

Annex 1

Preventing homelessness together

2018-2023



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Foreword

Homelessness and how we prevent it is something we should all be concerned about. It is the most extreme form of housing need that can have a devastating impact on people's lives and the wider community. To be homeless can mean sleeping rough, living in temporary accommodation, an institution or shelter, living in insecure or inadequate housing.

It is often said homelessness has many causes and can happen to anyone. Whilst it's true the causes of homelessness are sometimes complex the reality is homelessness or the risk of homelessness can often be predicted. A study in 2017 showed that poverty and particularly childhood poverty is by far the most powerful predictor of homelessness in later life.

Over the past few years we have seen a national rise in homelessness and rough sleeping. Prevailing public attitudes still incorrectly believe that individual factors such as a person's character and poor personal choices are largely to blame.

However, evidence shows that two trends are mainly responsible – a shortage of affordable housing and the ongoing impacts of welfare reform.

In recognising these structural causes of homelessness we recognise that homelessness is often the product of the policy choices we make.



This strategy was developed with the help of the York Homelessness Forum, a body made up of many statutory and voluntary agencies. It is endorsed by City of York Council, which provides strategic leadership on homelessness across the city.

Whilst our ultimate goal should be to end homelessness in all its forms we acknowledge this may not be achievable within the lifetime of this strategy. So we commit to working together to prevent and reduce homelessness wherever possible and minimise the impacts it has on those who experience it.

Chair of York Homelessness Forum



Signatories to the strategy

The following agencies are committed to delivering the strategy and are members of Homeless Strategy Executive Group:

- City of York Council
- Changing Lives representing York Resettlement Group
- Safe and Sound Homes representing Youth Homeless Strategy Group
- Citizens Advice York representing voluntary sector agencies
- York Housing Association representing Registered Social Landlords (RSLs)
- Department of Work and Pensions
- National Probation Service
- Community Rehabilitation Team
- York health and wellbeing board
- Clinical Commissioning Group
- Tees, Esk, Wear Valley NHS Trust
- York Children's Trust

Overview

This strategy builds on achievements delivered through previous homelessness strategies. It sets out to build a future where the structural causes of homelessness are understood and acted upon. It seeks to ensure that mistakes in life or particular vulnerabilities do not lead to homelessness in ways they can do now.

The strategy shows how we will tackle the complex causes of homelessness by focusing on prevention and early intervention and on locally designed integrated services that step in when things go wrong.

Homelessness of all kinds has increased significantly in the last six years¹. Nationally between 2010 and 2017 there was a 33 per cent rise in statutory homelessness, a 60 per cent rise in the use of temporary accommodation and a 134 per cent rise in rough sleeping.

Future projections suggest these rises are set to continue, presenting huge challenges for cities like York.

Many people, as part of everyday life, face experiences or triggers that could lead to homelessness, such as a relationship breakdown, financial crisis or the end of a tenancy. In most cases individuals cope and find suitable accommodation using their own resources.

But for others it is these life events that tip them into homelessness, either because they lack the resources to tackle their immediate challenges - for example, enough money for a deposit or because they suffer more underlying problems such as an addiction or mental health problem, which makes it harder for them to deal with their situation.

We know that preventing homelessness is more cost effective than dealing with its consequences² and it delivers far better outcomes for those concerned. Using powers and responsibilities set out in the Homeless Reduction Act 2017 we will re-double our efforts to make prevention and early intervention the backbone of our approach.

¹ National Audit Office

² A report in 2012 found that the average annual cost of homelessness was between £24,000 and £30,000 per person – Evidenced Review of the Cost of Homelessness, DCLG 2012.



York's 'Gold Standard' Homelessness Services

York is recognised for the quality of services offered to homeless and potentially homeless households. In 2016 City of York Council achieved the government 'Gold Standard' award' becoming the third local authority in the country to do so. While the service meets this standard, there is always more that we can do.

The Homeless Reduction Act 2017 extends the responsibilities of local authorities including;

- A duty to prevent homelessness
- Amending the definition of homelessness to households served with a section 21 notice seeking possession.
- Extending the 'threatened with homelessness' period
- Requiring households to agree a Personal Housing Plan
- A new relief duty on councils to work to prevent homelessness and secure accommodation for all applicants regardless of priority need or intentionally homeless.
- A new duty on public bodies to notify councils when they suspect someone may be homeless or at risk of homelessness.

The council's Housing Options Service offers advice and support

and partner agencies offer a range of services available to meet the statutory duty under the Act by providing advice and information to those at risk of homelessness, to prevent homelessness or help the customer to find alternative accommodation³. This can either be in supported housing, the social sector or in suitable private rented accommodation.

If a household is homeless immediately, temporary accommodation may be provided while assistance is offered to help secure more permanent accommodation. Historic duties under the Housing Act 1996 only come into effect if prevention and relief duties are unsuccessful.

The council directly supports and works with a wide range of partners to deliver advice services, debt services, hostels and other supported accommodation for vulnerable people.

The early intervention and prevention team provide specialist advice to single homeless (18+), youth homeless workers provide specialist advice to young people aged 16 and 17 and the specialist housing adviser provides housing advice to frail elderly and older people with complex needs.

There is a range of supported housing in the city, in particular for single homeless and young people, provided by the council and via the Adult Commissioning Community Wellbeing contract.

These provisions sit alongside those in the Care Act 2014 that place responsibility on councils to prevent, reduce and delay the need for care and support.

³ Homeless Reduction Act 2017



Homelessness in York

In October 2017 the York Homelessness Forum began reviewing homelessness in York. It looked at the housing market and pressures within it that can contribute to peoples housing problems.

It looked at household incomes and levels of poverty that may add further pressures. And it looked at patterns of homelessness, including its main causes and the types of households affected.⁴

The Forum concluded we are likely to see increasing demands on housing advice, homelessness and related services for the foreseeable future.

York's housing market

York's housing market is characterised by high levels of housing demand. Strong competition from a growing population fuels house prices and private sector rents meaning those least able to

compete, such as young people, young families and vulnerable households, can find their options limited.

The price of a home in York is well above the regional average and has been for many years.

High demand for housing is set to continue. York's Local Plan aims to set house building targets that meet assessed need but it is the delivery of new homes that often lags behind the aspiration.

There are around 1,500 households on the Housing Register waiting for the offer of an affordable rented home. The number of people joining the register is growing yet with turnover of around 500 vacant properties per year many on the list face never being offered accommodation.

Household incomes and poverty

Some households face growing challenges to access and sustain accommodation due to pressures on household budgets.

Average incomes of around £26,000 set against average house prices of £240,000 means housing affordability in York remains challenging for many with a ratio of 9:1.

Over 6,250 children live in poverty in York (Dec 2015) based on household income after housing costs. In some wards child poverty rates are around 33 per cent. This is despite low unemployment at just 1.3 per cent – half the national average - very low levels of benefits dependency and recent falls in youth unemployment.

Insecure employment and under employment are relatively high with a third of workers in part time work compared to 25 per cent

⁴ A wide range of evidence was used to understand the nature of homelessness in York and the reasons why people become susceptible to it.

nationally, a rise of 11 per cent since 2012. One in five workers is paid below the living wage.

Ongoing welfare reform are set to add further pressure to those with the least financial resources such as those on benefits, including a growing number of in-work claimant households. As a result, absolute child poverty is set to increase to over 18 per cent nationally by 2021.⁵

Households approaching the council for help

The Housing Options service remains busy. In 2017/18 it saw 2,958 people worried about their accommodation of which 1127 were given comprehensive housing advice following detailed interview.

Across York 752 households were successfully prevented from being homeless or from presenting as homeless, up from 631 in the previous year.



Homelessness prevention tools

There are a wide range of tools to help prevent homelessness. The most effective over the past five years have included:

- Debt advice

⁵ Institute of Fiscal Studies

- Crisis intervention
- Negotiation / legal advocacy
- Resolving benefits issues
- Conciliation

Preventing homelessness is cost-effective⁶:

- The cost of mediation - for example, resolving family disputes to avoid someone becoming homeless - is nine times less expensive than finding someone new accommodation
- Advice on housing options, such as how to solve benefit problems or helping people manage their finances is estimated at around nine times less expensive than finding someone new accommodation
- The costs of a rent deposit scheme are estimated to be eight times less than providing accommodation under the main homelessness duty.

Households accepted as homeless

Of the 186 households that presented as homeless under the Housing Act 1996, 97 were accepted as being homeless and in priority need, up from 91 in the previous year.

Female lone parents represent the largest single group of households accepted as homeless at 35 per cent of all households.

In 2016/17 households accepted as homeless were in the following priority need groups:

⁶ Communities and Local Government advice demonstrating the cost-effectiveness of preventing homelessness, published in 2010

- Pregnant or dependent children 53 per cent
- Mental illness or disability 19 per cent
- Domestic violence 10 per cent

The main homelessness triggers

The main triggers for homelessness in York have remained fairly consistent. In 2016/17 the main trigger was relationship breakdown (32 per cent), eviction by family or friends (29 per cent), followed by the ending of a private sector short hold tenancy (17 per cent).

Homelessness arising as a result of relationship breakdown in York is double the national rate and homelessness arising from the ending of a private sector tenancy is half the national rate.

Eviction by family or friends predominantly involves young people or young families.

Pressures on young people look set to continue. A study by Homeless Link found welfare cuts were increasing the chances of young people becoming homeless. It said changes in eligibility and benefit rates had made it harder for young people to find private accommodation, leading to 50 per cent more young people seeking support.

Temporary accommodation

Given the shortage of affordable homes, many of those accepted as homeless and in priority needs are placed into temporary accommodation.⁷

⁷ This includes purpose built hostels and accommodation schemes. Very little use is now made of bed and breakfast accommodation.

At the end of 2016/17 there were 63 households in temporary accommodation, down from 93 in 2011/12. There were no 16 or 17 year olds in temporary accommodation in York.

Rough sleeping

The number of people sleeping rough in York has risen from 9 to 29 over the last four years as pressures in the local housing market and the wider economy build up.

There is forecast to be a further 76 per cent national rise over the next decade (Crisis 2017).

In 2016/17, 275 people accessed 2,657 emergency bed nights under the No Second Night Out initiative.

Health, wellbeing and homelessness

Health professionals have long recognised that the impact of secure and appropriate accommodation extends far beyond the physical shelter it provides.

In January 2018 York's Public Health Team within City of York Council assessed the impact homelessness can have on people's health and the extent to which people's health contributes to homelessness.

Key points:

- Overall, York has fewer people with long term health conditions than other parts of the country but the prevalence of poor mental health is relatively high.

- Children who have been in temporary accommodation are three times more likely to demonstrate mental health problems such as anxiety and depression and are at greater risk of infections and accidents.
- There is some evidence that people who experience living in insecure accommodation as young children are more likely to use drugs in later life. People who misuse drugs or alcohol are at a greater risk of experiencing homelessness.
- Ex offenders can find access to services and support challenging, particularly if they are not registered with a GP or moving between temporary addresses.
- There remains a significant overlap between York's homeless population and people who have been in a range of institutions.
- The majority of rough sleepers will only be on the street for a short period usually after a particular incident in their lives. However, for a smaller group, rough sleeping will become sustained and enduring characteristic of their lives. These people are likely to experience poor health throughout their lives and have a drastically reduced life expectancy.
- Support for people with dual diagnosis or mental health and drug or alcohol addition is historically complex to access. A challenge is to become better equipped to recognise and meet the needs of this group.
- A small number of people disengage from services and support posing greater risks to their health and wellbeing.

- Periods of housing insecurity often exacerbate the symptoms of existing mental and physical health conditions.
- Access to timely and appropriate services is critical. A challenge for the city is to maintain high levels of practitioner awareness of the support and services available.
- A majority of homeless people in York are smokers. Of all the behavioral factors, smoking has the biggest impact on health.



Strategic aims and priorities

The homelessness review found our approach and Gold Standard services had helped deliver effective results in the face of growing demand.

We therefore plan to retain our core focus on early intervention and the prevention of homelessness, backed up by high quality joined up support to get people back on their feet when things do go wrong.

In order to achieve this we need to address long standing structural issues that increase the likelihood of a housing crisis – like the shortage of affordable housing and rising household poverty.

This is to some extent dependent upon York's Local Plan which aims to set out sufficient housing building targets to meet identified need. Ensuring these translate into actual delivery will be a key challenge.

1. Reduce Rough Sleeping

The Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government has announced a national target to reduce rough sleeping by half by 2020 and to eliminate it altogether by 2027. Despite significant work over past 5 years, York has seen an increase in rough sleeping and will look at new and additional ways of addressing this issue.

Effective outreach

- Effective outreach services play a critical role in identifying needs an early stage so we will ensure these continue through the re-tendering of provision.

- We will retain Making Every Adult Matter (MEAM) to work with complex / entrenched rough sleepers
- We will evaluate and if successful, secure ongoing funding for the Next Steps project and review current supported housing curfews and restrictions to minimise the role these may play in rough sleeping.

A Housing First approach

Housing First is an international model, providing accommodation and intensive support to homeless people with complex needs.

York adopted the model in 2015. The model is only effective where agencies can provide long term, ongoing support and individuals are willing to accept it.

- A key focus will be to further embed the Housing First approach and ensure all partners are committed to the model and provide appropriate support and funding to individuals.

Flexible short term bed spaces to meet needs

- Ensuring adequate emergency bed spaces are available means no one gets turned away. We will explore new ways to create additional spaces to meet short term peaks in demand.

Minimise street begging

Not all beggars are homeless but public perception often assumes they are. Begging in York can be very lucrative and the city has a

joint approach between the community safety and early intervention and prevention teams.

- To address growing concerns about street begging we will explore ways for people to donate in ways that do not inadvertently support and encourage it.



2. Prevent Homelessness

The Homeless Reduction Act 2017 places a statutory duty on preventing homelessness ensuring timely and accessible housing advice and information is critical to helping people make planned housing moves and avoid a housing crisis.

That we will continue to develop our Housing Options service to ensure it appeals to a wider range of customers, not just those that are on the brink of a housing crisis.

A significant piece of work is around tackling poverty and particularly childhood poverty, which can have a lasting impact on a

person's life. All indications are that poverty rates will rise and this could have long lasting effects given its links to homelessness.

Our economic strategies must ensure everyone benefits from York's success and deliver an increasing proportion of workers who are in secure well paid jobs that enable them to meet their needs.

While York has been very successful in preventing homelessness in recent years to achieve this, there are further actions that will support this aim.

- We will ensure that information about the Homeless Reduction Act 2017, advice and support is accessible to agencies and the public.
- We will ensure advice and prevention tools are relevant to tackling the main structural causes of homelessness – housing supply and poverty
- We will ensure advice and prevention tools are relevant to tackling the main causes of homelessness like relationship breakdown and loss of tenancies

Deploy the most effective early intervention and prevention tools

- As the full impact of welfare reform including Universal Credit continues to be felt, we will support access to financial advice, skills and employment services.
- We will build on our work with voluntary sector partners to deliver free and independent debt advice and identify those at risk of homelessness at an early stage.

3. Ensure appropriate accommodation for people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness

A significant challenge in York is the availability of suitable accommodation in the social, private and supported housing sectors. There is high demand and high rent / purchase prices.

- York's Local Plan aims to set out sufficient housing building targets to meet identified need. Ensuring these translate into actual delivery will be a key challenge.
- Work with private landlords, developers, RSL's to increase suitable housing supply for vulnerable household and those on low incomes.
- We will continue to make best use of the available social housing stock and consider alternative uses and tenancies including shared accommodation, demoted tenancies, flexible tenancies and family intervention tenancies

There remains a commitment within the homeless services not to place any young person age 16 or 17 in such accommodation or place any families in bed and breakfast except in an emergency and for no longer than 6 weeks. The new provision at James House will contribute to this goal.

- There is an ongoing need for specialist supported housing and a key task will be to develop a comprehensive plan ensuring sufficient Tier 1 (24/7 hostel accommodation) and Tier 2 (supported housing including long term accommodation for those unable to live independently).

A particular focus will be better provision of accommodation for people with mental illness, complex needs and mobility issues and

development of supported housing for perpetrators of domestic abuse

- We will look to expand emergency bed provision

4. Ensure appropriate support for people that are homeless or at risk of homelessness

It is vital that a person or household who become homeless has the right support to ensure they sustain any future accommodation. Personal Housing Plans (required under Homeless Reduction Act 2017) will identify both short term and long term support needs, We will commission and work in partnership with organizations that provide practical help to maintain tenancies, such as budgeting advice, furnishing assistance, signposting and advocacy for other services.

Currently there is concern within the sector regarding long term sustainable funding of supported housing. There are proposals at national level regarding this which will affect York.

- We will explore the provision of a Day Centre - with positive activities for customers to assist them to access / retain independent living
- We will ensure the full introduction of Personal Housing Plans
- We will ensure a comprehensive resettlement programme, including for people seeking advice under the Homeless Reduction Act 2017

Minimise contributory factors like poor health and alcohol & drug abuse

The Public Health Outcomes Framework aims to ensure the mental health needs of homeless people and those at risk are properly taken into account by local services.

Early engagement with drug and alcohol treatment agencies and interaction with the criminal justice system will remain critical points for identifying and helping those at risk of homelessness.

- We will continue to develop clear housing pathways for each specific client group such as those leaving prison, hospital or social care that includes appropriate accommodation and support.
- We will continue to develop our approach for those with more complex needs, such as the Mental Health Tracking Panel.
- We will work with partner agencies to tackle health issues raised in Homeless Health Needs Assessment 2018 including support to register with GP services and smoking cessation promotion

5. Maintain and develop partnership working and strategic direction

The successful delivery of this strategy is dependent on co-operation and joint working with internal departments, statutory bodies, voluntary sector agencies, faith and community groups.

There are a number of forums within York that facilitate this but with rising public concern about homelessness and rough sleeping we need to encourage others to be involved.

A comprehensive training programme is provided by the Council which is available to volunteers and those working with people that are homeless.

The Homeless Reduction Act 2017 introduces a new duty on statutory authorities to refer anyone who is known to be homeless (with consent) and will hopefully enable planned moves from hospital or prison rather than last minute homeless presentations.

- The York Homelessness Forum and Homeless Strategy Executive Group will continue to meet to deliver and review this strategy, under the strategic leadership of City of York Council. This approach has served the city well, ensuring effective partnership working across a diverse range of services with good links into relevant client groups.

Central to effective joint working will be workable pathways for specific client groups, such as those leaving prison, hospital or long term care.

- We must ensure that all agencies understand and adhere to the provisions of the Homelessness Reduction Act and particularly the Duty to Refer for statutory bodies. And ensure these are fully reflected with websites and information to customers.
- There is a need to ensure closer working relationships between the council and registered social landlords to ensure earlier intervention and support. We must establish formal systems to better monitor and understand failed tenancies and abandonments.

- We must ensure information sharing agreements and consent forms are GNDR compliant.
- A particular focus will be to build on the Homeless Health Assessment to gain a deeper understanding of how early homelessness prevention results in much better outcomes for people and significant financial savings for health and other budgets further down the line.
- We will work in a collaborative way across the city so that housing advice and information is consistent and linked up. We will refer vulnerable clients into relevant support services at the earliest opportunity.

Action plan

The commitments outlined above are set out more fully in the strategy action plan at the back of this document.

Making sure we deliver

The Homelessness Strategy Executive Group will meet at least annually to review progress against the action plan and ensure it remains responsive to emerging needs.

We will publish an annual report on the council's website in summer each year.

Your comments, ideas and further information

We would like to know what you think about this strategy or homelessness in general. You can leave comment or feed back at any time using the contact details below:

Email: yourservice.yoursay@york.gov.uk

Telephone: (01904) 554379

We will take your comments to our review meetings.

Further copies of this strategy are available to download from the council's website www.york.gov.uk/housing

