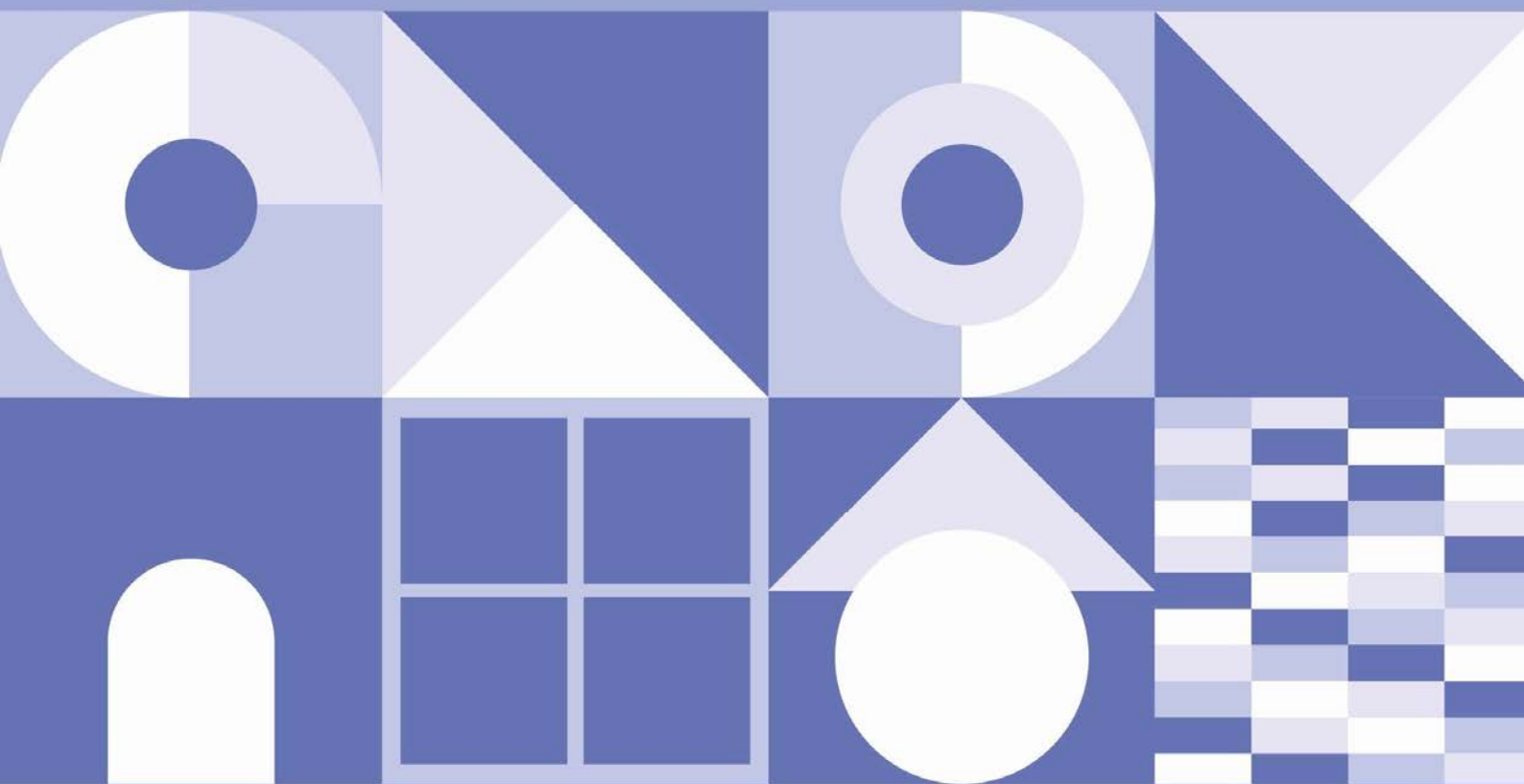


Solihull Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy

2024-2029



December 2023



Solihull
METROPOLITAN
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Foreword

As a local councillor, I know the impact that our residents face when they lose, or are at risk of losing, their home and we are proud to outline our ambitions to eradicate the harm caused by homelessness and rough sleeping.

Homelessness is complex and the ultimate exclusion. In Solihull we are committed to tackling homelessness and working collaboratively with our partners to do so, recognising we all have our role to play. We have made great progress under the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020-2023, including increasing the number of households that we prevented or relieved homelessness for (from 38% to 55%). We also recognise that homelessness impacts people in different ways, so we are proud of our track record of delivering bespoke solutions to meet differing needs including our rough sleeper accommodation and rent simplification model for young people.



The challenges around homelessness and rough sleeping are both local and national. Despite the positive progress we have made to tackle homelessness, people across Solihull continue to face this risk, especially as we see the legacy issues following Covid 19, plus international conflict and cost of living pressures taking effect. This strategy sets out how we will continue to build on our work, ensuring that no-one gets left behind.

Homelessness requires a partnership approach and our partners have been central to our work to tackle homelessness, our development of this strategy and our plans to implement it. The strategy has also been shaped by feedback from people who have experienced homelessness, who have told us what works and where we can do better.

We know that an affordable, settled home is the basis upon which people can thrive. I am passionate about the ambition, principles and priorities set out in this strategy to tackle homelessness and rough sleeping. I look forward to seeing these plans implemented, making a real and lasting difference to people and communities in Solihull.

Councillor Mark Parker

Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Housing

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Introduction

Homelessness is a complex issue which is impacted by a wide range of factors, of which housing is just one. Tackling homelessness requires a partnership and system-wide approach, ensuring that homeless households are not only supported to maintain or secure accommodation, but to sustain them and make them their homes.

This Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy sets out the Council's ambitions for the period 2024-2029 to:

“reduce homelessness and end rough sleeping, ensuring services provide the right support, at the right time.”

This aligns with the Council's vision that, “everyone in the borough is able to access housing at the point of need and has opportunities to create sustainable homes in thriving communities”.

This strategy follows our first Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy which covered the period 2020-2023. We are proud of the work we have done during that period, with sustained year on year improvements in preventing and relieving homelessness (from 38% in 2018/19 through to 55% in 2022/23). However, the development of this strategy for 2024-29 follows a period of sustained pressure around homelessness and rough sleeping nationally, with increases driven as a result of a combination of factors including challenges in accessing affordable housing, resettlement of households displaced due to international conflict, challenges in accessing the private rented sector and cost of living pressures.

Partnership working is central to tackling homelessness and achieving the ambition of this strategy. Solihull benefits from a broad range of committed and engaged partners across all sectors, including public, voluntary, business and faith sectors. During the period for the last strategy, partners have been unwavering in their commitment to tackling homelessness. Through the development of this strategy, partners have demonstrated their ongoing commitment, enthusiasm and engagement in being part of the next phase in our work to tackle homelessness, reducing the number of people who become homeless and supporting those who do.

This Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy has been developed at a time when homelessness is increasing both locally and nationally. In Solihull we pride ourselves on being “*small enough to care, but big enough to make a difference*” and this sits central to our ambitions around homelessness.

The strategy will be accompanied by an annual delivery plan which will allow for a flexible approach to delivering against the strategy and ensuring any changes in demand can be responded to in line with the overarching ambition.

In developing this strategy, we have completed a [Homelessness Needs Assessment](https://www.solihull.gov.uk/about-solihull/jsna/topic-based-needs-assessments) which you can read [here](https://www.solihull.gov.uk/about-solihull/jsna/topic-based-needs-assessments) (<https://www.solihull.gov.uk/about-solihull/jsna/topic-based-needs-assessments>) alongside our [Joint Strategic Needs Assessment](#). Through this assessment and feedback from partners and residents we have developed a strategy that identifies clear principles and priorities.

This strategy has been developed in line with the Council's statutory duties under the Homelessness Act 2002, and the Government's Rough Sleeping Strategy (2018).

Homelessness is damaging, exacerbates existing issues and support needs and impacts on health and wellbeing. Tackling homelessness therefore contributes to the success of many other priorities, plans and policies for Solihull including the Council Plan, Housing Strategy, Health and Wellbeing Strategy and Domestic Abuse Strategy.

The main audience for this strategy is the wide range of partners who the Council works alongside, elected members of Solihull Council and senior officers.

Developing the strategy

To reflect on the last strategy and develop this strategy, the Council completed a Homelessness Needs Assessment and engaged with partners and residents to ensure their experiences shaped the strategy and its focus.

Reflecting on the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020-2023

The last strategy identified five priorities for the Council and its partners:

1. Minimise rough sleeping
2. Prevent homelessness whenever we can
3. Relieve homelessness when it cannot be prevented
4. Support people to recover from homelessness
5. Connect services at the strategic, policy and operational levels

The strategy was developed following significant changes to the Council's homelessness duties following the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. The period covered by this strategy was also significantly impacted by factors unknown at the point the strategy was developed including the pandemic, international conflict in Ukraine, Afghanistan and Sudan and cost of living pressures.

As the life of the strategy saw the embedding of the new duties under the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, the key indicator of success in relation to this was the stepped improvement year on year in relation to preventing and relieving homelessness. This reflects year on year improvements from preventing homelessness for 38% of households in 2019/20, steadily increasing to 42% in 2020/21, 52% in 2021/22, and 55% in 2022/23. St Basils, our specialist youth homelessness provider, was able to prevent or relieve homelessness for three in four of young people (16-24) without dependants in 2022/23.

Other key successes included:

- Creating a Council Rough Sleeper Outreach Team to work across Solihull, who have increased awareness across Solihull and delivered deeper engagement with rough sleepers, ensuring everyone receives an offer of support and accommodation
- Introducing an 'Accommodation Finding' post responsible for ensuring that appropriate accommodation can be sourced to meet the individual, and often complex, needs of homeless individuals
- Introducing "Don't evict, let Solihome Assist" (DELSA) to promote early conversations with landlords to prevent avoidable evictions from the private rented sector
- Introducing a sanctuary scheme to prevent homelessness as a result of domestic abuse by adding additional safety measures into homes
- Investing in mediation training for staff delivering our homelessness service, ensuring that where it is safe for someone to remain in their home, parties are supported to explore this as an option
- Introducing a rent simplification model to support young people who secure employment to make a planned transition from supported accommodation into the private rented sector
- Creating an additional adult social worker post to work with adults who were vulnerably housed or rough sleeping and at risk of exploitation

Whilst the priorities set out in the existing strategy are still relevant, they have become embedded in our approach to homelessness. Through the continued work in developing our response to homelessness, we have identified key areas which require more focus from the Council and its partners so that we can continue our journey to ensure a robust response to homelessness, with the right support available at the right time.

Current context

We ensure that people who are homeless or rough sleeping, or at risk of homelessness and rough sleeping, are supported to secure and sustain settled accommodation through a wide range of partnerships, including with commissioned providers who deliver specialist support to meet local need. The existing initiatives span the wide range of needs of Solihull residents, from self-serve information online through to accommodation-based intensive support to enable people to recover from homelessness. We have a number of pathways to reflect the diverse needs of different groups. This includes specialist support for individuals at risk of homelessness, a dedicated Youth Hub for young people at risk of homelessness and a Rough Sleeper Outreach Team to ensure we can respond to the diverse needs of individuals who are, or are at risk of, rough sleeping.

A number of government schemes such as 'Everyone In', the boost to Universal Credit and the eviction ban put in place during Covid lockdowns have now ended, resulting in an increase in homelessness. Increasing private rental prices coupled with local housing allowances remaining frozen since 2020 have also added pressures in relation to homelessness. The recent announcement that Local Housing Allowance rates will increase is a welcome one which will have a significant impact on homelessness pressures, both in relation to reducing those at risk of homelessness and through increasing the number of homeless households who can find settled accommodation in the private rented sector.

The pressures around the cost of living are also impacting on homelessness, with households who previously may have been resilient to the risks of homelessness, requiring additional support to secure or sustain a tenancy. Preventing homelessness has been central to our cost-of-living response, with cross Council, cross sector working in relation to the Household Support Fund and Here2Help to ensure early identification and targeted support.

Assessing homelessness need

Homelessness has increased at a steady rate, with the number of households owed a homelessness duty rising on a quarterly basis since 2021. The top three reasons for homelessness in Solihull are consistent - being asked to leave by friends and family, followed by domestic abuse and private rented sector evictions.

During 2022/23 there was a significant increase in demand for homelessness services:

- There were 2,708 approaches, an increase of 23% from 2021/22
- Of these, 1,298 households required a full housing needs assessment
- 463 people approached Solihull Council as homeless on the day
- There were 420 approaches by young people (aged 16-24, with no dependants)
- During the single night count – which is an agreed night during the Autumn when all local authorities undertake a count of anyone rough sleeping in their area on behalf of the government – we counted eight people sleeping rough, double the four for the previous year

Through the homelessness needs assessment we have identified a number of factors that affect Solihull residents who are homeless:

- Four in five households were headed by someone aged 18-44
- 65% had an identified support need including 27% who had a history of mental health problems and 16% who were subject to domestic abuse
- A relatively high proportion of young people under 25 years owed a homeless duty (28% for Solihull v 20% for England)
- Proportionally more households owed a duty are single parents (29% for Solihull v 23% for England)
- More households had previously lived with family or friends (44% for Solihull v 35% for England) or in social rented housing (20% for Solihull v 11% for England), but fewer had lived in private rented housing (19% for Solihull v 27% for England)
- Violence or harassment was a far more frequent reason for why Solihull households had left their previous accommodation (31% for Solihull v 16% for England)

In addition to the homelessness needs assessment, the Solihull Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) considers many of the risk factors associated with homelessness. The evidence suggests that the Solihull population is less vulnerable to these health and wellbeing risk factors than the national population. However, Solihull is subject to significant sub-borough inequalities with health, employment, income and public safety outcomes among the north Solihull population lagging behind the rest of the borough.

Solihull has seen a sharp and sustained increase in homelessness approaches. As a result of this, the use of budget hotels has increased, with more families being placed there, for longer. We recognise the impact that the disruption associated with budget hotels causes and reducing our budget hotel use and improving the offer for homeless families is a key priority for the Council.

Lived experience

Central to the development of the strategy has been the voice of homeless households, ensuring that lived experience shapes our approach and ambition. The views of residents were sought through a range of focused engagement activity, from online surveys to telephone interviews to face-to-face sessions with the Council or partners. The strategy has been shaped by this feedback from households who were homeless or had experienced homelessness, including families in temporary accommodation, young people at risk of homelessness, Solihull's care experienced young people through OVOS, rough sleepers and families who are homeless as a result of domestic abuse.

Ben was living in one of the schemes in Solihull's youth pathway. He told us having a specialist offer for young people, including St Basil's Life Skills approach, was crucial. "When I was homeless, I couldn't stay in my [family] home any longer, I thought I could do it on my own. I was wrong. St Basils have given me the skills I need to go out into the big, bad world – and it's much bigger than I thought when I first left home but now, I know I have the skills to cope."*

**Name has been changed to protect the identity of this young person*

Key feedback included:

- The impact of getting the right support at the right time
- Challenges around lengthy stays in temporary accommodation, especially where this was outside of Solihull

- Young people need more than just a roof over their head, including the support to be tenancy-ready
- Challenges in securing affordable, large family homes
- Young people need a response that reflects the additional support to be tenancy-ready
- Challenges around affordable housing options for young people
- Many residents didn't understand the realities of the housing market in relation to the challenges around the supply-demand mismatch
- The importance of not having to tell your story twice

Working in partnership

Solihull benefits from a wide range of partners who work collaboratively to tackle homelessness and rough sleeping. The multi-agency homelessness forum is well attended, connecting partners to enable the early identification of issues, joined up problem solving and increase understanding around the role each can play. The partnership response in Solihull includes broad representation across the public, private, voluntary and faith sectors.

There has been a key focus on raising awareness around homelessness prevention, including how and where someone can get advice. This has included work across the criminal justice, health and education systems. This has led to significant increases in the number of referrals under the duty to refer for households who are homeless, or at risk of homelessness, ensuring they can get the right advice and support at the right time.

Solihull BID is a key partner in Solihull's response to homelessness, both through early identification of rough sleepers and joint working with the Council's rough sleeper outreach team. They are also a member of Change into Action Solihull, where they have supported the embedding of Change into Action as an alternative giving model, designed to divert donations away from those begging and into enabling individuals to make lasting changes as they settle into accommodation. Each year their Jingle Bell Jog raises awareness of and money for Change into Action.

Solihull is an active member of the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) Homelessness Taskforce through which it engages with local authority partners and other key stakeholders to understand themes and trends in homelessness, working collaboratively to tackle them. The development of the strategy is consistent with the aims of the taskforce and the draft strategy will be shared with the Taskforce as part of consultation.

Through the Rough Sleeper Taskforce, the Council is part of a WMCA early adopter project on defining homelessness with the Centre of Homelessness Impact (CHI). CHI are working on defining rough sleeping and ensuring that where rough sleeping does occur it is rare, brief, and non-reoccurring. Through a variety of indicators, it is allowing us to understand the causes and circumstances that lead people to rough sleeping, and identify 'at risk of rough sleeping' at an early stage e.g. no family contacts. This work is central to our future plans around ending rough sleeping.

The work done to develop the strategy has indicated four principles and seven priority focus areas which will shape our future approach to policy, process and commissioning.

Principles

Underpinning the strategy will be the following four principles:

- Partnership
- Prevention
- Intelligence led
- Improving life chances and health outcomes

Tackling homelessness requires a **partnership** approach ensuring that the needs of households who are homeless, or threatened with homelessness, are approached holistically. We will continue working together to raise awareness around homelessness and to prevent and respond to homelessness.

We recognise that partnerships are the key to preventing and relieving homelessness and to supporting people who are either homeless or facing homelessness. The causes of homelessness are multiple and complex and require solutions which reflect this.

We will continue to engage across our public, business, voluntary and faith sectors, recognising the importance of each to coordinate a comprehensive approach to homelessness prevention that delivers sustainable outcomes for residents in Solihull. We will continue to strengthen our existing partnerships, both with other services in the Council and with external organisations, as well as building new working relationships. To underpin our approach, we will develop a Solihull Homelessness Charter which we will ask our partners and businesses to sign up to.

Prevention will be the golden thread running through the strategy, recognising that this is in the best interests of the household and offers the best value for money for the Council and partners. In particular, resources need to be invested in early help and prevention across a range of partner services to encourage referrals at the earliest possible stage and to further build upon the duty to refer and partnership working. This is particularly relevant in light of the challenges around the legacy of Covid 19 and the cost-of-living pressures which have the potential to increase homelessness due to the links around grief, financial resilience, mental health and substance misuse.

Working across homelessness and public health, we jointly commission a specialist provider, Solihull Integrated Addiction Services, to provide an advice and support service for adults with substance misuse issues who are vulnerably housed. This includes drop in sessions at libraries across Solihull, helping people to get timely advice and avoid homelessness and support for people to settle into their homes and access Council services, such as discretionary housing payments.

Our approach will be **intelligence-led**, building on the work done through the homelessness needs assessment, with dashboards covering each of the priority areas, tracking trends and monitoring the impact of the implementation of the strategy. Focusing on the data we will assess any new and emerging issues and ensure we understand how the Solihull picture compares regionally and nationally, ensuring our

approach remains focussed on making a difference to our residents. Recognising that homelessness is not random, we will overlay this with wider factors to ensure that we have a holistic approach which enables us to direct our resources to provide support at the earliest stage possible. This will be supported by the experiences of people who have experienced homelessness, ensuring our approach is always shaped by their experiences and feedback around what works and what doesn't.

Recognising homelessness as part of a wider system of inequalities, we will seek **to improve life chances and health outcomes**, through our partnership approach to tackling homelessness and joining systems up. This will include raising awareness of the impact of homelessness on health and wellbeing outcomes, including how homelessness can exacerbate existing problems, issues and support needs, particularly in relation to mental health.

Our response will include specific initiatives around health and wellbeing for homeless households as well as ensuring our approach to preventing homelessness and supporting households into settled, sustainable accommodation provides a basis upon which they can thrive.

Through joint working with the NHS Health Inequalities Team, the Rough Sleeper Outreach Team organised a series of vaccination events for those who were, or at risk of, rough sleeping at temporary accommodation schemes and at Solihull Link. This ensured that those who wanted to, could receive their Covid 19 vaccination and/or get specialist health advice.

Priorities

In assessing the current homelessness need, a series of emerging priorities have been determined and confirmed through the work with stakeholders and residents. In addition to increasing number of households approaching the Council as homeless, there is an increase in the complexity and range of needs of the people who are homeless, which requires a targeted response. Whilst each priority focuses on a specific area, there are many links between the areas and interventions focused in one area, which will contribute to Solihull achieving its ambitions in another.

The priorities are well evidenced as core issues affecting homelessness in Solihull. Developing a targeted approach to tackle these will support us in achieving our ambition of preventing homelessness. By seeking to address underlying issues alongside improving the responses to homelessness when it occurs, we aim to deliver a systems change to reduce the long-term impacts of homelessness.

Homeless families and insecure accommodation

There are many factors which place homeless families as a priority focus for Solihull. These include the recognition of the importance of a stable home in which families can thrive. Improving outcomes for homeless families is central to the Council's ambitions for children and young people and improving life chances and health outcomes.

In assessing homeless need, we have identified a number of key trends relating to families including:

- Having dependent children is the most common reason for a Solihull household being in priority need. This accounts for 63.9% of all cases in 2022/23 (compared to 54% nationally) and is the main reason during 2018-2023
- There are significant links between families fleeing domestic abuse and families in temporary accommodation
- The use of temporary accommodation in Solihull is a less common solution to homelessness than across England but is increasing
- Where Solihull households were in temporary accommodation, the majority were in the Council's own stock or in private sector housing leased by the Council
- Increasing homelessness coupled with new arrivals due to international conflict has caused Solihull to be more reliant on both bed & breakfast style accommodation and nightly rate providers. These are costly, mainly outside of Solihull and are not always a good experience for households. This is particularly the case with hotel placements, due to the challenges for families being moved multiple times, the lack of kitchen and laundry facilities and their location in neighbouring areas.

Due to the supply and demand mismatch of larger, social homes, many larger families remain in temporary accommodation for prolonged periods of time. Improving access to the private rented sector will be key to supporting families into settled accommodation. The proposed changes in the Renters Reform Bill coupled with the increase in local housing allowance rates announced in the Autumn statement will further enable families to secure and sustain private rented properties. In addition, we will ensure the Council's Allocation Scheme adequately prioritises homeless families.

We have undertaken significant work to increase our temporary accommodation portfolio to reduce the reliance on budget hotels. This included the Council purchasing two supported housing schemes, ensuring that these sixteen flats remained in use for homeless young families. With increasing homelessness demand, we have continued to rely on them as part of our homelessness response. We will continue to work on diversifying our temporary accommodation portfolio. Alongside this, we will reduce the number of families who need it through early intervention and increasing the number of move on options available to families.

As part of our work to transform our approach to temporary accommodation, reduce costs, shorten the duration of placements and reduce reliance on budget hotels and temporary accommodation outside of Solihull, we will support residents who are homeless or threatened with homelessness, to seek stable accommodation in tenures other than social housing.

The Council will prioritise efforts to prevent the trauma of homelessness through early help by working to keep households in their homes, or giving people more control over the timing and nature of their move where possible and appropriate. Where that isn't possible, the Council will seek to ensure that temporary accommodation placements are time limited solutions, recognising the detrimental impact they can have on families. The Council will aim to reduce use of temporary accommodation, seeking to eradicate budget hotel use, shifting our service focus from reactive short-term stability towards long-term proactive prevention.

This priority will focus on:

- Reducing the number of families being threatened with homelessness or becoming homeless
- Where homelessness cannot be avoided, stays in temporary accommodation are time limited and placements reflect the needs of the family
- Ensuring that there is targeted support for families to recover from homelessness and to secure and sustain settled accommodation

This priority will link heavily to our focus on domestic abuse and housing options, particularly in relation to the private rented sector.

To deliver against this priority we will:

- Review the pathway for homeless families
- Undertake a review of our existing suite of temporary accommodation options with a particular focus on reducing the use of hotels and nightly rate provision
- Develop a new temporary accommodation strategy, reducing the length of stay
- Support families living in temporary accommodation to access the private rented sector
- Develop a Solihull-wide communications strategy to raise awareness around homeless families, ensuring that families get timely advice and support to prevent homelessness

Young people

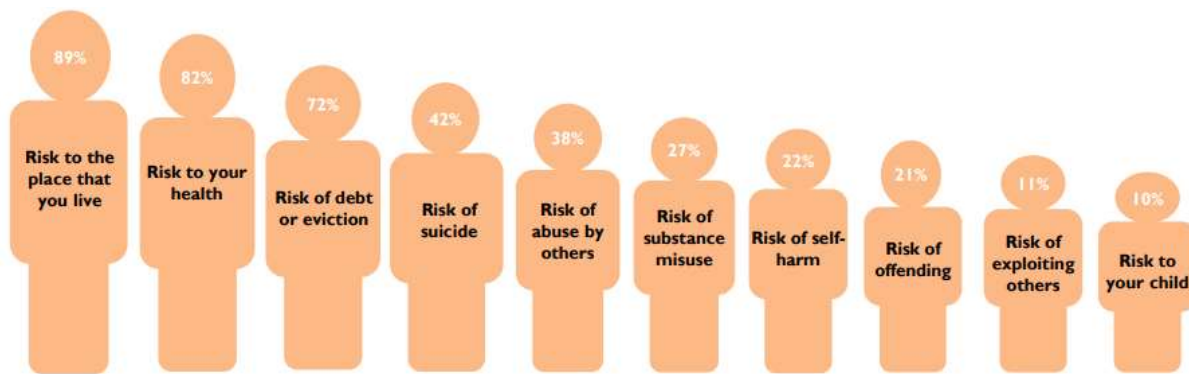
Youth homelessness severely affects the health, wellbeing and development of vulnerable young people at a critical time in their transition to independence. Young people can be at greater risk of homelessness due to very specific factors including affordability challenges, their lack of experience, lack of support and risks of exploitation. There is strong evidence that links youth homelessness with exclusion later in life, highlighting the importance of getting the response right, first time.

The Council has invested in a specialist youth hub and pathway, providing advice, assistance and accommodation to young people. This has delivered significant results, with homelessness being prevented or relieved for three in four young people in 2022/23. The Council and St Basils work collaboratively to respond to issues affecting young people. This led the introduction of a rent simplification model, ensuring living in supported accommodation didn't become a barrier to securing employment. There has been further investment in an early intervention offer, with a dedicated worker engaging with schools, colleges and youth groups to increase awareness amongst young people around homelessness and housing options. This pilot will be evaluated and will shape the recommissioning of our youth homelessness offer. Our approach to youth homelessness will be a core part of our cross-Council, cross-sector offer to holistically meet the needs of young people.

In assessing homeless need, we have identified a number of key trends relating to young people, including:

- Four in five homeless households in Solihull were headed by someone aged 18-44
- Solihull has a relatively high proportion of young people under 25 years owed a homeless duty (28% in Solihull v 20% in England)
- Young people find it more difficult to secure affordable housing, especially where they are in receipt of benefits and only eligible for the shared room rate
- Every year approximately 400 young people approach us as homeless / at risk of homelessness
- Care experienced young people were over-represented in homelessness presentations (13% of approaches compared to 0.7% of the Solihull population)
- The main reason young people approach is due to family breakdown
- The number of young people owed a prevention duty (those at risk of homeless) has steadily increased over the last three years but the number of young people who are actually homeless has decreased (from 169 in 2020/22 to 65 in 2022/23)
- The number of young people with a risk to health has increased from 67% in 2020/21 to 82% in 2022/23. The number with three or more support needs increased from 9% to 11%

Risks faced by young people who were homeless:



The approach to youth homelessness is a shared priority between the Council's Housing and Childrens Services teams. The teams work collaboratively with partners to ensure an integrated approach which provides young people with the right accommodation and support to keep them safe and enable them to thrive.

As part of the Youth Pathway, we invest in a crash pad, delivered by St Basils. This short-term assessment bed provides a safe space for a young person to stay while their needs can be assessed. This ensures that they aren't left with no alternative but to rough sleep or stay in an unsafe situation.

The most common reason young people approach as homeless is due to family breakdown. Where it is safe and appropriate to do so, the primary focus is on reunification and the Solihull Youth Hub has a strong track record of successfully mediating between young people and their families, enabling their return home.

As part of our specialist youth offer, Solihull benefits from a Youth Pathway which provides dedicated accommodation for young people. This provides both emergency accommodation and step-down accommodation options. We will explore additional opportunities to increase the options available to young people.

Our approach to young people includes our response to homeless 16-17-year-olds. Solihull's joint working protocol has recently been revised to ensure that 16 and 17-year-olds receive quality advice around their options, including access to advocacy. We will monitor the implementation of this protocol including reviewing the impact of the new Ofsted registration regime, which came into force in Autumn 2023, and reflecting on the Children's Commissioner's report on ['Homeless 16- and 17-year-olds in need of care'](#) published in November 2023.

A specific and relevant homelessness risk factor in Solihull is the number of young people currently in or who have recently left the care system. As Corporate Parent, we have a responsibility to ensure our young people leaving care are supported to secure and sustain suitable accommodation. In addition to ensuring there is a robust transition support offer, we will implement measures to ensure that the risks of homelessness are identified early and bespoke initiatives to ensure care-experienced young people aren't made homeless through avoidable factors.

Through our new Children's and Housing Group we will develop the processes, policies and commissioning arrangements to support our ambitions under this priority.

This priority will focus on:

- Raising awareness amongst young people around housing options and homelessness
- Increasing housing options available for young people, including in the private rented sector
- Ensuring 16 and 17-year-olds get quality advice, support and accommodation to meet their needs
- Ensuring that care-experienced young people are supported to secure sustainable, settled accommodation to reduce the risk of homelessness

To deliver against this priority we will:

- Embed these ambitions in the recommissioning of our youth homelessness offer
- Review our Care Leaver Protocol and undertake regular evaluations to measure its effectiveness
- Review the implementation of our 16–17-year-old protocol, including the broader impact of national changes
- Evaluate and embed an early intervention offer to improve awareness amongst young people
- Increase access to affordable housing available for young people

Housing options

This priority focuses on making best use of the private rented and supported housing sectors in tackling homelessness. It ensures individuals and families have access to sustainable and settled housing, creating stability for them and the wider community in which they live. This links to the Council's ambitions in the Housing Strategy governing the period 2023-2032.

Social rented housing is the most common accommodation secured by homeless households owed a prevention or relief duty. Nationally, there is an undersupply of affordable housing. In Solihull over 1,600 new affordable homes were built from April 2015 to March 2023, 62% of which were for rent, resulting in overall net increase of social rented housing. But while Solihull's record on affordable housing delivery is positive, it will not be possible for all homeless households to secure a social rented home.

As part of the wider response to homelessness, and in addition to the work to increase the supply of affordable housing, there needs to be greater accessibility to other housing options including private rented and supported housing. This will also include developing relationships with landlords to enable early identification of homelessness.

Private rented sector

Solihull's private rented sector is unaffordable to many. This has been exacerbated by local housing allowances remaining frozen at the 2020 rates while rents have continued to rise. From 2018-2023, rents have risen by 12% nationally. The government announcement that the freeze will be lifted is welcome and will mean the private rented sector is a sustainable option for many more households, including families.

Low supply and high demand are creating additional challenges for households securing rented accommodation, with landlords prioritising joint income households over single parents, low-income households or those in receipt of benefits.

In addition to demand and affordability concerns, refugees, resettling communities and low-income households experience additional challenges when securing private rented sector tenancies as they are less likely to have a UK guarantor.

The proposals within the [Renters Reform Bill](#) are welcome and represent a significant change to the regulation of the private rented sector. The current proposals include ending no fault evictions, removing

the instability that arises from fixed term tenancies, greater regulation around rent increases, greater rights around renting with pets and outlawing blanket bans on renters in receipt of benefits or with children. The collective measures would serve to completely transform private renting as a long term, stable choice. We will follow the implementation of these measures both as the bill becomes law and enacted, noting the recent announcements regarding the necessary revisions to the court system to enable these changes.

Research from autumn 2022 has shown one in twelve private renters in England – equivalent to 941,000 people – are currently under threat of eviction. A quarter of private renters (2.8 million people) are struggling to pay rent, an increase of 24% from autumn 2021. Where households get into difficulties, we want to ensure the right support is available early to ensure homelessness is prevented where possible.

Making best use of the private rented sector is key to the ambitions of this strategy, ensuring that households are supported to access the private rented sector and landlords are supported when tenancies are at risk, thereby helping to avoid homelessness.

Supported housing

Quality supported housing is a key option that enables people with additional needs to thrive. This includes people who are recovering from homelessness. In line with the commitments under the housing strategy, we will continue to work with trusted partners to ensure that we can access quality, safe, supported housing which provides individuals with the skills and confidence to sustain a tenancy and live independently.

Rent simplification

We identified a gap around young people who were living in supported accommodation and seeking employment. Upon securing employment, they were unable to afford their supported rent, which had previously been paid by benefits. We introduced the rent simplification model to meet the shortfall between what they could afford and their rent. This enables them to settle into their role and move into more affordable accommodation in a planned transition, avoiding the instability of lots of change at once and ensuring support at that critical point as they settle into their new role.

We are pleased that this has been adopted as a proof of concept by DWP, attracting £4.7 million worth of funding to roll out across the West Midlands region.

We are now exploring other groups who might benefit from this approach, including refugees.

In some cases, the rent and support charges become a barrier to people securing employment and progressing to the next stage of their recovery from homelessness. We will implement initiatives to support individuals to overcome this, ensuring they do not become trapped in supported housing with no means of moving on. We will do this by ensuring there are appropriate move on options for accommodation and through broadening our rent simplification model for those who need it most.

Nationally, homelessness has increased in the over 55s. Solihull benefits from a broad range of housing for older people and we will ensure that promoting age-restricted housing forms a central part of the homelessness assessment process for eligible applicants.

This priority will focus on:

- Increasing awareness around the variety of housing options available to meet differing needs
- Maximising homelessness prevention and relief in the private rented sector

- Ensuring supported housing provides a basis for an individual to recover from homelessness, with pathways to move into independent accommodation where appropriate

To deliver against this priority we will:

- Further develop our positive working relationships with private sector and supported housing landlords
- Develop resources to support households to understand the various housing options available to them
- Introduce initiatives to support landlords and tenants to understand their roles and responsibilities
- Ensure that individuals and families that need it, are supported to settle into their new homes

Mental health

Poor mental health is both a cause and consequence of homelessness. Housing insecurity and homelessness can exacerbate or cause mental health problems. Nationally, 45% of people experiencing homelessness have been diagnosed with a mental health issue. This rises to eight out of ten people who are sleeping rough.

In Solihull, one in four households owed a prevention or relief duty have a history of mental health issues. At 25%, this is higher than the proportion of the Solihull population aged 16 and over who have a common mental health disorder (15%). Increasing numbers of young people who approach as homeless have mental health issues which are further exacerbated by the risk of, or experience of, being homeless.

Through our existing homelessness support initiatives, we have identified a gap in relation to meeting the needs of individuals who are suffering from a mental illness or impairment.

The Council has a strong history of developing targeted specialist services to meet residents' needs. Through the commissioning strategy, we will explore how to meet this need, working collaboratively cross Council and with health partners, ensuring that services adopt a joined-up approach to support households to sustain accommodation, recover from homelessness and promote their wellbeing.

This priority will focus on:

- Preventing homelessness and where possible, minimising the impact on a person's mental health
- Ensuring individuals who are vulnerably housed are supported
- Increasing awareness amongst health practitioners of the duty to refer, the different housing and homelessness pathways and the breadth of support available to an individual who is homeless, or at risk of homelessness

Poor mental health can impact anyone and be exacerbated by homelessness and lack of settled housing. As a result, this priority cuts across all other priorities within the strategy.

To deliver against this priority we will:

- Review the housing and homelessness pathways for people with mental ill-health and develop the range of accommodation available to people with different levels of support needs
- Ensure there is specialist support for people with poor mental health who are, or at risk of, homelessness
- Develop a homelessness toolkit for health practitioners, outlining the support on offer and how to access it

Rough sleepers

Solihull's rough sleeper numbers have traditionally been low however a combination of external factors plus the proactive early morning outreach delivered by the Council's rough sleeper outreach team have seen our rough sleeper numbers increasing. On average in 2023/24, the encountered sixteen individuals each month, with an average of four of those being new rough sleepers. Through promoting awareness around rough sleepers, the support on offer and how to make a Streetlink report, there has been a significant increase in reports, climbing from 77 to 143 in a twelve-month period. This community and partner-led intelligence is key to ensuring a swift response where someone is rough sleeping, ensuring they get the right support at the right time.

The Council has developed a rough sleeper pathway, delivered by the rough sleeper team, to realise the Council's ambition to ensure that any Solihull resident who is rough sleeping or at risk of rough sleeping is

Many individuals sleeping rough are considered to be experiencing multiple disadvantages. The key areas are identified as homelessness, mental health, substance misuse or offending. Support for people facing multiple disadvantages can often feel fragmented and uncoordinated.

The Council invested in a dedicated social worker to ensure individuals who were, or at risk of, rough sleeping could be assessed in a timely manner by someone who understood the challenges they may be experiencing and to reduce any risks of exploitation they may be facing.

supported to secure and sustain accommodation. Where individuals travel into Solihull, we will support them to engage with the right support from their area of local connection.

During the government's "Everyone In" initiative during the pandemic, there was demonstrable evidence around the importance of accommodation with wraparound support to enable individuals to make the transition from the streets into settled accommodation. This sits at the heart of the Rough Sleeper pathway and the Council has invested in a number of additional housing options for rough sleepers. This includes six flats in the rough sleeper accommodation programmes, with one of Solihull's registered provider partners, Citizen, purchasing a further three flats. The individuals who have lived in these properties have been provided with wrap around support under the Housing First and Rough Sleeper Accommodation programmes.

The work around preventing and ending rough sleeping in Solihull benefits from a wide partnership response. In addition to working collaboratively with individuals, partners meet to discuss trends and complex issues in the Rough Sleeping Action Group and refer cases to the Complex Needs Panel. Regional leads share information and develop cohesive, joined up approaches through the West Midlands Combined Authority Rough Sleeping Taskforce. The partnership extends into the business sector where the team has established relationships and pathways with HSBC to ensure individuals with no fixed abode can access banking services.

This strategy shares the national commitment to end rough sleeping and desire to build on the work done through the new team and the Housing First Pilot and Rough Sleeper Accommodation Programme, evaluating learning and using it to shape the ongoing Solihull approach. Our ambitions around ending rough sleeping are in line with the Government's [Ending rough sleeping for good](#) strategy.

We share the strategy position in relation to the importance of health services in tackling rough sleeping because of the high proportion of rough sleepers who suffer from mental ill-health, physical ill-health and addiction issues, the challenges rough sleepers face in accessing mainstream health services and the adverse health outcomes of sleeping rough including reduced life expectancy. Increasing accessibility to health services has been a key focus of the rough sleeper team and this will continue throughout the life of this strategy.

As a member of the Centre for Homelessness Institute's pilot on ending rough sleeping for good, we want rough sleeping to be brief, rare and non-recurring.

Early identification and response to individuals at risk of rough sleeping sits centrally to this.

Our services and partnership approach are designed to support this – an example in practice was a PCSO identifying a young person who had been made homeless that day, making immediate contact with the Rough Sleeper Team who were able to support the young person into the crash pad ensuring they didn't rough sleep whilst their housing options were assessed.

This priority will focus on:

- Ensuring there is specialist support for individuals who are, or at risk of, rough sleeping, from removing the risk through to crisis response when someone is rough sleeping
- Increasing awareness across all sectors and the wider community to ensure anyone who is rough sleeping is quickly identified and receives the right support, meaning they don't have to spend a second night out
- Improving health outcomes for individuals who are, or at risk of, rough sleeping

To deliver against this priority we will:

- Develop a local housing and support model, embedding the learning from the Housing First Pilot and ensuring individuals are supported to secure and sustain accommodation
- Implement a programme of health initiatives to ensure individuals who are, or are at risk of, rough sleeping have access to health care, information and guidance
- Introduce initiatives to prevent homelessness for those groups who are at greater risk of rough sleeping, including care leavers and individuals with no recourse to public funds
- Develop a communications campaign to increase awareness around individuals who are, or at risk of rough sleeping, what support is in place and how to report concerns about an individual to ensure they get that support

Domestic abuse

Domestic abuse is consistently within the top three reasons for homelessness in Solihull. Domestic abuse figures in Solihull are much higher than the national average. It consistently accounts for around 12% of all homelessness approaches, which exceeds local and national trends, and amounted to 326 approaches of 2,708 in 22/23. In 2020, 19% of households were owed a homeless duty due to domestic abuse which was 9% higher than the national average and 6% higher than the regional average. There has been an increase

in rates across all wards in the borough, but levels are highest in the north of the borough. Homelessness as a result of violence accounts for double the approaches in Solihull (31%) compared to nationally (16%).

As the ability to prevent homelessness can be more limited, a much higher proportion of households fleeing abuse are placed in temporary accommodation where they can stay for extended periods, while they wait for a property that is the right size in an area where they will be safe. This focus aligns with the Council priority to strengthen our multi-agency responses for adults and children affected by domestic abuse.

The new Domestic Abuse Act 2021 has supported local authorities to develop the support available for those experiencing domestic abuse. We will continue to develop our housing options for those experiencing domestic abuse, including providing domestic abuse safe accommodation.

Where it is safe and appropriate to do so, we want to ensure people and families are supported to stay in their homes, surrounded by their support networks. Solihull Community Housing is undertaking a programme of improvements to strengthen their arrangements around domestic abuse and attain accreditation under the Domestic Abuse and Housing Alliance, which is the UK benchmark for how housing providers should respond to domestic abuse.

Through a Sanctuary Scheme, households are supported to stay safe in their homes and avoid homelessness through the installation of additional security measures.

Where it is not safe for someone to remain, we want to ensure that the suite of housing options, both temporary and settled, meet the wide range of needs of people and families and that unsuitable housing options are never a driver for someone to return to an unsafe situation.

Through engagement with stakeholders and residents, they have highlighted the reliance on securing social housing as an affordable, sustainable option; the challenges in prolonged stays in temporary accommodation and refuge, especially in relation to children and maintaining school attendance; and issues with accessing the private rented sector. Due to the supply and demand mismatch, we will need to change perceptions around social housing being the only option. This will include how settled, sustainable accommodation can be secured in the private rented sector including raising awareness around the initiatives to support families to secure private rented properties and the impact of the increased local housing allowance and the Renters Reform Bill changes in ensuring private rented properties provide settled housing.

People with lived experience of being homeless due to domestic abuse have also shared feedback in relation to their experience of being homeless, highlighting a lack of awareness and understanding around the support on offer and how to access it and concerns about the compassion and understanding demonstrated by staff in understanding some of the additional challenges they faced. Both of these points will be central to our work in this area.

This priority will focus on:

- Upstreaming interventions to ensure the right support is available as early as possible
- Ensuring that survivors of domestic abuse and their families have access to safe and secure housing that meets their needs
- Improving the experience of people and families who are homeless, or threatened with homelessness due to domestic abuse

- Raising awareness around the support on offer and how people can access it
- Increasing the number of households who are supported to move on into the private sector
- Reducing the risk of individuals returning to unsafe situations due to limited housing options

This work will also link closely to the priorities around housing options and families in temporary accommodation.

To deliver against this priority we will:

- Review our existing pathway, reflecting the additional considerations for families who are homeless as a result of domestic abuse
- Implement a case review process to enable key stakeholders to reflect on homelessness cases from the individual's or family's perspective
- Increase our safe accommodation portfolio
- Implement a communications campaign to increase awareness
- Ensure domestic abuse commissioning reflects homelessness needs and pressures
- Implement a domestic abuse dashboard to enable us to monitor trends and the impact of our work in this area

Ex offenders

People with an offending background face significant barriers in finding suitable and sustainable longer accommodation. 50% of individuals sleeping rough in Solihull across 21/22 and 22/23 had an offending background. This also includes those who have spent a period in prison at one time. Supporting ex-offenders to secure sustainable accommodation reduces the risks of reoffending and provides a stable basis for an individual to continue their rehabilitation journey, including accessing support in relation to mental health and substance misuse issues and enabling an individual to rebuild damaged relationships with families and friends.

Solihull has a specialist housing provision for ex-offenders. This supported accommodation provides for individuals to receive the support they need to transition following their release from prison and to secure sustainable, settled accommodation and move on in a planned way, reducing the risk of homelessness and reoffending.

This priority links to our commitments under Solihull's Reducing Reoffending Strategy, including reviewing our existing service provision for housing and homelessness in relation to ex-offenders. It also assesses the impact of our specialist housing and developing actions to overcome any barriers currently faced by ex-offenders and those who support them, in preventing homelessness and accessing housing. Through this work we have introduced a new process to ensure we are capturing better data around ex-offenders who are homeless or threatened with homelessness and we will evaluate the impact of these changes.

This priority will focus on:

- Ensuring a risk-led approach to accommodation for Solihull residents exiting custody, avoiding homelessness and supporting rehabilitation
- Improving links around prison release planning to ensure individuals have accommodation to move to
- Ensuring we maximise any funding opportunities in relation to providing specialist services

To deliver against this priority we will:

- Evaluate the newly implemented pathway
- Work with the prison service to ensure a duty to refer is completed as part of the release planning process

Veterans

The Council is invested in ensuring its offer for our armed forces community is robust and reflects the sacrifices made by those who serve. At the time of the 2021 Census:

- There were 5,851 veterans living in Solihull, equating to 3.4% of the 16+ population. People who are currently serving are additional
- These veterans were living across 5,607 households. 81% of these households are owner occupied (4,558 households), 11% are social rented (610 households) and 8% are private rented (439 households). By comparison to non-veteran households, owner occupation is more common while both forms of renting are less common
- An average of 50 households which include a veteran approach each year for homelessness advice and assistance. This equates to around 2% of all approaches

Whilst there is often a perception that veterans are over-represented in homelessness, this is not the case. However, there are specific risk factors related to veterans which we want to be in a position to respond to, ensuring homelessness is prevented where possible and the response is tailored to their needs where it cannot be prevented.

We will develop a bespoke approach to ensure that veterans are identified and supported to access housing and avoid homelessness, reflecting that:

- Veterans may find it hard to engage with and trust professionals who have no military background and haven't shared or have an awareness of the unique experiences, circumstances and situations that members of the armed forces encounter.
- Veterans can find themselves excluded from mainstream service provision because their behaviour does not align with the 'normal' client base.
- Veterans wait longer on average than others before asking for help.
- An average of 50 households which include a veteran approach each year for homelessness advice and assistance. This equates to around 2% of all approaches

We have an existing pathway which focuses on individuals who are leaving the force – we will broaden our offer to ensure that veterans receive a tailored service at any point they are homeless or threatened with homelessness.

Solihull benefits from a wide range of partners who support the armed forces community, including the Royal British Legion and Soldiers, Sailors and Airmen's Families Association. Both agencies provide homelessness-related advice including support with housing and financial issues for veterans and serving members. We will work collaboratively with them to develop our response and ensure they are able to support them to link into Solihull pathways and initiatives to deliver the right outcomes at the right time.

This priority will focus on:

- Ensuring that there is a bespoke approach to veterans who are, or at risk of, homelessness
- Reducing the number of veterans who become homeless by ensuring timely advice and interventions to prevent homelessness

To deliver against this priority we will:

- Ensure that veterans and specialist agencies supporting them are able to access quality, timely information and advice to prevent homelessness
- Ensure that our homelessness service reflects the additional needs of veterans

Implementing the strategy

Delivery

To realise the ambitions of this strategy, an annual delivery plan will be developed. This will be shaped by partners through the multi-agency homelessness forum, whilst taking account of local, regional and national changes and pressures. As identified throughout this strategy, tackling homelessness requires a partnership approach and all key partners will have a role to play in progressing the identified actions under the delivery plan.

The Council's housing team will be responsible for the coordination and management of the strategy and overseeing the activity contained within it. We will conduct an annual homelessness review to reflect on progress against the strategy and the current context in relation to homelessness which will be made available on the Council's website.

Governance, monitoring and review

The following arrangements will apply to the oversight and scrutiny of this strategy and associated delivery plans:

- The Council's Cabinet Member for Housing has overall responsibility for delivering against the Homelessness Strategy.
- The Council's Economic Development and Managed Growth Scrutiny Board provides overview and scrutiny of the responsibilities of this portfolio.
- Delivery against this strategy and the annual delivery plans will be overseen by the Council and its partners through an annual homelessness review.
- Strategic Housing Board will oversee the implementation of and progress against the associated delivery plan to realise the ambitions of this strategy.
- The Council and its partners will provide regular updates against their progress through the multi-agency homelessness forum.

As there are many close links between the ambitions of this strategy and other portfolios, additional updates may be provided to the Safer Communities and Neighbourhood Services Board and any of Solihull's partnership boards.

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