

# **2018-21 Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy**

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## **1. FORWARD**

Welcome to Sandwell's 2018-21 Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy. Our Strategy sets out how we aim to prevent homelessness and to ensure that support and accommodation will be available for people who are either at risk of losing their home or have lost their home.

We know that the causes of homelessness are complex and intertwined. It is not just a lack of accommodation, but is often connected to a wider set of more complex circumstances. Homelessness can affect our physical and mental health and wellbeing, educational achievement, ability to gain and sustain employment, and puts pressure on our personal and family relationships. These effects, especially on children, can be life long and can cause repeated homelessness of a generational nature.

No single organisation can prevent homelessness alone; together we must be proactive in working together and crucially as early as possible. We know the task ahead will be challenging. Increasing pressure on budgets across all sectors together with the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act, welfare reform and wider housing market pressures are just some of the challenges that we face going forward. However, I am strongly committed to reducing homelessness in all its forms within Sandwell and I am confident that through a strong partnership approach we can deliver the outcomes of this strategy.

**Cllr Kerry Carmichael – Cabinet Member for Housing**

## **2. INTRODUCTION**

- 2.1 Every local authority has a statutory obligation to produce a strategic homelessness review and implement a strategic homelessness plan. The Council has completed its most recent strategic review this year. The action plan accompanying this strategy is a separate document and will be reviewed on an annual basis.
- 2.2 Homelessness is caused by a complex interaction between a person or family's individual circumstances and a number of social and structural factors that are often outside of their own control. Unless these factors are addressed, the ability of an individual or family to become resilient and improve their chance of a positive future is greatly reduced and places them at risk of becoming trapped in a cycle of homelessness.
- 2.3 Tackling all of these factors at the point of crisis is complex and costly. More must therefore be done to intervene as early as possible, to limit the impact of homelessness, to help people recover from homelessness, and prevent it from happening in the future.
- 2.4 The journey into and through homelessness is different for everyone. People enter at different stages, at different times in their lives, and each with individual support needs; it is important therefore to adopt a flexible approach to respond effectively.
- 2.5 Over the next few years, the challenges imposed by welfare reform together with the probability of rising housing costs will continue to place a significant number of Sandwell households into 'housing stress' at a time when service budgets remain under strain. Because of the pace of change in many of the dynamics that interface with homelessness, including the introduction of a revised Code of Guidance this strategy will be reviewed after three years.

## **3. STRATEGIC AIMS AND MEASURING OUTCOMES**

- 3.1 Over the course of the last three years over 12k households approached the Housing Choice Service. With the help of our partner organisations approximately a third were enabled to either

stay in their existing home or were assisted to obtain suitable alternative accommodation before they hit crisis point.

3.2 Looking to the future, the Council will continue to pursue with vigour the 'prevention' agenda, with intervention taking place at the earliest point possible to prevent crisis. The Council has therefore adopted the following five aims to support people in Sandwell who are affected by homelessness:

1. **UNIVERSAL PREVENTION - to ensure people are well informed about their housing options.**
2. **TARGETED PREVENTION - to prevent people, particularly vulnerable people, from becoming homeless**
3. **CRISIS PREVENTION AND RELIEF - to assist people as soon as possible if they do become homeless so that their homelessness can be relieved by securing suitable accommodation and support**
4. **RECOVERY - to support people to recover from their experience and stay out of homelessness**
5. **SUSTAINABLE HOUSING OPTIONS - to enable people to secure homes that they can afford and maintain**

These aims together with their respective outputs are detailed further in Appendix One.

3.3 Through its 2030 Vision, the Council has adopted ten Ambitions to make Sandwell a thriving, optimistic and resilient community. This strategy will play a role in this vision and in particular it supports Ambitions 2 and 5:

**Ambition 2:** Sandwell is a place where we live healthy lives and live them for longer, and where those of us who are vulnerable feel respected and cared for.

**Ambition 5:** Our communities are built on mutual respect and taking care of each other, supported by all the agencies that ensure we feel safe and protected in our homes and local neighbourhoods.

## ***Measuring the outcomes of this strategy***

- 3.4 The Council will measure the impact of this strategy by how well it achieves, or is on track to achieving, the following outcomes:
- A** A year on year reduction in the number of homeless acceptances set against the data outlined for 2016/17 in *Figure One*.
  - B** A year on year increase in the number of households prevented from becoming homeless set against the data outlined for 2016/17 in *Figure Two*
  - C** A year on year decrease in the use of Bed and Breakfast/Hotels set against the data outlined for 2016/17 in *Figure Three*
  - D** To keep the level of rough sleeping below the relevant England Rough Sleeping Rate as set out in *Figure Four*.

## **4. DEFINING HOMELESSNESS**

- 4.1 An applicant is to be considered homeless if they do not have accommodation that they have a legal right to occupy, which is accessible and physically available to them (and their household) and which it would be reasonable for them to continue to live in. The law defines a person being threatened with homelessness if they will not have any accommodation within 56 days. (*Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities 2018*).
- 4.2 Rough Sleepers are defined as follows (for the purposes of rough sleeping counts and estimates):
- People sleeping, about to bed down (sitting on/in or standing next to their bedding) or actually bedded down in the open air (such as on the streets, in tents, doorways, parks, bus shelters or encampments). People in buildings or other places not designed for habitation (such as stairwells, barns, sheds, car parks, cars, derelict boats, stations, or “bashes” which are makeshift shelters, often comprised of cardboard boxes). (Communities and Local Government, 2018<sup>1</sup>).*

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[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/682001/Rough\\_Sleeping\\_Autumn\\_2017\\_Statistical\\_Release\\_-\\_revised.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/682001/Rough_Sleeping_Autumn_2017_Statistical_Release_-_revised.pdf)

## **5. LEGAL DUTIES**

5.1 The Council's legal obligations with regard to homelessness are as follows:

- The Housing Act 1996 and the Homelessness Act 2002, places statutory duties on local housing authorities to ensure that advice and assistance to households who are homeless or threatened with homelessness is free of charge. A 'main homelessness duty' is owed where the authority is satisfied that the applicant is eligible for assistance, unintentionally homeless and falls within a specified priority need group. Where a main duty is owed, the authority must ensure that suitable accommodation is available for the applicant and his or her household.
- The Homelessness Act 2002 places a specific requirement for local authorities to devise and implement a Homelessness Strategy.
- The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 places three duties on local authorities, namely:
  1. to assess all eligible applicants and agree an individual Personal Housing Plan
  2. to take reasonable steps to prevent homelessness
  3. to relieve homelessness by helping the applicant to secure accommodation.

The Act also introduces responsibilities on the part of the applicant to take steps to either prevent or relieve their homelessness and is accompanied by a new statutory code.

## **6. OVERVIEW OF HOMELESSNESS IN SANDWELL**

6.1 Over the last three years the number of approaches to the Housing Choice Service and subsequent cases opened has remained constant, with 4,163 opened in 2014/15, 4,200 in 2015/16 and 4,215 in 2016/17. This latter figure represents a 12% increase when compared to 2010/11. From cases opened covering the two financial years, the most common causes for approach to the service were:

- Parents/relatives no longer willing to accommodate (27%)
- Termination/loss of assured shorthold tenancy (AST) (20%)
- Relationship breakdown non-violent (11%)
- Relationship breakdown violence from partner (11%)
- Loss of National Asylum Seeker Support (NASS) (5%)

Overall, 74% of households presenting to the service did so under one of the five reasons outlined above.

### ***Those owed the 'main duty'***

6.2 In 2016/17 the Council helped 551 households who were eligible, unintentionally homeless and in priority need. Known as the 'main duty' or 'full statutory duty', the authority must ensure for these households that suitable accommodation is available for the applicant and his/her household. The most frequent cause of homelessness for people that the Council had a legal duty to rehouse was (in declining order):

1. Termination/loss of assured shorthold tenancy
2. Relationship breakdown – partner violent
3. Parents/relatives no longer willing to accommodate
4. Loss of National Asylum Seeker Support
5. Relationship breakdown partner non-violent

85% of households owed the 'main duty' present to the service under one of the five reasons outlined above. In addition, from the 551 households owed the 'main duty', the presence of dependent children accounted for 68% (376) of the Priority Need award.

**Figure One: Total number of cases accepted as eligible, unintentionally homeless, and in priority need 2014/15 to 2016/17:**

	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
Total Cases Full Duty Accepted	565	546	551
<i>Total cases opened</i>	4163	4,220	4,215
2016/17 Homeless and in Priority Need Acceptance Rate (per 1,000 households):			Sandwell: 4.52 England: 2.09 (Excl. London)

### **Preventing people from becoming homeless**

6.3 In 2016/17, 1,288 households were prevented from becoming homeless either by enabling them to remain in their existing home or finding suitable alternative accommodation.

**Figure Two: Homeless Preventions by number 2014/15 to 2016/17:**

	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
Assisted to remain in property	1,105	703	697
Assisted to obtain alternative accommodation	638	450	591
Total cases prevented from becoming homeless	1,743	1,153	1,288
<i>Total cases opened</i>	4,163	4,220	4,215

## ***Temporary Accommodation***

6.4 Whilst the use of temporary accommodation (TA) remains an issue in the borough, the Council has in recent years considerably improved the options at its disposal where the use of TA is the only option. The Council can now utilize:

- 23 self-contained units leased from Housing Options West Midlands
- 6 bed HMO; leased from a Private Landlord
- 6 x 2&3 bedroom flats within own stock
- 7 bed HMO within own stock
- 6 B&Bs used on a regular basis
- A range of other B&Bs and hotels when the regular B&Bs are not available.

*Figure Three* below outlines by number TA usage by accommodation type and household type (number of persons). The data only includes households who were placed into TA for seven days or more.

***Figure Three: Temporary Accommodation usage 2015/16 & 2016/17:***

	<b><u>2015/16</u></b>				<b><u>2016/17</u></b>			
	<b>Household Type (No. persons)</b>				<b>Household Type (No. persons)</b>			
	<b>1P</b>	<b>2P</b>	<b>3P</b>	<b>4+P</b>	<b>1P</b>	<b>2P</b>	<b>3P</b>	<b>4+P</b>
<b>B&amp;B or Hotel</b>	10	22	39	36	11	16	27	27
<b>Leased units</b>	7	9	21	19	8	15	25	37
<b>LA Accom.</b>	0	2	0	0	3	14	6	15

**Note: 1P = one person household  
4+P = four or more persons**

## ***Rough Sleeping***

- 6.5 The Council's rough sleeper estimate completed in November 2017 accounted for 10 people. *Figure Four* below outlines the rough sleeper returns from 2013 to 2017

***Figure Four: Sandwell Rough Sleeper Estimates by year/number 2013 to 2017:***

	<b>Year (November)</b>				
	<i>2013</i>	<i>2014</i>	<i>2015</i>	<i>2016</i>	<i>2017</i>
<b>Number</b>	3	2	4	11	10
<b>2017 Rough Sleeping Rate (per 1,000 households):</b>		Sandwell: 0.08 England: 0.18* <i>*excludes London</i>			

## **APPENDIX ONE:**

# **AIMS AND DESIRED OUTCOMES**

**AIM ONE: UNIVERSAL PREVENTION - to ensure people are well informed about their housing options.**

**This aim covers:**

Ensuring signposting outlets are readily accessible and are embedded beyond Council operated service areas covering the personal factors associated with homelessness:

- Access to employment and benefits
- Advice on housing costs and tenancy issues
- Debt Advice
- Mortgage and Repossession
- Managing your tenancy
- Neighbourhood Issues – ASB, Harassment, Environmental Services

**Desired outcome:**

**People/families are empowered to understand about housing costs, options and know where to get help if they need it.**

**AIM TWO: TARGETED PREVENTION - to prevent people, particularly vulnerable people, from becoming homeless**

**This aim covers:**

Early intervention targeted to reach households most likely to be at risk of homelessness. Groups at risk of homelessness include:

- people released from prison or youth detention accommodation
- care leavers
- victims of domestic abuse
- people leaving hospital
- people suffering from a mental illness or impairment
- teenage parents
- those on low incomes and / or in debt

**Desired outcome:**

**People/families are supported wherever possible and where it is appropriate to remain in their existing home**

**People/families are supported where it is appropriate to make planned moves to reduce risk of homelessness and other harms**

**AIM THREE: CRISIS PREVENTION AND RELIEF - to assist people as soon as possible if they do become homeless so that their homelessness can be relieved by securing sufficient accommodation and support**

**This aim covers:**

Integrated, co-ordinated response for accommodation and support for people / families where the threat of homelessness is imminent or they are homeless.

Comprehensive multi-agency assessment of household need including housing, health, education or family mediation etc

**Desired outcome:**

**Homelessness is prevented through intervention at point of crisis**

**Emergency accommodation is secured for those without other housing options,**

**AIM FOUR: RECOVERY - to support people to recover from their experience and stay out of homelessness**

**This aim covers:**

Building resilience after the prevention or relief stage to stabilise and sustain accommodation focussing where appropriate on:

- Accessing relevant support services, e.g. MH,
- Maximising family income and facilitating tenancy sustainability
- Entering / maintaining employment and/or accessing education/ training.

**Desired outcome:**

**Patterns of repeat homelessness are broken, individuals and families recover from their experience of homelessness and have the resilience to sustain accommodation and a more positive and healthy future.**

**AIM FIVE: SUSTAINABLE HOUSING OPTIONS - to enable people to secure homes that they can afford and maintain**

**This aim covers:**

To ensure sufficient supply of suitable affordable housing options including access to the private rented, housing association and third sector accommodation;

**Desired outcome:**

**There is a range of safe, decent, affordable housing options for all covering the private, social and third sectors.**