

# **Solihull Homelessness Strategy**

**2019**

**Draft for Health and Wellbeing Board**

**March 2019**

## **1. Introduction**

This strategy sets out the Council's objectives for the development of its Homelessness Strategy for the period April 2019 to March 2020.

Following this it is expected that the Council will be required to introduce a new 'Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy'. New Governance guidance on this is awaited.

This strategy is informed by an updated Homelessness Review which sets out our picture of homelessness in Solihull, including the number of households seeking assistance, the reasons why they were homeless or threatened with homelessness and the outcomes of our prevention and relief work and support. The headlines are set out in box 1 below.

The Review also sets out the main providers of homelessness services through which the strategy will be delivered – SCH, St Basils and SIAS, and other organisations which provide support through provision of accommodation, advice and support.

Consultation on the development of the Strategy has run through most of 2018 and has involved partner agencies and strategic boards, in particular the long – established multi-agency homelessness forum (MAHF), the Solihull Together Board, and Solihull's Health and Wellbeing Board.

The strategy proposes four objectives for 2019 and for each sets out the main considerations including recommendations from the homelessness review and from consultees. Key tasks for the council and partner organisations are headlined and will be set out in more detail in a separate Action Plan.

## **2. Objectives and Priorities**

The objectives of the strategy are to:

- **Prevent** homelessness whenever we can;
- **Relieve** homelessness when it can't be prevented;
- **Support** vulnerable people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness;
- **Connect** services at the strategic, policy and operational levels.

The updating of the Housing Review and consultation on the strategy has highlighted several particular areas of concern to be addressed by the new strategy as priorities:

- rough sleeping, including the increase in the number of individuals at risk of rough sleeping, and the effect that an increase in begging by people who are not homeless is having on public perception;
- the increase in approaches for assistance particularly from those who are 'homeless today' for whom there is little opportunity for prevention;

- increased numbers and length of stays of households in temporary accommodation and increased use of budget hotels for families;
- the shortage of suitable accommodation in Solihull, including emergency and temporary accommodation options and move-on accommodation;
- a lack of supported accommodation, particularly to meet the needs of individuals with complex needs who present a high level of risk to themselves or to others.

These and other actions are outlined below under each of the objectives and further detailed in a separate Action Plan.

### **3. Prevent**

Preventing families and individuals from becoming homeless is the best possible outcome and therefore the first priority of this Strategy.

The benefits of successful prevention are significant. If a household is able to remain in their home the disruption and dislocation of having to leave is avoided and with it the negative impacts for the individual or family in terms of education, employment, health and social networks.

Our providers will continue to provide an accessible and responsive service which offers information and advice to people with housing problems which could lead to homelessness. Where the threat of homelessness is significant they will undertake detailed, targeted case work to provide personalised advice and assistance to avoid the loss of a home and this will be supported by flexible prevention funding to enable effective intervention.

Where the risk of homelessness is flagged up before crisis more opportunities are likely to exist to help the household avoid losing their home. We are seeing, however, an increase in 'homeless today' approaches which put the applicant straight into the 'relief' stage.

The updating of the Homelessness Review and consultation on the strategy provided some clear guidance on how we should be developing prevention in 2019.

- Work with other agencies to identify opportunities for earlier 'upstream' intervention with cases of concern being flagged early with a provider to maximise prevention opportunities.
- Work with partner agencies to identify the causes of the increase in 'homeless today' approaches and agree any joint responses which may reduce their number.
- Develop cross-agency plans to respond to each of the main causes of homelessness and focus resources on agreed solutions.
- Develop a clear understanding of the causes of repeat homelessness and policy responses to reduce it.
- Build on our good connections with private landlords to develop a better understanding of the drivers for loss of assured shorthold tenancies, which is a major cause of loss of settled accommodation to inform potential policy responses.
- provide clear and consistent messages to the public and the media about homelessness and what can be done to prevent it.
- Develop effective working relationships with the agencies which will be delivering the new advice contract from April 2019 notably Age UK and CAVA, together with other organisations notably CASB, which has the advice contract from DWP for the rollout of Universal Credit.

- Develop working relationships with a wider range of staff and volunteers who could play a role in delivering and emphasising messages to families and single people about approaching providers for advice early and not waiting till problems develop to crisis point. The emerging approach to localities working may provide opportunities for this.

#### **4. Relieve**

Where prevention has not been possible, or no opportunity existed, there is a duty to relieve homelessness by ensuring that appropriate accommodation is available to the household for at least 6 months.

Successful relief can avoid a number of negative impacts on households who may otherwise suffer detriment such as ending up in poorly managed or low quality housing, having to move away from employment and social support, and at worst, seeing families split up. The Homelessness Review describes how our providers meet these obligations.

Where the relief duty ends without a successful outcome and where a final offer has not been made to the applicant under the relief duty the main housing duty will apply. This requires that accommodation is made available for occupation for those who are in priority need and not intentionally homeless.

Most of the main housing duty is met by SCH allocating a council property to the applicant through Solihull Home Options. SCH will, however, continue to develop alternatives in the private sector through the Solihome scheme which will be used to support discharge of the prevention, relief and main housing duties.

Often households need temporary accommodation (TA) whilst providers work with them to investigate the relief and main duties or when they are owed the main duty and are awaiting an offer. The mainstay of the TA portfolio is flats within the council housing stock which are managed by SCH and to this is added a number of homes which SCH have leased from private owners and purpose built managed accommodation for single people and families.

The Homelessness Code is clear on the expectations on local authorities to meet accommodation needs from their own stock and private sources, and in turn there are expectations of SCH to:

- manage the TA portfolio flexibly (in terms of number and type of property) to meet the demand in a way which minimises the number of people referred to budget hotels, the use of which should be on an occasional short term basis only;
- deliver the Council's allocations scheme through Solihull Home Options in a way which gives reasonable preference to homeless households.

In addition to these main resources, St Basils and SIAS facilitate placements of single people into privately owned accommodation but often struggle to find places in Solihull and have to work with accommodation providers in Birmingham.

Worsening affordability in the Private Rented Sector due to the freeze in Local Housing Allowance rates and the higher than average rents in Solihull makes it more difficult for households to source alternative accommodation in this sector. This also creates homelessness through rent arrears and affordability issues. Single people, in particular, face a number of barriers to finding suitable and

affordable housing solutions in the Borough, with a lack of shared accommodation options being a barrier for those under the age of 35.

The updating of the Homelessness Review and consultation on the strategy provided some clear guidance on how we should be developing our strategy on relief in 2019.

- SCH to consider scope for ending the main housing duty in the private rental sector for selected cases and to continue to develop Solihome to support this as well as enabling discharge of the prevention and relief duties.
- Ensure prevention resources are focused on larger families to prevent the need to place them in TA which is at considerable cost and has a negative impact on the well-being of the individuals.
- The review of the housing allocations scheme to also address how Solihull Home Options operates in relation to the relief of homelessness, the prevention of rough sleeping and in meeting the needs of larger families in temporary accommodation.
- Consider the scope for using modular construction for temporary accommodation or permanent homes following interest from several providers.

The short supply of affordable accommodation in Solihull is an underlying factor in the level of homelessness in the Borough. Whilst SCH can ensure that existing properties are allocated in a way which affords reasonable preference to groups including homeless households, the number of lettings in a year is low historically.

There remains an unmet need for homes at social rent including family sized accommodation and this should inform the approach that the Council takes in negotiating the supply of affordable homes in new developments through its planning policies.

## **5. Support**

Key developments started in 2017/18 will be progressed and embedded, notably the implementation of housing first, the evaluation of future options for the Solihull Youth Hub, a single commissioning strategy for accommodation and support and the development of cross-agency arrangements through pathways.

The updating of the Homelessness Review and consultation on the strategy provided some clear guidance on how we should be developing our strategy on prevention in 2019.

Most particularly, there is a clear need for a sustained focus on rough sleeping with an ultimate goal of its elimination in Solihull, mirroring the ambition of the Government's Rough Sleeping Strategy. In 2019 the priorities for rough sleeping will be:

- to continue to support single people aged 25 and over to avoid homelessness as this group are most likely to become rough sleepers, this includes the development and facilitation of suitable accommodation options for this group of individuals;

- to continue to develop the support network for rough sleepers to ensure that they receive the immediate help they need and then advice and support to enable them to come off the street into accommodation through Housing First;
- to develop effective and reliable working arrangements between outreach and other support agencies including health and social care;
- to introduce an alternative giving scheme to encourage the public to donate to a charity rather than give money to people on the street most of whom are not homeless;
- to work with our partners, notably SIAS, Accord Fry, Solihull BID and Solihull Churches Action on Homelessness (SCAH) to devise new ways of meeting the immediate needs of those who go on the street and those few who decline accommodation and remain outdoors.

Meeting the immediate need for accommodation is often only part of what is required to help, or enable, the customer to overcome homelessness. There is often a clear need for after-support to sustain people in their new homes (or their current home if prevention was successful) and to help them to get support they need on employment, social support, health etc.

Providers should use strengths-based approaches to this with the emphasis on allowing or enabling the customer to do what they can for themselves with assistance on those aspects that they cannot.

This method will be followed in Housing First so that rough sleepers are provided with decent accommodation and support to stay off the street, tackle their other problems and stabilise their lives but in a way which develops the capacity and resilience of the customer.

St Basils have successfully done this with customers of the Solihull Youth Hub and are now seeking opportunities for step down accommodation where intensive support is no longer required.

Solihull has limited accommodation for those who require immediate access and support, but lacks accommodation options for those who have stabilised and are on their way to independence but still require some support. Specifically, the following needs to be provided:

- step-down provision for people who have been in supported accommodation but who are now semi-independent and do not need all of the support services any more;
- somewhere which offers affordable independent living space with minimal outreach support for those who are ready to commit to training and / or employment in order to become fully independent over time. (Existing supported provision is too expensive for those who are working or apprentices.);
- Suitable, targeted floating support options to ensure smooth transition of individuals into their own tenancies and a phased withdrawal to increase the likelihood of tenancy sustainment.

## 6. Connect

There is a host of potential problems involved when a household is threatened with homelessness, which is a time of stress and uncertainty even if prevention is successful. Where a home is lost and a household has to relocate to a new area this can cause a number of adverse issues, including the weakening or breakup of networks of family, friends and change of schools. It is also likely to limit personal, family and community development where household members are less likely to learn or engage in preventative health or invest in their communities

Prevention and relief of homelessness and support of vulnerable people is not just a housing issue: many parts of the council and partner agencies have an interest in minimising homelessness and dealing with it as efficiently and effectively as possible as it impacts on so many areas of people's lives, on communities and on their business. We need to fully develop the connections between homelessness and other policy areas at every level.

### Strategic Level

This strategy is a component of the Council's Strategic Housing Framework which should ensure that the planning for new accommodation is informed by homelessness demand as a part of wider demand for affordable housing.

Homelessness is mentioned in several service strategies and the JSNA, but there is scope to build on this. Given the negatives which homelessness produces it will be in the interests of several 'non-housing' agencies to 'think homelessness' when developing strategy and policy. This will increase the scope for policy convergence and joint service planning to minimise negative impacts.

This also links to the central focus of the West Midlands Mayor's Homelessness Taskforce which is to 'design out' homelessness from structures and practices by collaborating across departments, agencies and fields.

From the development of the Review and consultation it became apparent that there is a need for a strategic grouping to bring together providers (of advice, accommodation and support) to harness the experience and knowledge of key partners and to form a potentially effective reference group for the Solihull Together Board and other strategic and policy fora.

This may also prove to be a useful basis for of a local Homelessness Reduction Board should Government follow up its thinking in the Rough Sleeping Strategy and require their creation.

This should also encourage corporate / partnership commitment to co-producing service improvements and solutions and a readiness to develop and share knowledge and understanding of homelessness, how it impacts on services and communities. An initial meeting was held in early 2019 and it is recommended that this is now formalised.

### Policy / delivery level

In the main there are good policy and delivery links between agencies with joint working producing good outcomes for customers. There is always a need for more Intelligence and evidence based work, however, so we need to develop this further with partners in a targeted way, making and strengthening linkages, Improving mutual knowledge and understanding.

We need to engender 'ownership' of homelessness as an issue across agencies, not just in housing organisations and to develop an Integrated multi-agency approach to identify and respond to service demand. The more effectively we can work across organisations to support and assist people with range of problems the more we will reduce pressures in system further down the line.

There are several points of focus for this work:

- developing 'Pathways' provides a good basis for practical joint working with scope for service improvements which will make differences for people by ensuring that joint arrangements for information, advice, assistance and referral are effective;
- further development of prevention, relief and support for people who have been subject to domestic abuse;
- as stated under 'prevent' above we can also devise joint approaches on the main causes of homelessness. Solutions may require Partners to change aspects of existing policies and/or service delivery;
- Building on and extending the referral arrangements introduced for the Duty to Refer to other agencies voluntarily can facilitate appropriate referrals
- Ensuring earlier referrals as part of this process to enable timely and effective prevention work to take place (rather than waiting for a household to be in crisis before referring to Housing services);
- public awareness of homelessness and its impact on people and communities has grown considerably, so it will be important to develop a clear narrative for messaging the public on the extent of homelessness, rough sleeping and street begging and what the Council and partners are doing about it. The proposed introduction of an alternative giving scheme provides an opportunity for this.

The updating of the Homelessness Review and consultation on the strategy made clear that we need to improve our knowledge and understanding of the costs of homelessness across the system and our forecasting of demand.

An example of this is demand from adults of 50yrs who may be 'psychologically older', possibly having suffered abuse or being denied a care home place. This has not hitherto been identified as a rising issue but following this response to consultation investigation will be carried out with adult social care and adult safeguarding

An outstanding opportunity to address our level of knowledge and understanding exists in 2019 as capacity has been identified for a cross-agency exercise supported by the Solihull Observatory's Special Interest Intelligence Group (SIIG). This work can produce useful information for service planning and for the JSNA

The consultation also suggested that we could do more to be informed by people with 'lived experience' of homelessness as this would yield useful insights into how aspects of service are regarded by customers – what helps and what does not help. This can be approached through

partner agencies during 2019 and will be taken forward through the implementation of Housing First which will involve the role of peer mentors as part of the support package available.

The work with the Mayor's Homelessness Taskforce will continue in 2019 and now that Housing First is being delivered the focus should move on to other aspects of homelessness which are set out in the 'Five Asks' which have been endorsed by the WMCA who will ensure that the associated work is taken forward through the mainstream strategies of the Combined Authority.

## **Finance**

The Council will continue to support Solihull Community Housing and our other partners to provide high quality services with an emphasis on prevention, relief and support.

Service Level Agreements with SCH, St Basils and SIAS which will ensure that services are maintained.

These partners also have access to the Flexible Homelessness Support Grant (FHSG) through submission of business cases for investment to the Council. The availability of this resource has enabled service providers to react quickly to new spending priorities which continue to emerge after implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act

In 2019/20 the remaining FHSG will be allocated (subject to Cabinet Member approval) to maintaining the Solihull Youth Hub.

During 2017 and 2018 we have made progress in rationalising the funding of support services including the former Supporting People funded schemes. In 2019 this work will continue, paving the way for a Commissioning strategy for a single contracted service from 2020/21

We will be looking for possible new funding in the coming year, including Rough Sleeping Initiative Round 2 and a possible European Social Fund homelessness call.

## **Appendix - Policy Context**

### **Homelessness Legislation and Guidance**

The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 updated and widened the statutory responsibilities of local authorities on the prevention and relief of homelessness, adding to the extant Housing Acts.

The Act has led to a significant increase in of the number approaches by customers to providers and to the demand for temporary accommodation

The accompanying Homelessness Code of Guidance 2018 sets out very clearly Government's expectations of local authorities and other agencies on homelessness reviews and strategies

### **Rough Sleeping Strategy**

Government published its Rough Sleeping Strategy in 2018 with the ambition to halve the number of rough sleepers by 2022 and end rough sleeping by 2027. The strategy has three 'pillars' - prevention, intervention, recovery.

Whilst recognising that rough sleeping is the most extreme form of homelessness the strategy acknowledges that to fix it requires ensuring that the whole system is working to prevent all forms of homelessness. It makes the link with the wider housing market and in particular with the provision of sufficient affordable homes.

The strategy stresses the importance of working together across central and local government and with business and wider society to prevent and deal with rough sleeping. It focuses on commissioning services based on what works, support which is person-centred and strengths-based and which promotes choice. There is a commitment to develop social investment, which Solihull has seen the benefit of previously through the Fair Chance Fund social investment bond scheme

The strategy points out that many have a role to play in reducing and ending rough sleeping, not just local authorities. This includes communities, business, faith and voluntary groups. Solihull is fortunate to have Solihull Churches Action on Homelessness (SCAH) as a long-term partner which wishes to do more, and we are at the start of a new approach to working in communities which may lead to opportunities for asset based community work with homelessness as a focus or component

### **Regional policy**

The Mayor's commitment to tackling homelessness and rough sleeping has led to intensive but productive cross-authority work focused on the introduction of Housing First to provide immediate access to housing with support for entrenched rough sleepers This will be implemented in Solihull from spring 2019 with a Target of accommodating 27 people during 2019-2021

The Taskforce has also developed 'Change into Action' an alternative giving scheme by which an App enables the public to donate to charity rather than give to people on the street. This, or a local variant, will be introduced to Solihull in spring 2019.

Now the focus is expected broaden to the Five Asks / recommendations which have been endorsed by the WMCA. This continues the ‘designing out homelessness’ theme and requires authorities to look at their own arrangements as well as outwards to working with each other.

### Local policy

The Council has a vision where everyone has an equal chance to be healthier, happier, safer and prosperous and seeks to be an organisation that improves lives by delivering great services. The Council Plan 2014-20 has four priorities, 18 key programmes and seeks 12 outcomes.

Homelessness and its prevention are relevant to several of these, most notably:

Priority	Key programme	Outcome
Improve health and wellbeing	Solihull Together	Every child in Solihull has the best start in life
		People achieve and maintain independence and quality of life
		Healthy life expectancy is higher in all communities and the gap between highest and lowest is less
Build stronger communities	Developing and promoting an integrated approach to prevention and earlier intervention	Our communities are inclusive and everyone has access to local services and amenities
	Enabling communities to thrive – community development	We have safer and stronger communities
		We have empowered citizens actively involved and adding value to their communities
Managed Growth	Transforming support for those furthest from the employment market to enable them to access employment	Where people have stabilised their housing situation and are ready to improve their employability

Although not stated in the Plan, the prevention of homelessness is important to the ‘Deliver Value’ priority given the costs which accrue to Council and partner services when people lose their home.

The new Homelessness Strategy is one of six ‘priority policy areas’ of Solihull’s Strategic Housing Framework (SHF). This is a key programme in the Council Plan 2018-20

Given the impact which it has on individuals and families, homelessness is cited in several strategies on health and wellbeing, notably:

Birmingham and Solihull STP – Live Healthy, Live Happy	Both Birmingham and Solihull have stark inequalities in terms of the health and wealth of their citizens .....whilst improving, there is a relatively high rate of homelessness. there is a relatively small number of people who are stuck in a cycle of chronic and severe disadvantage.... with at least three markers of extreme disadvantage, including homelessness, severe mental illness, substance misuse, or having been in the justice system as offenders
Solihull Health and Wellbeing Strategy	Solihull’s homelessness acceptance rate remains high particularly amongst single people presenting with a range of vulnerabilities (most commonly mental health needs, violence and substance misuse). Need to develop integrated commissioning and delivery of homelessness prevention, rehousing and support especially for vulnerable/at risk groups and reduce numbers of people in TA
JSNA Summary Update 2017/18	An above average, albeit falling, level of homelessness ‘acceptances’ with the rate substantially above the England average. However, the number of acceptances in Solihull has fallen in each of the last two years. Strategic priorities include ‘Housing for vulnerable groups and reducing homelessness’
The Solihull Mental Health Needs Assessment	identifies a range of mental health risk factors including unemployment, homelessness and substance abuse with individuals in these groups, along with Looked After Children (LAC) and teenage mothers among those subject to higher prevalence rates for various types of mental ill health than the rest of the population