



**PREVENTING HOMELESSNESS AND ROUGH
SLEEPING STRATEGY
2018-2021**

***“ENGAGING & SUPPORTING OUR
COMMUNITIES”***

Foreword by Cabinet Member for Housing

We have always worked hard to develop housing services that are modern and fit for purpose with services that are ahead of the curve.

That is why we were the first Council in the country to undertake a diagnostic peer review within scope of a new government funded framework, and we were one of just seven local authorities nationally to achieve the “Gold Standard”; reflecting our commitment to delivering quality services. We like to challenge ourselves to always do better.

We have been successful in leading on funding bids to the Department for Communities & Local Government, bringing £1.9m of new funding into Hampshire; to support single homeless people, people affected by domestic abuse, and to become part of a national network of “Homelessness Prevention Trailblazers”.

This is Hart’s fifth Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy and it is ambitious. Our delivery plan is forward thinking and sets out the way we will work to prevent and tackle homelessness.

Homelessness and poor housing conditions blight lives, damage health, reduce opportunities. They negatively impact communities in profound ways. That is why preventing homelessness is a priority for this Council. We are committed to ongoing investment that delivers tangible benefits to the people we serve.

Grounded in a comprehensive evidence base, our Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy has been developed with our customers, our partners, and our stakeholders. I would like to extend my thanks on behalf of the Council to everyone who has been involved.

With their help, the strategy has been developed at a time of change. The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 represents a new statutory framework for local authorities. The Council’s Housing Service is in the process of embedding a new model of service delivery. We want to get better at engaging and supporting customers, and the wider system of public services, so that together we can improve outcomes and improve the support available for people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

This is an exciting time to introduce a new strategic plan for preventing homelessness in Hart. I am very pleased to endorse this strategy; knowing it will deliver continuous improvement and impact positively on people’s lives.

Stuart Bailey
Cabinet Member for Housing

Foreword by Chief Executive

The Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2018-2021 presents a roadmap for the way we will deliver housing services in the coming years. It will:

- Ensure compliance with the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.
- Ensure we remain focused on continuous improvement in the way we respond to homelessness.
- Support reform across the wider system and improve the support available to local residents who find themselves in difficulty.

It will be delivered effectively, efficiently, and in keeping with our core values and commitment to excellence in customer care.

The strategy represents the culmination of a significant body of work. It has been developed in partnership and through extensive consultation. It has consolidated learning and the experience of our 'trailblazing' journey. It will directly contribute to Hart's Corporate Plan 2017-2022. It has been deliberately structured around 5 key priorities that feed into our overarching corporate aims and ambitions. In this context we will:

1. Build on existing services and continuously improve service delivery.
2. Work with people to understand their strengths, and support them holistically to achieve their goals.
3. Work with partners to identify people who may be at risk of homelessness at the earliest opportunity.
4. Develop place-based services in the community using colocation and partnership working to increase prevention activity.
5. Engage the wider statutory and voluntary sector to address wider support needs that may otherwise contribute to homelessness, with a focus on system review and reform to deliver sustainability.

The strategy enjoys the support of our wider services and has the full support of the Council's corporate leadership team. To be effective, we recognise that our services must come together to support our residents, and that we cannot achieve our aims as a Council on our own.

We will deliver in partnership across the voluntary and statutory sectors, and always in the interests of supporting our residents.

Patricia Hughes & Daryl Phillips
Joint Chief Executive

BACKGROUND

I. Introduction

Requirement to Formulate & Publish a Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy:

- I.1 The Homelessness Act 2002 introduced a requirement for local authorities to undertake a review of homelessness, including consultation, and to use the results of the review to inform a Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy.
- I.2 Local authorities must publish their Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy periodically, but not longer than once every 5 years.
- I.3 This strategy meets these requirements. It has been developed from a comprehensive evidence base that has been used to formulate the key priorities and delivery plan.

The Legal Framework for Homelessness:

- I.4 Within a complex legal framework, the Council delivers services to people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness. This framework sets out duties it must perform and powers it can exercise with discretion.
- I.5 The Housing Act 1996, Part 7 has been amended over the years, but remains the primary legislation prescribing how local authorities should deliver services, and what duties they must owe to homeless persons.
- I.6 The Housing Act 1996, Part 7 has most recently been amended by the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. This new Act represents fundamental amendments to the existing homelessness legislation.
- I.7 It introduces new requirements to “prevent” and “relieve” homelessness and in that context, sets out a range of new duties.
- I.8 These recent amendments have not taken effect at the time of writing. It is understood the Act will commence from April 2018, with some aspects being rolled out throughout the year.

Strategic Ambition:

- I.9 The Review of Homelessness represents a body of work that can be read in conjunction with the strategy and delivery plan. It has been published separately and can be downloaded at www.hart.gov.uk.
- I.10 This strategy supports the work of the whole of Community Services. It provides a brief summary of the extent and findings of the review, sets out the direction of travel, and provides a detailed delivery plan reflecting the Council’s aim to embed a new operating model and its ambition to do things differently.
- I.11 It represents a strategic shift from a focus on “housing options”. The new emphasis focuses on improving “engagement” with our customers and our partners, and developing more holistic ways to “support” people. The main driver is to achieve

increasingly early interventions that prevent homelessness and to achieve sustainable outcomes for customers.

2. Summary of Review

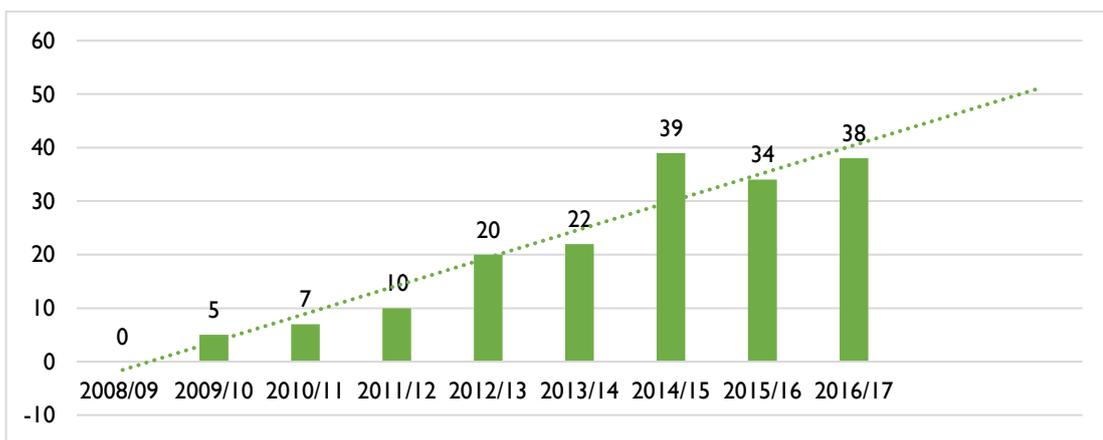
Overview of the Review of Homelessness:

- 2.1 The review commenced in October 2016, and coincided with the decision to bid for Government funding to become a lead authority Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer.
- 2.2 The content of the bid was developed in partnership. It involved both internal and external consultation and engagement and set in motion a process of research and analysis that has ultimately informed the Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy. The full range of partners involved in the review document is included in Appendix A.
- 2.3 The review was detailed, extensive, inclusive and robust. The main focus was on understanding challenges, need, trends, existing services, opportunities, and how we could improve. This included how we could improve wider system responses.
- 2.4 Consultation has been pivotal to the review, and service user engagement vital to garner insight into how we might design our service differently. Service users will continue to play an important part in the life of this strategy.
- 2.5 The strategy itself will be kept under continuous review and the “Review of Homelessness: Engaging & Supporting our Communities” is available on the Council’s website at www.hart.gov.uk.

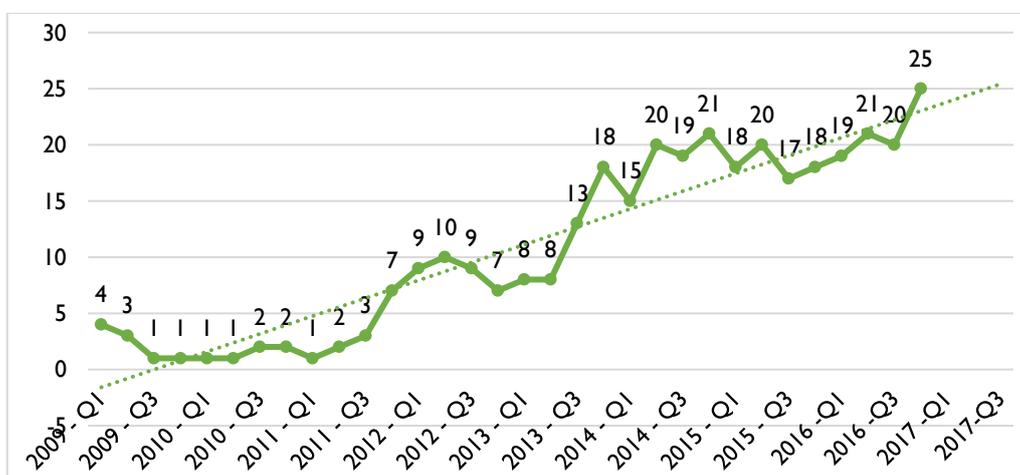
Summary of Key Challenges:

- 2.6 Hart is a very expensive housing market area. House prices are much higher than neighbouring areas and have significantly increased in recent years. The rental market reflects the same trends in terms of increasing cost across both private and affordable rented sectors.
- 2.7 The majority of households registered on the Council’s Housing Register are in work (65%), of which 28% do not receive any welfare benefits.
- 2.8 The average household income for people registered with Help to Buy South for ‘shared ownership’ in Hart is £34,357 with average savings of £20k.
- 2.9 There is a steady demand for advice and assistance from the Housing Service. This demand has remained relatively consistent in recent years. Partner agencies report steady demand from people seeking help with regard to housing related problems.
- 2.10 At the same time, it has become increasingly challenging for residents to secure homes that are affordable for them at open market value. This increases the pressure on available alternative, more affordable, housing solutions, as the number of options is shrinking, particularly with regard to the private rented sector.

- 2.11 Affordability is becoming increasingly problematic for larger families, with “affordable housing” becoming “unaffordable” for people who need more than 3 bedrooms. This trend is starting to extend to smaller units.
- 2.12 Concerns about being given notice to quit accommodation, private rented sector tenancies being ended, relationship and family breakdown are the main reasons people approach the Council for help.
- 2.13 People aged between 25 and 40 represent the largest group requiring assistance with housing related problems. Those aged between 25 and 45 years were the largest group represented within statutory homelessness acceptances.
- 2.14 Whilst levels of statutory homelessness remain low, it is anticipated that they will increase based on the trend over the past 6 years and in light of prevailing housing market pressures.
- 2.15 This assessment is based on data captured under the current statutory framework, before the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 has commenced, and must be understood in that context. Total numbers of statutory homeless acceptances since 2008/09 are demonstrated below along with the forecast trend:



- 2.16 Temporary accommodation use in Hart also remains relatively low, however, the trend over the past 4 to 5 years has been increasing. Total numbers of households in temporary accommodation are demonstrated below along with the forecast trend:



- 2.17 The number of households for whom homelessness is prevented as a result of a private rented sector offer has been in sharp decline over the last 5 years.
- 2.18 After a period of declining numbers of housing association accommodation offers preventing homelessness, we are now seeing a rise.
- 2.19 78% of the Council's successful homelessness prevention activity in 2016/17 was the result of securing alternative accommodation for people. The majority of these preventions related to securing private rented sector accommodation.
- 2.20 Just 22% of the total number of households for whom homelessness was prevented, were able to remain in their existing home.
- 2.21 Hart continues to report very low levels of rough sleeping and has a "No Second Night Out" procedure in place to ensure people who are either sleeping rough or at risk of sleeping rough can be offered support.
- 2.22 There are risks to wider services associated with reductions in public spending, and the identifiable pressures that exist in other parts of the system. It is reasonable to anticipate these factors will ultimately result in de-investment in services that contribute to the existing safety net, and increasing pressure on the Council's services and those of other partners locally to fill emerging gaps.
- 2.23 The full detail of the review can be downloaded at www.hart.gov.uk.

3. From "Housing Options" to "Engagement & Support"

Overview:

- 3.1 The review demonstrated that Hart's "Housing Options" approach has been successful at preventing and tackling homelessness.
- 3.2 It demonstrated recent trends in the housing market. Trends that are increasingly hostile to low income households. It also highlighted trends that indicate the Council relies too heavily on the housing market to meet demand.
- 3.3 Together, these factors indicate that the "Housing Options" approach is no longer a sustainable or viable model. Certainly, if it fails to adapt to emerging conditions.
- 3.4 It follows that we need to work in new ways, to intervene in people's situations to support them. Otherwise we may find it increasingly difficult to prevent homelessness in Hart.
- 3.5 Furthermore, the model must fundamentally change if the Council is to manage the transition to the new statutory framework effectively.
- 3.6 Identifying and securing new ways to access alternative housing options that are suitable and affordable will, of course, continue to be one of a number of competing priorities.
- 3.7 The Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy feeds into an overarching Housing Strategy that seeks to improve the availability of suitable housing for local residents, including affordable rented housing that meets a range of locally identified needs.
- 3.8 The change that is being advocated here, must be understood in this wider context.
- 3.9 We must explore new ways of helping residents, to dramatically increase the number of people for whom interventions result in sustainable outcomes, enabling more

- people to stay in their homes or to manage in the housing market without requiring the ongoing or repeat intervention of different public services.
- 3.10 The strategy recognises that over-reliance on a housing market that is excluding increasing numbers of people, risks incrementally increasing levels of homelessness.
 - 3.11 Additionally, this reliance increases the likelihood that the Council will have to export local people to more affordable housing markets in other areas, if it is to fulfil its legal duties under homelessness legislation now and in the future.
 - 3.12 The Review of Homelessness has recognised that people present to Housing Services for advice and assistance for a variety of reasons.
 - 3.13 On closer inspection, those reasons are rarely, if ever, directly attributable to “housing”. Whilst we must accept that the housing market itself is a challenge, they are yet rooted in people’s financial capacity, employment, redundancy, ill health, alcohol and/or drugs misuse, relationship breakdown, or other underlying causes.
 - 3.14 “Housing” is part of a wider set of problems, and it is almost always a ‘symptom’ of deeper issues.
 - 3.15 Frequently, these underlying causes are not being adequately addressed by the Council, or by the wider network of public services; often this is because the person does not meet relevant service thresholds where the right expertise may otherwise be available, or because we can sometimes – even when trying to operate collectively - work in isolation. Sometimes the person we need to help is viewed by agencies, including ourselves, through the lens of our own constraints.
 - 3.16 This strategy is about rethinking the approach and rethinking how we work with people to prevent and relieve homelessness, so that we can be more effective at it.

Transformation: Engagement & Support Team

- 3.17 We have introduced a new approach which puts the customer at the centre of the work that we do on housing options, and one that recognises their needs and strengths beyond simply housing. This approach focuses on supporting customers not just to resolve their housing issues but encourages them to thrive in other areas, for example, by becoming economically active or by participating in their community.
- 3.18 Clients who approach the service for assistance, or who are referred to us, will receive a comprehensive “strengths based” interview, taking a comprehensive look at all of the housing options available to them and the strengths they have to ensure alternative housing is secured. From this we will develop a personal housing plan – our “enabling agreement” which sets out the actions they will take and the support they need from us and others to move away from housing crisis. We then monitor this with them, until a housing solution has been found. We will also bring in other agencies with specialist skills and knowledge to help in this process. Service level agreements and data sharing protocols support this methodology.
- 3.19 We are developing new approaches and engaging the wider system of statutory and voluntary services, encouraging them to participate in this new model, while supporting them to identify people at risk and ensuring they are ready for a new “duty to refer” enshrined in the Homelessness Reduction Act.
- 3.20 Our mission will be to find increasingly effective ways to identify people at risk of homelessness, at the earliest possible opportunity, and to engage with them at the earliest possible stage.
- 3.21 The “Housing Options Service” will become a proactive “Engagement & Support Service” working within the Housing Services Department.

Links to the Evidence Base:

- 3.22 The Review of Homelessness tells us that the people we are working with are either struggling or unable to find their place in the local housing market. In one sense, there is an identifiable cohort of people that are being left behind.
- 3.23 In addition to actively seeking to influence the market and source suitable accommodation, we need to consider ways of working with our customers so that we are doing more to support them to access the local market sustainably. We aim to do this by helping to harness skills and strengths, and seeking to reduce reliance on public services.
- 3.24 Working with our partners to tackle contributory factors that unchecked, result in housing crisis, will be a key aspect of achieving this.
- 3.25 The premise for the Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy delivery plan reflects this ethos.
- 3.26 It will ensure the Council complies with the requirements of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 and it will promote a partnership approach to engaging and supporting people.
- 3.27 It will include actions to improve support services to meet the needs of our most vulnerable people, so that we are collectively taking a keener interest in understanding their goals and helping them to achieve.

4. Resourcing the Strategy

- 4.1 In common with other local authorities, the Council has been affected by austerity and year on year reductions in central government grant funding. These have required it to transform and constantly review opportunities to become more efficient.
- 4.2 In a 2-tier area, the Council is also vulnerable to funding decisions that are made by Hampshire County Council that can have knock on consequences for district level resources.
- 4.3 Despite these pressures, the Council has continued to prioritise its frontline services and has continued to invest in its Housing Services. Housing Services remain a priority for the Council and it is committed to ongoing work to improve the way we engage and support people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless.
- 4.4 The Council has worked with partners to bring in new money to support continuous improvement. This includes “Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer” funding that will bolster delivery until March 2019, along with the targeted use of Department for Communities and Local Government “Preventing Homelessness Grant” funding and “Flexible Homelessness Support Grant” funding.
- 4.5 The Council will continue to seek to capitalise on any additional opportunities to draw down funding into the area to support homelessness and related services, including by supporting our voluntary sector partners to seek funding from sources that may be exclusively available to them.

5. Working together

- 5.1 The Review of Homelessness has identified that there are challenges facing the Council and its wider partnerships.
- 5.2 Partners across statutory and voluntary sectors contributed to the Review of Homelessness and to this strategy. The Council extends sincere thanks for all of the support provided and for the insights that have been shared.
- 5.3 Partnership working is crucial. Exploring new opportunities and finding new ways to work differently together remain priorities for us and are increasingly encouraged as part of the national policy agenda. We have developed service level agreement with many partners, and we will develop a “memorandum of understanding” moving forward to ensure that the aims and aspirations of each organisation in the partnership are aligned.
- 5.4 Working with the Department for Communities and Local Government, as part of the network of lead authority Homelessness Prevention Trailblazers, Hart will be hoping to influence wider services to contribute to the operational delivery of the strategy and to help us to meet our aims.

6. Monitoring & Review

- 6.1 Ultimate responsibility for driving through this strategy and ensuring it delivers key objectives rests with the Head of Community Services, supported by a range of colleagues from other agencies.
- 6.2 The strategy has been developed in partnership with others, including service users and stakeholders, and they will continue to be involved in the ongoing review and delivery against targets and outcomes.
- 6.3 The Hart Homelessness Forum will take the lead in monitoring delivery against targets and measuring outcomes. The Forum is made up of colleagues from statutory and voluntary agencies that work in Hart with either a remit to tackle homelessness, or to support or provide care for clients who approach us for assistance. This includes, for example, colleagues from mental health services, floating support services, Citizens Advice Bureau and a range of specialist organisations. The Forum meets quarterly and after each meeting the delivery plan is updated accordingly.
- 6.4 The Hart Homelessness Forum will meet in January 2018 to begin work on delivering this new Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy and will use the delivery plan as its work plan moving forward. A clear, refreshed terms of reference will be developed at this initial meeting.
- 6.5 Service user focus groups will also run every six months to help us to co-produce a service that works for local people.
- 6.6 The Community Services “Service Board” of elected members from Overview and Scrutiny Committee will monitor performance against the annual Service Plan.

7. The Delivery Plan

- 7.1 This Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy is deliberately focused on action and delivery, through the delivery plan which is attached as an appendix.
- 7.2 This will develop and embed the “Engagement & Support Model” and will ensure the Council’s approach to preventing and tackling homelessness is fit for purpose now, and for the future.
- 7.3 Rough Sleeping levels in Hart remain constantly low due the level of work put in to ensure those at risk of rough sleeping are prevented from doing so and those in precariously housed are provided with the security they need to prevent homelessness. We work towards a ‘No First Night Out’ (NFNO) approach when it comes to rough sleeping and is part of our continued commitment to preventing single homelessness.

The overarching aim of the procedure is to:

“To reduce to zero the number of people who will sleep rough for the first time across Hart by providing rapid access to accommodation and additional support services where necessary”

NFNO and NSNO shows that Hart takes a ‘zero tolerance’ ethos to rough-sleeping. Our consistent and rapid approach to supporting people who are at risk of rough sleeping alongside continued assistance from the housing services team and our wider partners, ensures we are able to deliver a robust response at the earliest opportunity to prevent rough sleeping entirely.

- 7.4 It has been structured around the key priorities identified by the Review of Homelessness:
1. Build on existing services and continuously improve service delivery.
 2. Work with people to understand their strengths, and support them holistically to achieve their goals.
 3. Work with partners to identify people who may be at risk of homelessness at the earliest opportunity.
 4. Develop place-based services in the community using colocation and partnership working to increase prevention activity.
 5. Engage the wider statutory and voluntary sector to address wider support needs that may otherwise contribute to homelessness, with a focus on system review and reform to deliver sustainability.
- 7.5 Appendix A contains the list of partners consulted and involved in developing the strategy and delivery plan. Appendix B contains the multi-agency delivery plan. It will be monitored by the multi-agency Hart Homelessness Forum and the Community Services “Service Board” and regular quarterly updates will be published on the Council’s website at www.hart.gov.uk.

