

Solihull Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy

2020 - 23

1. Introduction

This is Solihull's first Homelessness and Rough Sleeping strategy. It supersedes the 2019 Homelessness Strategy and has been informed by the national Rough Sleeping Strategy 2018 and its accompanying delivery plan.

The Strategy is also informed by a detailed homelessness needs assessment which sets out the Council's current knowledge and understanding 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 commissioned services.

Consultation on the development of the Strategy has involved partner agencies and strategic boards, in particular the long – established multi-agency homelessness forum (MAHF), the new Tackling Homelessness Delivery Group and the Council's Strategic Housing Framework Board.

The Council commissions partner organisations to deliver the homelessness service, currently:

- Solihull Community Housing – provides the core service – information, advice, assistance, prevention, relief, temporary accommodation and statutory decisions
- St Basils – Solihull Youth Hub provides the service to single people up to 25 years
- Solihull Integrated Addiction Service (SIAS) – provides rough sleeper outreach and services to single people aged 25 and over
- Accord Housing – provides support to those accommodated through Housing First

2. Objectives and Priorities

The objectives of the strategy are to:

- **Minimise** rough sleeping
- **Prevent** homelessness whenever we can;
- **Relieve** homelessness when it cannot be prevented;
- **Support** people to recover from homelessness
- **Connect** services at the strategic, policy and operational levels.

The 'prevent', 'relieve' and 'connect' objectives have been retained from the 2019 strategy.

The Homelessness Needs Assessment and consultation on the strategy have highlighted several particular areas of concern to be addressed by the new strategy as priorities:

- the increase in the number of individuals at risk of rough sleeping
- the need to improve on prevention and relief outcomes
- the continuing use of budget hotels as first-stage temporary accommodation
- the shortage of suitable accommodation in Solihull, including emergency and temporary accommodation options and move-on accommodation;
- the lack of supported accommodation, particularly to meet the needs of individuals with complex needs

The most urgent priority for service improvement is to help a greater proportion of people at the prevention and relief stages, with a consequent lower proportion going on to the full housing duty.

For 2020/1 the target will be 45% of closed cases and this will increase incrementally to 60% by the end of 2022/3.

Prevention opportunities are often limited when customers approach a provider late, often when they are homeless 'on the day'. On relief, there is a shortage of available rehousing options, which pushes customers toward 'full duty' allocations of council homes. This will be a challenging target for our providers to achieve but substantial improvement is essential.

Minimise Rough Sleeping

Whilst the number of rough sleepers in Solihull is relatively low (generally less than 5) there are many more at risk of rough sleeping so there remains a need for a sustained focus on the issue, with an ultimate goal of the elimination of rough sleeping in Solihull, mirroring the ambition of the national Rough Sleeping Strategy 2018.

The Council currently commissions Solihull Integrated Addiction Service (SIAS) to operate a prevention and outreach service which offers advice surgeries, tailored interventions with individuals to prevent rough sleeping and a responsive outreach service to those on the street or in other rough sleeping situations. This service is structured around delivery of the Government's Rough Sleeping Strategy commitments, with action prioritised around:

- Prevention – integrated working with partner agencies to identify those at risk of sleeping rough before crisis
- Intervention – a responsive outreach service to support rough sleepers to move off the streets and towards recovery and to identify new rough sleepers as quickly as possible
- Recovery – support for individuals to find and sustain stable accommodation and to meet wider support needs

Several developments introduced in 2019 have increased local capacity to develop outreach and support, including:

- Housing first – launched in autumn 2019 - 4 individuals who were rough sleeping or at risk of rough sleeping were accommodated by Solihull Community Housing (SCH) and supported by Accord Housing by the end of the year. The target is to accommodate 27 individuals by the end of 2021.
- Employment of a Rough Sleeping Co-Ordinator, funded by the Rough Sleeping Initiative (RSI). This postholder will co-ordinate partners to share information and agreeing appropriate service responses to known and suspected rough sleepers. Liaison will also take place with those within the Council and partner agencies who are responding to the increase in people who pose as rough sleepers in order to beg.
- Introduction of an alternative giving scheme, 'Change into Action' in autumn 2019, which encourages the public to donate to a local charity (Solihull Churches Action on Homelessness) rather than give money to people on the street, most of whom are unlikely to be homeless.

The emphasis in the coming years will be to develop more effective and reliable working arrangements between all agencies involved in the welfare of those who are sleeping rough or at risk, in particular with health and social care services.

The recommendations of this Strategy's Fair Treatment Assessment (FTA) will need to be followed in developing this service to ensure that responses are appropriate to customers' characteristics

Objectives

Prevent people from sleeping rough wherever possible

Provide immediate support to rough sleepers and seek to accommodate them where they wish to come off the street or reconnect them to other localities

Safeguard those who have no shelter through the Severe Weather Emergency Procedure (SWEP)

Increase the number of people accommodated through Housing First

Ensure Solihull's Rough Sleeper Protocol meets the aims of the national Rough Sleeper Strategy,

Improve co-ordination of services which support rough sleepers including health and social care

3. Preventing Homelessness

Preventing families and individuals from becoming homeless is the best possible outcome: 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.

The Council and its commissioned services offer 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 their home.

Where the risk of homelessness is flagged up before crisis, more opportunities are likely to exist to help the household to avoid losing their home. Our providers report, however, that there are many 'homeless today' approaches which put the applicant straight into the 'relief' stage.

There will be a renewed focus on encouraging early approaches from customers and early referrals from partner agencies. SCH, St Basils and the Council have produced a detailed improvement plan to achieve the three – year target for closing a greater proportion of cases at the prevention or relief stages

Objectives

Create and take all possible opportunities to prevent homelessness

Providers to achieve an increase in the proportion of cases where homelessness is prevented or relieved in accordance with the 3 – year target set by this strategy

Provide clear and consistent messages to the public and the media about homelessness and the importance of seeking early advice if there is a concern with self-help options available to support those who are able to take action to resolve their own accommodation issues with targeted information, advice and guidance

Ensure that the scope, consistency and quality of available information from the Council, our commissioned providers and other agencies informs those with a concern about homelessness how to access advice and assistance

Work with other agencies to identify opportunities for earlier 'upstream' intervention thereby maximising scope for pre-crisis identity and intervention

Develop effective working relationships with the agencies which deliver the Council's advice contract, together with other organisations notably Citizens Advice Solihull Borough (CASB), which has the advice contract from the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) for the rollout of Universal Credit.

Develop cross-agency plans to respond to each of the main causes of homelessness and focus resources on agreed solutions

4. Relieve Homelessness

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.

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

Most of the main housing duty is met by SCH allocating a council property to the applicant through the Solihull Home Options choice-based lettings scheme. 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 where appropriate.

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 of Guidance¹ 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 on 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 and the time which they have to spend in them

Solihull's housing market presents considerable difficulties to providers in seeking to accommodate homeless households temporarily or permanently. This is not helped by the continuing lag in the Local Housing Allowance behind actual rents in the private sector.

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. St Basils, which operates the Solihull Youth Hub, 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.

¹ MHCLG 2018

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 available lettings is reducing each year

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.

Objectives

Create and take all possible opportunities to relieve homelessness

Providers to achieve an increase in the proportion of cases where homelessness is relieved to meet the 3 year target set by this strategy

Make the case for more social rented accommodation to provide capacity to accommodate homeless households

Develop capacity to end the main housing duty in the private rental sector where the availability of suitable lettings allows

Minimise the use of budget hotels in terms of numbers and time spent in them

Maintain a flexible portfolio of temporary accommodation options to meet need and provide alternatives to hotel placements

5. Support Recovery

Many families and single people will need support when threatened with homelessness, whilst homeless and, after they have secured settled accommodation, are recovering from homelessness. At all of these stages there will be stress and uncertainty for the household.

Where a home is lost and a household has to relocate to a new area networks of family, friends and neighbours may be weakened or lost. There will often need to be temporary arrangements for children to be able to access schools or a change of schools, doctor and other key connections.

When under threat of homelessness or seeking to recover from it individuals and households may be less likely to engage in learning or preventative health or invest time and energy in their communities.

There may be a role for statutory, voluntary or community-level interventions to help people deal with these pressures and to rebuild their connections in their new community, and the need and scope for this will be explored by the Council and its partners in these sectors.

Providers will be expected to employ 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.

The need to provide accommodation with support remains, particularly for single people who may have a number of issues to contend with in addition to homelessness. Mental health and addiction problems are common amongst those seeking assistance and some also have a history of offending to overcome

During 2020/1 the Council will develop a single commissioning strategy for accommodation and support to include the continuation of the Solihull Youth Hub, which provides the homelessness service to single people aged 25 and under.

Partner agencies, currently SIAS, Accord, Solihull BID and Solihull Churches Action on Homelessness (SCAH) will continue to look for new ways of meeting the immediate needs of those who go on the street and those few who decline accommodation and remain outdoors.

Solihull has limited accommodation for those who require immediate access and support, but also 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.
- Facilities to support people who are or have been rough sleepers and others at risk
- A flexible pathway of prevention support, relief options and temporary and permanent accommodation options to meet the needs of victims of domestic abuse

Objectives

Work with partner agencies, voluntary organisations and local communities to develop support options for people at all stages of homelessness, including recovery, using strengths-based approaches

develop a single commissioning strategy for accommodation and support to include the continuation of the Solihull Youth Hub and Encourage the provision of more move-on accommodation

work with partner agencies to bring forward supported accommodation and associated facilities to fill gaps in provision

6. Connect

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 business.

We need to fully develop the connections between homelessness and other policy areas at every level in order to maximise opportunities for prevention and support. Planned and focused joint working between agencies is vital.

Strategic Level

During 2019 the connectivity between housing, homelessness and other policy areas was strengthened by the formation of two new strategic groups by the Council:

- The Tackling Homelessness Delivery Group (THDG) which involves directors of key providers and partner agencies to oversee strategic development and delivery outcomes, reporting to the Solihull Together Board which is the delivery agency of the Health and Wellbeing Board
- The Strategic Housing Framework Board (SHFB) brings together directors of the Council to oversee the development of policy including planning requirements for affordable housing, wellbeing and supported housing and homelessness. This strategy is one of the strands of the strategic housing framework.

There is a continuing need for corporate and partnership focus on developing and sharing knowledge and understanding of homelessness and how it impacts on services and communities.

- A Homelessness Needs Assessment has been produced Solihull Special Interest Intelligence Group (SIIG) which forms the Homelessness Review underpinning this strategy. In turn the information which it presents will inform the JSNA and the Health and Wellbeing Strategy.
- Solihull is committed to the NHS Population Health Management project on homelessness through which it is intended that cross-sectoral data and intelligence can help make the case for investment and / or service change at all levels of the health service to prevent homelessness and help those who have become homeless.

It is increasingly clear that new demand trends are emerging which often present new complexities for service providers, for example:

- An increase in homelessness amongst 'older' people has been noted nationally with new difficulties around exclusion by care providers. Any local incidence of this will be considered by the Supporting Our Older People Board.
- difficulties and complexities caused by gang affiliation have been noted by providers
- a recent review into the death of a man with a history of rough sleeping has highlighted the need for agencies to ensure that staff are well trained and follow approved policies and practices on safeguarding particularly on reporting.
- Exploitation has emerged as a partnership priority in Solihull with a particular focus on child to adult transition and on modern slavery. A recent safeguarding review highlighted the shortage of suitable emergency and temporary accommodation and longer-term supported accommodation for young people with complex needs. This case illustrated the necessity for cross-agency planning and capacity to deal with very challenging circumstances. During 2019 an Exploitation Reduction Board and accompanying Delivery Group has been formed with a workplan to address the issues raised by this and other cases.
- The greater diversity of the population will increasingly require providers to vary their approaches to meeting customer needs in all situations, particularly for those from BAME and LGBT communities

Policy / delivery levels

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, co-producing service improvements and solutions.

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.

As well as the statutory and voluntary sectors, the taskforce is reaching out to the business sector as 'good' employment is seen as a key protective factor. In partnership with Business in the Community it has developed a guide for businesses, highlighting practical steps that employers can take to help prevent homelessness, provide help to employees who are threatened with homelessness or are experiencing it, and create pathways to employment for those who are recovering from homelessness. The approaches which are suggested include:

- Offer mental health support through workplace initiatives and employee assistance programmes.
- Know how to spot signs of domestic abuse and how to support employees who may be affected.
- Support employees in times of relationship breakdown,
- Support charities tackling homelessness and its causes by giving financially as part of your responsible business strategy.
- Consider what products or services your business may be able to give in kind either to directly support homeless people or to provide much-needed resources to charities.
- Encourage employees to fundraise, donate and support
- Offer apprenticeships to people of all ages, providing a way to learn on the job and start on a new career pathway.
- Ensure jobs offer fair pay and in-work benefits that would be of most benefit to people rebuilding their lives

We will continue to develop customer 'pathways' with partner agencies within and beyond the housing sector to ensure that provision of information, advice, assistance to customers is as good as possible and that potential homelessness is identified and that referrals are timely.

In particular, joint approaches to address the main causes of homelessness [loss of private tenancy, the ending of informal arrangements with family and friends and domestic abuse] must be fully developed. Solutions may require partners to change aspects of existing policies and/or service delivery to achieve this.

We will continue to build on the statutory referral arrangements introduced by the Duty to Refer by encouraging and enabling non-specified agencies to voluntarily make referrals and by seeking to introduce a Commitment to Collaborate.

The consultation also suggested that we could do more to be informed by people with 'lived experience' of homelessness and by outreach and other 'front line' workers as this would yield useful insights into how aspects of service are regarded by customers – what helps and what does not help. This will be taken forward through the implementation of Housing First which will involve the role of peer mentors as part of the support package and the development of wider commissioned services to take into account the views of frontline workers, service users and their wider support networks.

Objectives

Continue to develop the connectivity between homelessness and other service areas at the strategic, policy and delivery levels

Further develop our understanding of homelessness and its implications, including forecasting, through cross-agency work with SIIG/ Solihull Observatory and NHS Population Management

Develop knowledge and understanding of equality and diversity issues in all aspects of homelessness and work with partners to ensure that service design and delivery treat people fairly and promote equality

Develop effective customer Pathways with partners and keep under continual review

Build on the Duty to Refer with voluntary arrangements and a Commitment to Collaborate

Gain insights from outreach workers and those with lived experience of homelessness

Support the Homelessness Taskforce initiatives in 'designing out' homelessness

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 was implemented in Solihull from 2019 with a target of accommodating 27 people by March 2021

The Taskforce also developed 'Change into Action', an alternative giving scheme by which the public to donate to charity rather than give to people on the street. This was introduced to Solihull in summer 2019.

Now the focus is expected broaden to five recommendations which have been endorsed by the West Midlands Combined Authority (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. Homelessness and its prevention are included in the Strategic Housing Framework programme within 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 citizenswhilst 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 2016-19	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). A priority is to achieve an increase in the number of households where homelessness is prevented or relieved. 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 2018/19	In 2017/18 405 Solihull households were classified as being homeless, equating to 4.54 per 1,000 households compared to the England average of 2.41. This ranks Solihull 26th in the country out of 322 Local authorities and the 2nd highest in the West Midlands after Birmingham. The Solihull homelessness rate increased sharply between 2009/10 and 2014/15, but has trended downwards since. The number of homeless households fell by 32% (-194 households) between 2014/15 and 2017/18.
Solihull Mental Health Strategy 2015 - 20	Violence and harassment is the most notable reason for homelessness in Solihull with this being recorded in 33% of cases compared to 20% for comparator LA’s. Mental illness in terms of priority of need accounts for 20% of Solihull homelessness acceptances compared to 29% within comparator local Authorities. A key priority to be addressed during the life of this strategy is to support homeless people with a diagnosed mental illness to find stable accommodation.
Solihull Suicide Prevention Strategy 2017 – 21	People who are homeless are amongst those at a particularly high risk of self-harm and suicide. For these groups the strategy commits to: Identify current service ‘offer’ and care available Compare current services and care available with evidence-based best practice Identify problems with current services and care available for these groups Identify any ‘gaps’ in the services or care commissioned Produce commissioning proposals for addressing any ‘gaps’ identified
Children Missing Education Policy 2017	Some children and young people, often the most vulnerable, are at greater risk of going missing from education including children

	of homeless families, including those living in temporary accommodation
Solihull Market Position Statement 2019-22	<p>We would like to talk to private and social landlords, including providers of specialist and supported accommodation about opportunities to meet the needs identified in the Council's Homelessness Review & Strategy</p> <p>We would be interested in talking to providers about opportunities to expand local options for individuals who are moving toward independent living but require low level support and affordable accommodation in order to commit to training / employment development options</p> <p>We would like existing providers to review accommodation pathways and identify any opportunities to increase the provision of emergency accommodation and / or provide suitable accommodation to prevent individuals from sleeping rough</p> <p>We want to talk to partners about meeting the specific health and mental health needs that the homeless population, in particular rough sleepers, present with through the delivery of flexible and innovative services that can be provided on an outreach basis where necessary</p> <p>We would like providers to look at the opportunities to work with our employment support services and homeless customers to offer employment to people who have lived experience.</p>