018-21 under the Theme: Wellbeing - Making Colchester an even better place to live and supporting those who need most help. Priority - Target support to the most disadvantaged residents and communities.

8 Consultation

8.1 During the development of the Homelessness Strategy, consultation in the form of focus groups and questionnaires took place with service users.

8.2 Key stakeholders were consulted on all the Homelessness Strategy documents and continue to be involved in the delivery of the strategy.

9 Publicity Considerations

9.1 The Homelessness Strategy documents including the progress reports are published on Colchester Borough Council's website. The Progress report and Delivery Plan 2017-18 will be circulated to all key stakeholders.

10 Financial implications

10.1 Resources required to implement the actions in the Homelessness Strategy is delivered from existing budgets. Partner organisations use the Homelessness Strategy to assist in aligning their financial resources to support the delivery of the actions in the Delivery Plan.

11 Health, Wellbeing and Community Safety Implications

11.1 The impact of experiencing homelessness on health and wellbeing are well documented. When it was originally developed, the Homelessness Strategy took into account national health and wellbeing strategies and initiatives such as the Public Health Outcomes Framework and Making Every Contact Count along with local health and wellbeing strategies such as the Essex Health and

Wellbeing Strategy. The strategy seeks to reflect themes and priorities in these national and local documents as well as addressing local health and wellbeing needs. A whole chapter of Colchester's Homelessness Strategy is dedicated to improving the health and wellbeing of homeless people. The delivery plan includes a number of actions to improve the suitability, access and take up of health services for people who experience homelessness and rough sleeping.

11.2 The implementation of the Homelessness Strategy Delivery Plan will be a positive benefit for Community Safety.

12 There are no particular references to health and safety or risk management implications.

Appendices

Appendix A: Housing and Homelessness Summary

Appendix B: Homelessness Strategy Delivery Plan 2017-18